Editors' Notes

EDITORS' REPORT, SEPTEMBER 2007

This marks my last report to the members of the Association as co-editor of the *Journal of Economic History*. Effective 1 July 2008, Price Fishback becomes the new North American editor and my co-editor, Phil Hoffman, will be delivering these reports. Time flies when you are having fun, and I find it hard to believe that my term is almost up—but it is and it will soon be time to go.

New submissions to the JOURNAL declined again during the year ending 1 July, falling from 125 in the previous year to 117. Much more startling, however, is the decline in submissions to the North American office. The previous year the North American office received a total of 61 submissions compared with 89 to the International office. This year, I received a total of 49 submission—only 34 of them new—whereas Phil received 105—more than twice as many—of which 83 were new. Whether this is simply a random occurrence of an event in the far left tail of the distribution is uncertain, but it is clear that there has been an unmistakable shift towards non–North American topics for some time now. Consequently, we have reallocated some responsibilities and the North American office will henceforth handle all papers dealing with the Americas—North, Central, and South. I know that, at times, I have thought I was overworked and stressed out by this job—I don't even *want* to think how Phil must feel.

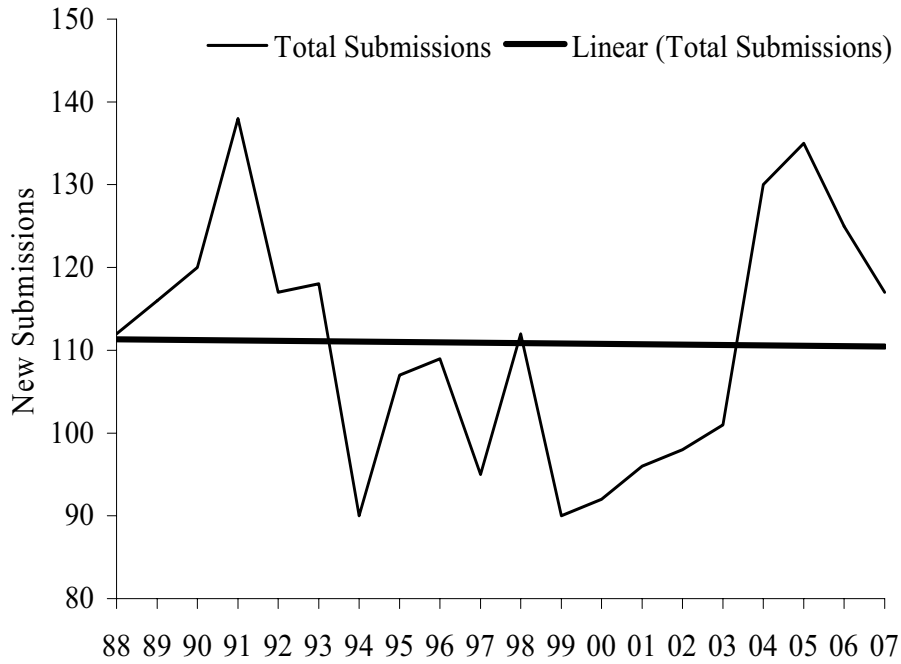


FIGURE 1
TREND IN NEW SUBMISSIONS, 1987/88–2006/07

Source: The yearly totals were taken from the published Editors' Notes.

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TABLE 1
ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY WORLD AREA, BROKEN DOWN BY TOPIC, JULY 2004–JUNE 2007

Topic	July 2004–June 2005		July 2005–June 2006		July 2006–June 2007	
	North America	All Other Regions	North America	All Other Regions	North America	All Other Regions
Agriculture	7	4	5	2	1	3
Demography	4	5	5	5	0	3
Growth	0	9	0	6	0	14
History of thought	0	0	1	1	0	3
Industry	5	6	1	11	5	1
International trade, finance	5	4	3	10	0	5
Labor	7	7	14	3	12	5
Money and macro	10	5	8	5	10	7
Political economy	1	15	7	5	6	24
Private finance, capital markets	8	11	6	9	0	15
Public finance	8	2	0	2	0	0
Technology	6	1	4	3	0	0
Urban and regional	1	1	0	4	0	1
Other	0	3	1	4	0	2
Total	62	73	55	70	34	83

Note: The numbers include new submissions only. The totals equal the number of new submissions received because a paper is classified in only one topic category. In the latest year, the North American office had 49 total submissions, 34 new and 15 resubmitted. The International office had 105 total submissions, 83 new and 22 resubmitted.

Phil and I share one pet peeve regarding submissions: many are poorly written and sometimes incomplete. We spend much of our time literally editing papers word by word, line-by-line—some of them several times. Perhaps we are overly picky but we have also had many referees voice this same complaint. Does it sway their judgment on a paper? Who knows, but please have others read through submissions and comment, not only upon the content but also on the presentation before you send them to us.

In the very near future the editorial offices will be 100 percent electronic and largely automated. Virtually all submissions, refereeing, and decision-making in recent years have been handled electronically using e-mail. Over the past nine months or so though, we have been working with Cambridge University Press to implement ScholarOne as an electronic interface. This will deliver copy to the editors while simultaneously generating acknowledgments to the authors. It will allow us to assign referees who, in turn, can accept or reject assignments. It will automatically follow up with them—incessantly—should they miss a deadline and badger the editors for a decision when the necessary information is available. Our referee and author pools are already signed up on the system (though you won't be able to access it until we go live). The system should be operational by the time that you read this report.

