I am pleased to report that at the start of my second, and final, two-year term as Editor-in-Chief of IEEE TDSC the state of the journal is very good and headed towards excellent. By the end of my tenure I believe it is feasible for TDSC to achieve an excellent state. I will discuss some of the metrics we will be aiming for towards this goal. First, however, a quick look at the past year.

In 2011 our total page count was 943. This compares with a total of 1020 pages for the first three years of the transactions (2004-2006) and a total of 915 for the second three years (2007-2009). Roughly speaking, in its eighth year of existence, TDSC is publishing at a rate equivalent to three years worth of material relative to the first six years of the journal. For completeness, let me mention that in 2010 TDSC published 445 pages, which was a record relative to the previous years. The TDSC community and leadership can be rightfully proud of this growth while maintaining and even improving the overall high quality.

Turning to the question of metrics for excellence in operations, we can distinguish two phases of processing a successful paper. There is an editorial phase from submission to an accept decision, followed by a publication phase from acceptance to final form in a specific TDSC issue with precise page numbers. Let us consider the publication phase first since there is essentially only one use case. As we all know a paper becomes available as a preprint in the digital library as soon as it is accepted. Moreover it is assigned a persistent doi (digital object identifier) which facilitates a stable citation. In reality there is little change between the preprint and the final paper. Nonetheless, authors (myself included) typically do not perceive closure until such time as the paper is in final form and allocated to a specific issue. While this perception may change as our scientific culture evolves it is important for journals to minimize the time between acceptance and finality. The processes and workload within IEEE Computer Society and its outsourcing partners require a three month lead time between allocating a set of papers to an issue and the issue’s publication date. This includes final editing and proof corrections by the authors. Thus papers for the TDSC January/February issue need to be selected by early October of the previous year. Since TDSC is published bimonthly, in a steady state this means that every two months the editorial phase should deliver an issue’s worth of papers. This adds up to a minimum of three to five months lead time for the publication. With accommodation for a bit of slack in the preprint queue let’s say the worst case for the publication phase should not exceed seven months. This number will not change without substantial modification to IEEE Computer Society processes, which is beyond TDSC’s scope. The saving grace is that the paper is officially declared published at the beginning of this phase, is available in the digital library in almost final form and is citable with a persistent doi.

The editorial phase has multiple use cases. I will consider two of these as representative for our purpose. A submitted paper on path to acceptance will typically receive a Minor Revision or Major Revision decision in its first round of review, the difference being that minor revisions are not sent back to the reviewers whereas major revisions are. Papers submitted after a major revision will often receive a minor revision decision next. Note that TDSC policy does not allow for a second round of major revisions, although such papers can be revised and re-submitted as new submissions. Thus the two main cases we need to consider are submit to minor revision to accept, and submit to major revision to minor revision to accept. For convenience let us refer to the former as the minor revision case and the latter as the major revision case. What would be desirable metrics for excellence in these two cases? I will spare our readers the details of this calculation. By establishing reasonable lower and upper bounds for each step in these two cases commensurate with the guidelines of the IEEE Computer Society, I have arrived at the following numbers. For minor revision cases, the results are four to seven months, and for major revision cases, the results are seven and a half to eleven months.

To summarize, the publication phase from acceptance to publication in final form in a specific issue should ideally take three to five months and no more than seven months in the worst case. For the editorial phase minor revision papers should take four to seven months and major revision papers should take seven and a half to eleven months. By looking at the extreme points, the overall processing of both phases from submission to final publication ranges from seven months to eighteen months for accepted papers.

Approaching these target numbers would indicate high excellence in TDSC operations. I believe these numbers are attainable. My goal is to attain these numbers as a steady state within my second term as Editor-in-Chief. In subsequent editorials I plan to address other aspects of the high excellence goal for TDSC.

Ravi Sandhu
Editor-in-Chief