JMIH Abstract Submission and Aftermath: The Process Demystified

You and many hundreds of other herpetologists and ichthyologists have waited until Deadline Day for abstract submission for the Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (JMIH). You hastily write your 250-word abstract, try to enter the abstract submission site, and fail. After struggling (and cussing profusely), you send an urgent message to the JMIH Program Officer—me. I respond by pointing out that, as per the instructions on the JMIH website and on the attachment you receive when you register for the meeting, the registration and abstract submission systems are not linked, and that you need to use a separate password. You register on the abstract submission site with a different password and submit your abstract successfully. Time to celebrate.

So many colleagues have asked me to describe what happens between the time they click the Submit button and the time they give their presentation several months later that I here attempt to demystify the process publicly. I began as the JMIH Program Officer in 2014, with the Chattanooga, Tennessee, meeting, after "training" with ASIH Secretary Maureen Donnelly during the 2013 Albuquerque, New Mexico, meeting. Rochester, New York, 2018, will be my fifth year as the JMIH Program Officer, aka the point person who won't let you submit an abstract six weeks after the deadline, won't include you in a student award competition if you are not a current member in good standing, and won't let you present three posters even if you plead that you need the presentations for your CV.

The JMIH is a consortium of four scientific societies: American Elasmobranch Society (AES), American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH), The Herpetologists' League (HL), and Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR). In addition, Neotropical Ichthyological Society (NIA) generally joins the JMIH. The societies met together for the first time under the umbrella of the JMIH in 2005, in Tampa, Florida. Currently, the K-State Global Campus Conference Unit coordinates our meetings. The JMIH abstract submission system is powered by Oxford Abstracts, a United Kingdom company founded in 2001.

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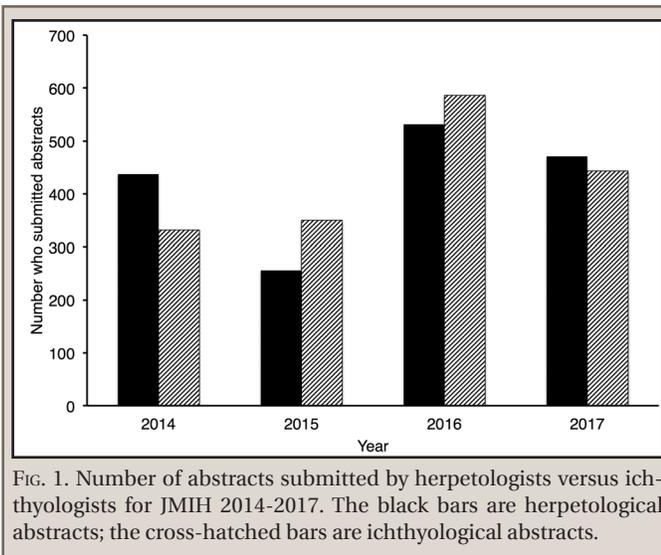*Logan, Utah 84322, USA; e-mail: marty.crump@nau.edu*

Fig. 1. Number of abstracts submitted by herpetologists versus ichthyologists for JMIH 2014-2017. The black bars are herpetological abstracts; the cross-hatched bars are ichthyological abstracts.
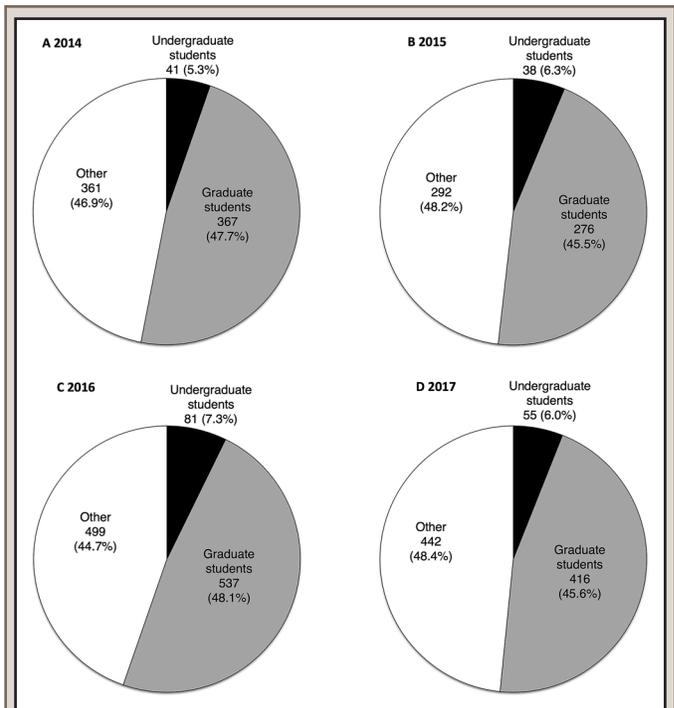

Fig. 2. Numbers and percentages of presentations by undergraduate students, graduate students, and "others." A = 2014, Chattanooga, Tennessee; B = 2015, Reno, Nevada; C = 2016, New Orleans, Louisiana; D = 2017, Austin, Texas.

