Editor’s Message: The CCR Paper Publication Process

I’d like to devote this editorial to a description of the process we use to select and publish papers submitted to CCR. CCR publishes two types of papers: technical papers and editorials. I’ll first describe the process for technical papers then for editorials.

Technical papers are submitted to the CCR online website (currently at http://blizzard.cs.uwaterloo.ca/ccr) which runs a modified version of Eddie Kohler’s HOTCRP system. Authors are required to submit a paper in the standard SIGCOMM format with subject classifiers and keywords required by the ACM Digital Library. We restrict technical papers to six pages for two reasons. First, it prevents rejected conference papers from being trivially resubmitted to CCR. Second, it limits the load on area editors and reviewers, which is important given the quick turnaround we’d like for CCR. Some papers do need more than six pages. If so, authors should write to me and, if I find their argument convincing, I usually grant the request immediately. I also add a note to the online system so that Area Editors do not reject the paper for being over-length.

Once a paper is in the system, I assign it to an Area Editor for review. If I have free time, I do this immediately after paper submission. If I’m backed up, which is true more often than I’d like, this happens in the week following the quarterly submission deadlines of March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1. Area Editors are given seven weeks to obtain up to five reviews. Most papers receive comments from at least three reviewers but papers that are clearly not acceptable may be rejected with a single review.

Reviewers judge papers along three axes: timeliness, clarity, and novelty; the range of scores is from one to five. Reviewers also summarize the contribution of the paper and provide detailed comments to improve paper quality. Finally, each reviewer suggests a potential paper outcome: accept, revise-and-resubmit, or reject. CCR’s goal is to accept high-quality papers that are both novel and timely. Technical accuracy is necessary, of course, but we do not require papers to be as thorough in their evaluation as a flagship conference or a journal.

Reviewers use the CCR online system to submit their reviews. After finalizing their own review, they are permitted to read other reviews and, if they wish, update their review. This tends to dampen outliers in review scores. Authors are automatically informed when each review is finalized and are permitted to rebut the review online. Some authors immediately rebut each review; other wait for all their reviews before responding. Authors typically respond to reviews with painstakingly-detailed responses; it is truly remarkable to see how carefully each reviewer criticism is considered in these responses! Author rebuttals are viewable both by reviewers and the assigned Area Editor. Although reviewers are free to comment on the rebuttals or even modify their reviews based on the rebuttal, this option is seldom exercised.

After seven to eight weeks it is time for Area Editors to make editorial decisions. The Area Editor reads the paper, its reviews, and the author rebuttals and decides whether the paper is to be rejected, accepted, or revised and resubmitted. The decision is entered as a comment to the paper. This decision may or may not be signed by the Area Editor, as they wish.

If the paper is rejected, I send a formal rejection letter to the authors and the paper is put to rest. If the paper is accepted and the revisions are minor, then the authors are asked to prepare the camera-ready copy and upload it to the publisher’s website for publication. On the other hand, if the revisions are major, then the Area Editor typically asks the authors to revise the paper for re-review before the author is allowed to generate camera-ready copy. In either case, the Area Editor writes a public review for publication with the paper.

Revise-and-resubmit decisions can be tricky. If the revisions are minor and the authors can turn things around, they are allowed to resubmit the paper for review in the same review cycle. This needs my careful attention to ensure that the authors and the Area Editor are moving things along in time for publication. Major revisions are usually submitted to the next issue. I try to ensure that the paper is sent back for re-review by the same Area Editor (in some cases, this may happen after the Area Editor has stepped off the Editorial Board).

Editorials are handled rather differently: I read and approve editorials myself. If I approve the editorial, it is published, and if it is not, I send authors a non-anonymous review telling them why I rejected the paper. I judge editorials for timeliness, breadth, potential for controversy, and whether they instructive. As a rule, however, given the role of CCR as a newsletter, all reports on conferences and workshops are automatical-
ly accepted; this is an easy way for you to pile up your CCR publications.

About a month and half before the issue publication date, we have a full set of papers approved for publication. My admin assistant, the indefatigable Gail Chopiaik, uses this list to prepare a Table of Contents to send to Lisa Tolles, our contact with the ACM-Sheridan service, Sheridan Printing Co. Lisa contacts authors with a URL where they upload their camera-ready papers. Lisa and her associates works individually with authors to make sure that their papers meets CCR and ACM publication standards. When all is in order, the issue is composited and the overall PDF is ready.

At this point, I am sent the draft issue to suggest minor changes, such as in paper ordering, or in the choice of advertisements that go into the issue. I also approve any changes to the masthead and the boilerplate that goes in the inside front and back covers. Once the PDFs are finalized, the SIGCOMM online editor uploads these PDFs to the ACM Digital Library for CCR Online. Finally, the issue is sent to print and, after about a month or so, it is mailed to SIGCOMM members.

I hope this glimpse into the publication process helps you understand the roles played by the Area Editors, the reviewers, Sheridan staff, the SIGCOMM online editor, and myself, in bringing each issue to you. My sincere thanks to everyone who volunteers their valuable time to make CCR one of the best and also one of the best-read newsletters in ACM!

S. Keshav
CCR Editor