

Preface to Volume 20(1)

At the 33rd ORSSA conference held in Pretoria, in September 2003, the management team of ORiON underwent a restructuring. Jan van Vuuren (of the Department of Applied Mathematics at Stellenbosch University) was elected editor of ORiON in the place of Paul Fatti, who stepped down after many years of excellent service to ORSSA as ORiON editor. In September 2004, Stephan Visagie (of the Department of Logistics at Stellenbosch University) was elected business manager of ORiON in the place of Wim Gevers, who is currently president of ORSSA and who has done a sterling job as business manager of ORiON over the years. We would like to thank Paul Fatti and Wim Gevers for the significant time and effort that they have poured into ORiON over many years. However, they will not be leaving the management team of ORiON; both have accepted an invitation to remain on in the capacity of associate editors, and they are also willing to advise us on management issues surrounding ORiON, based on their many years of experience.

It is inevitable that a new management will bring along with it certain changes; building on the achievements of the past, yet seeking to improve the quality of service that ORiON brings to the members of ORSSA, where possible. Publication of ORiON from volume 20 (which you are currently holding in your hands) onwards will be the responsibility of the new management team, and we have set ourselves a number of aims and objectives.

Blind refereeing of manuscripts

ORiON remains an accredited journal on the new government list of subsidised journals, in accordance with the guidelines contained in Act no 101 of the 1997 Higher Education Act. One of the conditions of this listing is that the refereeing process should be blind; *i.e.* referees should not be aware of the identities of the authors of papers that they review (in addition to the usual practice that authors should not be aware of the identities of referees who reviewed their submissions).

In order to facilitate such a blind refereeing process, the new instructions to authors (inside the journal covers and on the webpages¹ of ORSSA) stipulate that papers should be submitted without listing the names and affiliations of authors on the title page, instead only listing this information in a cover letter to the editor or associate editor to whom the manuscript is submitted. The new L^AT_EX style sheets that are available to prospective authors from the ORSSA webpages² also do not allow for the inclusion of author details.

In order to streamline and standardise the refereeing process a standard refereeing report form has been drawn up that will be filled in by referees in all cases, who are free to attach any additional (and typically more detailed) information / instructions / suggestions that they might believe to be helpful to authors, if they so wish. These standard report forms will be made available to the authors to help them improve their manuscripts, as well as for reasons of transparency, when refereeing decisions are communicated to authors.

¹Available at <http://www.orssa.org.za> → ORiON → Submissions → Instructions to Authors.

²Available at <http://www.orssa.org.za> → ORiON → Submissions → Style Sheets.

Each paper will be reviewed blindly by a minimum of two referees before a decision is made whether to accept or reject a submission.

Electronic publication of ORiON

We envisage eventual electronic publication of ORiON on the ORSSA webpages,³ in addition to the usual hard copy publication process. This will be a password protected publication process, so that only members of ORSSA and paying subscribers to ORiON will have access to the electronic version of the journal, as with most other journals currently published electronically. At the moment we are taking advice as to how this might be achieved (cost) efficiently and securely. It is not certain at this stage, whether electronic publication will commence with volume 21 of ORiON, or at a later stage (this depends on how smoothly the electronic publishing process unfolds).

New look for ORiON

We were tasked by the national executive of ORSSA in September 2003 to design a new and more modern look for ORiON, which is in line with the upgrade in the ORSSA newsletter's recent new look. The following decisions have been taken with regards to a new look for ORiON, and have taken effect in this volume.

All papers are henceforth to be typeset in \LaTeX . Authors will still be able to submit manuscripts in either MS Word or in \LaTeX . However, the final versions of accepted papers will be typeset in \LaTeX (by the business manager in cases where original submissions were in MS Word and authors are not familiar with \LaTeX) in order to create a standardised look for all papers, and also because typesetting via \LaTeX seems to be gaining ground as an international standard. Authors will nevertheless be encouraged to submit their contributions in \LaTeX at the start, or to convert their manuscripts to \LaTeX once accepted, if they are familiar with the package. The business manager has written a \LaTeX style sheet especially for ORiON, which is available (via the ORSSA website¹, or via email⁴, upon request) to authors who wish / are able to make submissions in \LaTeX . In any case, whether manuscripts are submitted in \LaTeX or MS Word format, authors will receive a final draft of their paper in pdf format (typeset in \LaTeX) shortly before publication, so that they can proofread it and inform the business manager of any errors.