Many other journals, of course, already have similar systems in place so lots of you are already familiar with them. They are a boon. They can also be a curse. For example, Bob Margo, Fred Bateman, and I recently had a piece accepted by a journal using such a system but the editor requested some minor and fairly straightforward changes—like dropping 20 percent of the text—same kind of thing that Phil and I ask. Unfortunately, when the editor made his decision, checking "Accept" sent the manuscript to typesetting rather than back to us for the needed changes, and recalling it

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TABLE 2
REGULAR ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY REGION, 1 JULY–30 JUNE

Region	Submissions			
	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007
Africa	2	2	3	1
Asia	11	16	7	12
Australia and New Zealand	2	2	3	2
Eastern Europe/Russia	2	3	2	4
Great Britain	13	20	14	16
Latin America	5	5	7	9
Middle East	3	5	5	2
Non-Spanish speaking Caribbean	0	0	0	0
United States and Canada	60	65	57	38
Western Europe	28	37	38	44
Not applicable	7	6	5	5

Note: The numbers include new submissions only. Totals exceed new submissions because a paper can be classified as pertaining to more than one region.

TABLE 3
REGULAR ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY PERIOD, 1 JULY–30 JUNE
2004–2005, 2005–2006, AND 2006–2007

Period	Submissions		
	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007
Twenty-first century			1
Twentieth century	74	55	57
Nineteenth century	70	75	60
Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries	22	25	30
Pre-seventeenth century	12	14	14
Not applicable or unknown	4	0	2

Note: The numbers include new submissions only. Totals exceed submissions because a paper can be classified as pertaining to more than one period.

from the production process proved far from simple. So we have learnt from this experience, and the best that you can hope for before your paper goes to the Production Editor will be a conditional acceptance.

The profession goes through fads and fancies as the topical distribution of submission shows. Interestingly, these are rarely the same topics across the International and the North American offices. Two topics, labor and money/macro, account for more than two-thirds of the new submissions to the North American offices. Forty-six percent of the International Offices submissions are in Political Economy (which accounts for almost 30 percent of the office's total) and finance. Labor and money/macro were also important last year among the North American submissions but industry and international finance topped the charts then at the International Office.

In terms of region of interest, the decline in research on North America is the only clear trend with perhaps some growth of interest in Western Europe. Research interest in the nineteenth century also continues to wane.

Mean decision times have edged down to 88 days for all submissions and 89 days for new submissions. However, while median turnaround time for all submissions

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TABLE 4
ACCEPTANCE AND TURNAROUND

	North American Office		International Office		Total	
	2005/06	2006/07	2005/06	2006/07	2005/06	2006/07
Accepted	10	13	19	15	29	28
Revise and resubmit	17	11	21	26	38	37
Rejected or withdrawn	34	18	49	51	83	69
Not yet decided		7		13		20
Total	61	49	89	105	150	154

	Decision Lags (in days)			
Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median
All submissions				
2002/2003	1	322	92	85
2003/2004	1	303	110	100
2004/2005	1	366	112	104
2005/2006	1	338	97	92
2006/2007	1	215	88	92
New submissions only				
2002/2003	1	322	98	91
2003/2004	1	303	113	103
2004/2005	1	260	100	90
2005/2006	1	338	94	90
2006/2007	1	215	89	111

Note: The acceptance figures include new submissions and resubmissions.

is unchanged from last year, median turnaround time has increased sharply for new submissions. My interpretation of these data are that we are doing better at making the quick decisions about whether or not a paper is suitable for the JOURNAL and stands an fighting chance of making it through the refereeing process. We are also doing a better job at getting a few laggard referees to respond more quickly to our pleas but we are apparently giving more forbearance on getting the reports back from referees reasonably promptly. It will be interesting to see how these statistics change when we go to ScholarOne and many of the reminders are pre-programmed.

The *JEH* remains very selective; last year 28 papers were accepted out of 154 manuscripts or about 1 in 5. Acceptances out of the North American office were higher last year—one in four—but frankly I think that I received some very good manuscripts last year.

We have been assisted in our activities by others: Bill Collins has handled the book reviews out of the North American office despite serving as senior staff economist on the President's Council of Economic Advisors this past year, and we have been assisted in our duties by Linda Carter. Alan Miller has handled book reviews out of the International Office, and Sabrina Boschetti has assisted with tasks there.

We have both been assisted by literally hundreds of referees during the past year whose services are gratefully acknowledged in this issue of the JOURNAL. We have also been assisted by our Editorial Board who provide counsel and extraordinary refereeing services at the drop of a hat either when a referee lets us down or we want another opinion. William Collins, Dora Costa, Steve Quinn, Paul Rhode, Joachim Voth,

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and Susan Wolcott finish their terms at the end of this year. I note too that Larry Epstein was also a member of the Editorial Board until his sudden, unexpected death earlier this year.

Joining the Board in 2007 were Price Fishback, Stephen Haber, Carol Shiue, and Marc Weidenmier. Other appointments to Board will also be made. However, any appointments that I make to represent North American topics will be made in consultation with our new incoming North American editor, Price Fishback.

I want to thank the Association for giving me this opportunity to serve as editor of the JOURNAL and I thank you all for submitting so many good papers and for being so diligent in your duties as referees. You have made this both a fun as well as an educational experience.

JEREMY ATACK, *Vanderbilt University*

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