

“Production Checks”: Backlog and Turnaround Times

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ASCE Journals Overview

- ▶ 34 journals with the same workflow
- ▶ ~300 journal papers/month
- ▶ 5 in-house Production Editors (PEs) do “production checks” on every paper
 - ▶ This is on top of many other duties
- ▶ How to treat all journals equally?
 - ▶ First in, first out—across all journals

Production Checks

- ▶ Crucial part of production process
- ▶ After acceptance but before copyediting
- ▶ Check for anything that must go back to author:
 - ▶ Permission issues
 - ▶ Figure quality
 - ▶ Math compatibility
 - ▶ Command of English language
 - ▶ Etc.
- ▶ Problems:
 - ▶ Too many papers in the pipeline
 - ▶ Long turnaround times

Data Collection

- ▶ Since 2016
- ▶ Automated weekly report from production tracking software provides data, which we then input into our own report
- ▶ Backlog:
 - ▶ How many papers are in the pipeline awaiting a production check
- ▶ Turnaround times:
 - ▶ How long papers wait in the queue from acceptance to production check

Workflow Experimentation

- ▶ How did backlog and turnaround data change when implementing various paper-processing workflows?
 - ▶ Positive and negative
- ▶ Implementation of “priority lists”
 - ▶ Papers able to jump the queue in order to fill an issue
- ▶ Cut queries/checks that are relatively unimportant
- ▶ Workflows:
 - ▶ “Specific assignments” (tasks assigned to specific editors, separated by journal)
 vs.
 - ▶ “Shared responsibility” (everyone works on what they’re able)

Turnaround Times



Backlog



Findings

- ▶ Visible from data:
 - ▶ Output variations
 - ▶ Staff changes affected numbers, including trickle-down from senior staff
 - ▶ Holidays and extended staff absences
- ▶ Not directly visible from data:
 - ▶ Brief staff absences/vacations
 - ▶ Competency of individual employees varies
 - ▶ Changes in attitude and motivation among staff
- ▶ Slower turnaround does not always equal higher backlog
 - ▶ Could indicate uneven work levels across staff

Conclusions

- ▶ Workflow type contributed to turnaround times and backlog number—but not completely
 - ▶ Shared responsibility vs. individual responsibility
- ▶ Non-workflow factors also contributed
 - ▶ Vacation, morale, competency
- ▶ The most efficient workflow might change per the organization
 - ▶ Dependent on staff makeup/skills
- ▶ We have a lot of work to do!