A new, glossy front cover has also been designed for ORiON, which will be used from this volume onwards, using colour, so as to bring ORiON in line with other, international journals. These covers will be printed in bulk for many volumes of ORiON at a time, in an effort to save on costs, and the date and volume number of each issue will then be printed on this front cover in black, by means of an overlay each time.

A new paper size has been adopted for ORiON, namely 190×260 mm, currently used by many journals, which is considerably larger than the previous A5 size. A thinner and finer paper quality (90gvm matt paper) will also be used from this volume onwards.

³To become available at <http://www.orssa.org.za> → ORiON → Contents in due course — currently only abstracts are available electronically at this site.

⁴Please send e-mail requests for the ORiON style sheets to Stephan Visagie at svisagie@sun.ac.za

Preprints to authors

As part of a cost-saving initiative, preprints will no longer be sent out to authors in hard copy form as in the past, once papers appear in ORiON. Instead, authors will be provided with a high quality, photo-finish electronic copy of their paper (the same file that will go to the printers) in pdf format. Authors will then be able to run off as many copies of this file as they require, at no cost to ORSSA. This practice will even be continued once ORiON is published electronically, since not all authors need necessarily be members of ORSSA or subscribers to ORiON, and may hence not have access to an electronic version of their paper once the volume of ORiON containing their paper is published electronically. In certain cases authors will still be able to request hard copy preprints of their papers upon acceptance of their manuscripts, such as when authors do not have access to computers or the internet — but such cases will be treated as exceptions, rather than as the rule.

Accelerated turn-around time for papers

In certain instances rather long turn around times (the time from when a manuscript is submitted by an author, to when the author receives communication regarding acceptance or rejection of the paper) are experienced by authors as a world-wide norm. In today's publish-or-perish environment a long turn-around time may affect a journal adversely, in the sense that contributors may prefer to send papers to journals with fast turn around times, at the cost of journals with slower turn-around times. We will therefore be placing *a very high priority* on relatively fast turn-around times for ORiON as from volume 20 onwards. For manuscripts submitted in English a period of 12 weeks for first readings will be our goal, and a period of 8 weeks for subsequent iterations, in the case of corrections. We plan to achieve these turn-around times by attempting to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Editor receives paper and sends it out to referees (1 week for manuscripts to arrive at referees).
- Referees receive paper and read (8 weeks for first reading; 4 weeks for subsequent readings).
- Editor receives recommendations from referees (1 week for recommendations to arrive at the editor in question).
- Editor communicates revisions/corrections to authors (2 weeks for recommendations to arrive back at authors).

For manuscripts submitted in any of the other ten official languages of South Africa the above turn-around times will be doubled, so as to facilitate identification of suitable referees.

Authors are requested to send a query to the editor to whom a submission was made if no news is received by the contributing author within the above time frames.

Two issues per annum

We will be aiming for two separate issues per volume of ORiON again in future. However, as an interim measure both issues were combined in one bound volume for volumes 18 and 19, so as to facilitate catching up on the previous backlog of ORiON. We hope that the new look of ORiON and the accelerated turn-around time of manuscripts will inspire OR practitioners to submit manuscripts of a number and quality that will enable us to publish the two issues per volume of ORiON separately again as from this volume onwards.

We welcome any comments or suggestions that you, the reader, might have about our vision for ORiON. Finally, we would like to invite you to submit your OR-related research results, case studies, methodological reviews and other papers to ORiON in future.

Jan van Vuuren (Editor) & Stephan Visagie (Business Manager)
Stellenbosch, December 2004