Editorial
The Responsibility of Reviewers

THE quality of a journal depends on the quality of the papers published in it. The quality of the papers depends on the novelty, significance, timeliness, and impact of the contributions each paper makes to the targeted technical field. The responsibility shouldered by the editorial board of a journal in ensuring the above is enormous. The editorial board encompasses the reviewers, the associate editors and the editor(s)-in-chief (EIC) who collectively conduct the process with the objective of ensuring a timely dissemination of research to the specific community. There is an enormous amount of trust and confidence that is bestowed by the research community on these volunteers. Thus, the importance of the contributions made by these reviewers is obvious!

There are a huge number of reviewers serving on a voluntary basis for IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON VERY LARGE SCALE INTEGRATION (VLSI) SYSTEMS. It is the end of my first term as EIC and it is time to thank and honor the outstanding volunteer work of these anonymous referees who amidst their tremendous responsibilities associated with their own profession and jobs, have taken the time out to do this important duty. I would like to say "A BIG THANK YOU!" to one and all of you. We are publishing in this issue of TVLSI, the list of all reviewers who have reviewed for TVLSI during 2003 and 2004. Our editorial assistant, Michael Pham, has tried his best to identify all of them to be added in this list. If there is any omission, please let us know by email at tvlsieic@csee.usf.edu or mpham@csee.usf.edu and we will update our records. Often, some referees write to us asking for a confirmation letter for reviewing papers for TVLSI and we have readily responded to such requests. In some cases, the employers need a verification of their voluntary professional activities and we will be more than pleased to respond. Please let us know how else we, at the EIC center, can serve you.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the associate editors (AE) for their outstanding work during this term. The rate of submission often varies during the year and the manuscripts do not arrive in a balanced manner in terms of the topics either. Thus, an AE gets to process more papers at one time and less at some other time and so their work is not "load balanced" all the time. This could be annoying and I am extremely grateful to the TVLSI AEs for their diligence and timeliness in handling manuscripts. There were occasional complaints from authors on specific manuscripts that had gotten delayed and once we were contacted, we took immediate action in clearing them. Occasionally, we have engaged in spirited discussions regarding a disagreement or a delay, however, I can confidently say that we have had a smooth term so far.

I am happy to indicate that I have accepted the extension of my appointment for another term which is for the calendar years 2005–2006. Michael Pham has kindly agreed to continue as my editorial assistant on my request. He has been extremely efficient and his role as a liaison among the authors, the editorial board, and the IEEE publications office has been crucial in keeping the operations smooth. The AEs on the current editorial board for 2003–2004 term will continue to serve until all their manuscripts complete the review process. Many of them will be officially reappointed for another term depending on their availability while some will complete their terms and new appointments will be made to replace them. The new appointees will be introduced in one of the early issues of 2005.

Our goal is to provide a decision to the author within 100 days after its first submission and we strive to get a final decision within six months. Although, we have succeeded in this for a majority of the manuscripts, in some cases, we are still observing delays that are unacceptable. We are working constantly on addressing these issues and improving to achieve our target.

Finally, I would like to make a note on the responsibility of reviewing research manuscripts. The task of refereeing includes reading a paper to review and analyze its contents for suitability of publication, sometimes looking up into the literature for related works so as to judge the manuscript in the context of the present state of the art and then writing a detailed review. The review must include both an evaluation of the manuscript, as well as some constructive feedback to the authors while carefully avoiding any biases and preserving the confidentiality of the work being reviewed is undoubtedly a challenging and demanding task. The requirement of completing the review without delay is fundamental to ensure timeliness in publishing the results before they get outdated. The length of time needed to review a paper depends on the complexity of the material presented and sometimes requires extra time. Also, for the AEs, the task of identifying suitable reviewers for papers that cross boundaries in terms of the topics or tracks or even at times the disciplines, is a difficult one.

While I fully appreciate the intensity and commitment to perform this task, it is my duty to point out some guidelines and point to information on how to review a manuscript in the best possible manner. I feel that even an established researcher could benefit from visiting these issues once in a while. I strongly recommend the reviewers to read an article written by Professor Alan Jay Smith from the University of California, Berkeley in the IEEE Computer magazine in 1990: A. J. Smith, "The Task of the Referee," *IEEE Computer*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Apr. 1990, pp. 65–73.

This article addresses a wide range of issues related to reviewing papers and nicely articulates on how to review a paper and the responsibilities associated with it. The article has a list of references that provide additional information. This article is a boon especially for graduate students and beginning researchers. We hope to have such material and guidelines posted in the TVLSI website www.csee.usf.edu/tvlsi maintained at the EIC Center. As usual, we are always open to suggestions and comments. Please feel free to email either Michael Pham or me at any time.

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