

February 2013

From the Board of Editors: on Plagiarism

Dear Colleagues:

There continues to be a disturbing number of duplicate submissions and plagiarism cases reported in all major journals, including the journals of The Optical Society. Duplicate submissions and plagiarism can take many forms, all of them are violations of professional ethics, the copyright agreement that an author signs along with submission of the paper, and the *Guidelines of The Optical Society Concerning Ethical Practices in the Publication of Research*. There must be a significant component of new science for a paper to be publishable. The copying of large segments of text from previously published or in-press papers with only minor cosmetic changes is not acceptable and can lead to the rejection of papers.

Duplicate submission

Duplicate submission is the most common ethics violation encountered. Duplicate submission is the submission of substantially similar papers to more than one journal. There is a misperception in a small fraction of the scientific community that duplicate submission is acceptable because it may take a long time to get a paper reviewed and because one of the papers can be withdrawn at any time. This is a clear violation of professional ethics and of the copyright agreement that is signed or accepted on submission. In cases of duplicate submission, the Editor of the affected OSA journal will consult with the Editor of the other journal involved to determine the proper course of action. Often that action will be the rejection of both papers. Duplicate submission is a form of self-plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious breach of ethics and is defined as the substantial replication, without attribution, of significant elements of another document already published by the same or other authors. Two types of plagiarism can occur – self-plagiarism and plagiarism from others' works:

Self-plagiarism is the publication of substantially similar scientific content of one's own in the same or different journals. Self-plagiarism causes duplicate papers in the scientific literature, violates copyright agreements, and unduly burdens reviewers, editors, and the scientific publishing enterprise.

Plagiarism from others' works constitutes the most offensive form of plagiarism. Effectively, it is using someone else's work as if it is your own. Any *text, equations, ideas, or figures* taken from another paper or work must be specifically acknowledged as they occur in the paper or work. Figures, tables, or other images reproduced from another source normally require permission from the publisher. Text or concepts can, for example, be quoted as follows: "As stated by xxx (name of lead author), "text" [reference]."

Action on Notification of Allegations of Plagiarism

OSA identifies an act of plagiarism in a published document to be the substantial replication, without appropriate attribution, of significant elements of another document already published by the same or other authors. OSA has implemented a process for dealing with cases of plagiarism. When the Editor-in-Chief of a journal is notified of an instance of either of the two possible forms of plagiarism discussed above, he or she will make a preliminary investigation of the allegations, including a request for the accused authors to explain the situation. If further action is justified, then the Editor-in-Chief will refer the matter to the OSA Editorial Ethics Review Panel, who will investigate and take corrective action as appropriate. The Panel will consist of three members: the OSA Senior Director of Science

Policy who will serve as Chair; the Chair of the Board of Editors who will serve as a member; and a third member with prior editorial experience and appointed by the Board of Editors. Penalties assessed to authors range from a simple warning to blocking access to a paper in the journal website, publishing notices describing the infraction and temporarily prohibiting the offending authors from publishing in OSA journals. In general, the penalty becomes more severe the more serious the infraction. Severity is judged by extent of the plagiarism (a few lines of text versus more extensive plagiarism of text, whether the infraction is a first offense, etc.) or the type of plagiarism. For example, self-plagiarism is considered less severe than plagiarism and plagiarism of text is considered less severe than plagiarism of ideas and results. Severe penalties, such as loss of OSA publishing privileges and blocking access to a paper in the journal website, require a unanimous vote of the Panel. An example of the notice that is inserted into the OSA electronic record in place of a blocked plagiarizing article is the following:

“It has come to the attention of The Optical Society that this article should not have been submitted owing to its substantial replication, without appropriate attribution, of significant elements found in the previously published material: [citation data – including the authors, journal title, full citation of the earlier published material.]”

The OSA Board of Editors