



From the Editor

CG&A's Departments

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Gabriel Taubin has graciously invited me to write this issue's From the Editor column, giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts on what CG&A's departments are, how they're run, and why we hope you benefit from them.

In 2002, Jim Thomas, CG&A's editor in chief at the time, asked me to serve as the associate editor in chief for departments. At the time, I wondered what I was getting myself into. I had been the Applications department editor since November 1994, and getting my department together every issue was challenging enough. I was wary that keeping an eye on (at that time) seven departments could be a bimonthly headache.

I needn't have worried. The other departments at that time included Theresa-Marie Rhyne's Visualization Viewpoints, Larry Rosenblum and Mike Macedonia's Projects in VR, Carl Machover and John Dill's New Products, and Gary Singh's About the Cover, as well as Jim Blinn's and Andy Glassner's columns. I learned right away that I could count on this talented group to deliver great content issue after issue without prodding from me. Other than the typical last-minute deadline scares and occasional author controversy, the headaches have been few and far between. It has been my distinct pleasure over the years to watch CG&A's departments grow and evolve.

What's a Department?

Within IEEE, departments are unique to the technical magazines. The IEEE transactions, conference proceedings, and books don't have them. As I learned early on, the technical magazines are here not just to serve the authors and the communities interested in their research but also to ensure that CG&A covers topics of interest to the broad readership.

Given our field's diversity, a given theme issue or set of research articles might simply not be every-

one's cup of tea. The editorial board chartered departments with the goal that every reader should find something accessible and of value in every issue. A department's first responsibility is thus to *serve the wider readership*.

Editorial Content

The departments' second distinguishing characteristic is that they represent *editorial content*. What does that mean? Every department has an editor (or two) whose name appears at the top of the first page. The editorial board has given that person the responsibility for what appears in the pages that follow, in every issue. The content that appears in a department is there because it has an editor who felt it was worth readers' time.

Editors might select what gets published from among articles that authors submit to them, or the editors can identify topics and solicit authors to write corresponding articles. Columnists (and occasionally department editors) write or cowrite their own articles on subjects they select. Other editors focus on finding worthy products, tools, or artistic works to feature. However they choose to do it, the decision on what to publish is solely theirs.

Reviewed, Not Refereed

Because department articles are editorial, this fundamentally changes the review process. We say regular CG&A research papers are *refereed* but department papers are *reviewed*. Said another way, research papers are peer reviewed, whereas department papers are editorially reviewed.

With a research article, an editorial board member chooses several referees to provide anonymous reviews directly to the authors. The editor assesses the referees' reports and makes an overall decision on whether to publish on the basis of the reports, but that decision fundamentally derives from a consensus of the peer reviewers.

In contrast, department editors are the primary reviewers of the submissions they receive. They can solicit input from other reviewers as they see fit, but generally they perform the review, provide feedback to authors, and make the ultimate decision whether to publish. The review, revision requirements, and acceptance decision aren't anonymous; they come identifiably from the editors. Authors know exactly whom they must satisfy.

Directive

In departments, the editors tell the authors what to do and exactly what it will take to get published. This *direct relationship* between authors and editors creates an interesting, productive relationship.

In my tenure as a department editor, I've been impressed by authors' willingness to respond to what I ask for. The anonymous peer-review process often focuses more on why a paper won't be published, rather than what it takes to get it published.

With the department review process, authors know where they stand. They know that if they do a specific set of things to the editor's satisfaction, they'll get their article accepted. The process doesn't drag on forever. The editor who sees something of value in the work tells the author how best to bring it out. I find most authors are overjoyed to have someone guide them as to exactly what they need to do to get their work in print.

Timely

Departments work closer to deadlines than regular articles. Most departments try to maintain a backlog of at most two or three issues. This lets editors select articles that are more *timely, current, and leading-edge*. Compared to the necessarily slower peer-review process, this process ensures that published information is at most months away from when it caught the editor's eye.

Because there's only one article per issue per department, editors efficiently shepherd one selected article at a time through the process. If a department editor does ask colleagues to help review an article, the lower-overhead review process is also quicker and easier and is often conducted by email or a phone call, without imposing the burden of writing a formal opinion.

Editors pick the articles for their novelty and even newsworthiness. Departments try to report on developments in the field. We've often used departments to explore new topics or feature a fresh author or institution. Occasionally, a topic covered in a department inspires a feature article a year later and a theme issue a year after that.

Opportunities

The current CG&A departments create many interesting opportunities for readers and prospective authors. Miguel Encarnação's Graphically Speaking provides a lively forum for opinions and perspectives. Dave Kasik's alternating Advanced Graphics Technology and Tools and Products have expanded the New Products department to include emerging technologies, standards, projects, and tools. Gitta Domik and Scott Owen's Education department explores novel ways to disseminate computer graphics know-how. Gabriel Taubin's Graphics Math & Code department echoes the foundational aspects of computer graphics explored for years by Jim Blinn. Tutorial articles, with editor Cindy Grimm, have some of the characteristics of a department such as editor-driven selection and development of topics. The newly regular From the Editor feature is an example of editor-written content. And, of course, original departments such as Visualization Viewpoints, Applications, and About the Cover are still going strong and continue to seek new, exciting submissions.

For readers, know that we're here for you. If you don't see something in each issue that you find accessible and of interest, we've failed you, and I invite you to send your thoughts on the matter to me at potel@wildcrest.com.

For authors, departments are an opportunity to get your thoughts out more quickly to a wider audience but still in an archival publication. You'll get feedback and guidance from the editors to maximize your efficiency and impact. Even for tenure-driven academics, department articles can be part of expanding your reputation and influence.

For everyone, please share your thoughts on what you're doing and what you'd like us to cover—even ideas for new departments. Maybe we'll put you in charge! ❏

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