What Happens *before* Abstract Deadline?

During November–December, I update the event page and make meeting-specific changes to the abstract submission site. After I have modified the site, members of the Meeting Management and Planning Committee (MMPC) test the site by submitting dummy abstracts. The MMPC consists of representatives of AES, ASIH, HL, and SSAR; Henry Mushinsky is the current committee chair. Once any bugs are exterminated, I open the site and e-mail blasts are sent out to the memberships of all participating societies announcing that the JMIH abstract submission site is open. The date varies, but generally occurs in mid to late January.

Between the abstract site's opening date and about a week before the deadline, I notify submitters who have violated the JMIH instructions posted on the website (e.g., people who submit abstracts for more than one oral presentation). I also notify submitters who have clearly checked the wrong box (e.g., someone giving a presentation on painted turtles who requested a spot in an American Elasmobranch Society session). Once the flood of abstracts arrives in the last week, these errors are more efficiently addressed in bulk.

What Happens *after* Abstract Deadline?

After the abstract deadline, I print the abstracts and organize them into 90-100 different folders, e.g., HL/SSAR symposium, AES Gruber competition, SSAR Seibert Ecology competition, HL Graduate Research Award competition, NIA Best Student Poster competition, ASIH Storer Ichthyology competition, Lightning Talks, Contributed Session Behavior - Ichs, Contributed Session Ecology - Herps, etc. These categories are based on the information submitters supply as part of the abstract submission process. I send Excel spreadsheets of student competitors to the respective societies so that student membership can be verified.

Next I go through each printed abstract and flag errors, such as (1) abstracts used for more than one presentation; (2) impossible combinations, such as poster presenters who indicate they wish to give 5-minute lightning talks with the same abstracts; (3) presenters who indicate they are participating in invited symposia, but have not actually been invited (I have master lists from symposium organizers); (4) students competing with oral presentations who have indicated they wish to give lightning talks (all competition talks are 15 minutes); and (5) submitters who indicate an inappropriate session for their presentations. I make sure that no one is presenting more than one oral presentation (unless he or she is an invited participant in two symposia or a plenary speaker) or more than one poster. I contact all of these errant submitters and make changes and corrections.

At this point, the Meeting Planner from K-State, I, and the other members of MMPC meet onsite at the venue for 2.5 days. During this planning meeting, we organize oral and poster sessions to create the program. Representatives of the four consortium societies are involved in this process. From the spreadsheet of submitters who have indicated their willingness to moderate, we assign a potential moderator for each session. During this planning meeting the society representatives deal with any outstanding student eligibility issues.

After the MMPC meeting, I finalize the program and check and double-check to make sure every abstract is included in the program. I contact all 100+ potential moderators to give them their "assignments" (and the day and time of their own talks) to get their consent. I code the abstracts to alphabetize the presenters for the abstract book, delete the withdrawn abstracts, and send the program to K-State. At this point, I send out acceptance e-mails to submitters.

Over the next 2–3 weeks I create the abstract book (at one time available in hard copy, now online only). To do this, I format the abstracts downloaded from the Oxford Abstract site, correct typos in titles, correct affiliations, lightly edit the abstracts (e.g., correct obvious typos and misspellings, italicize scientific names, etc.), and enter the day and room for each presentation. By mid-May I send the abstract book to K-State, and it is posted on the JMIH web site.
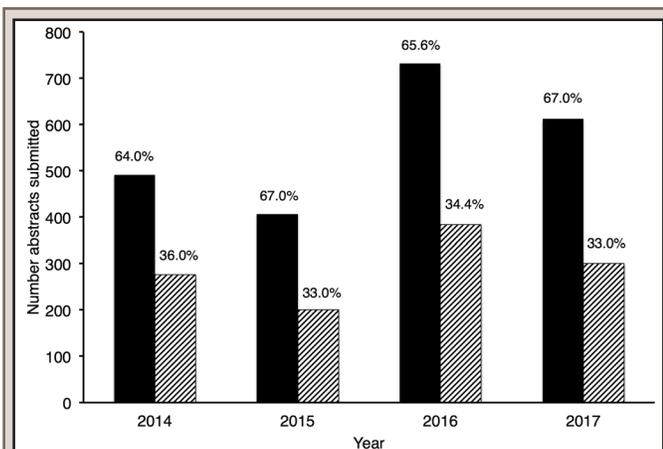
Fig. 3. Numbers and percentages of abstracts submitted for oral presentations versus posters for JMIH 2014-2017. The black bars are oral presentations; the cross-hatched bars are posters.
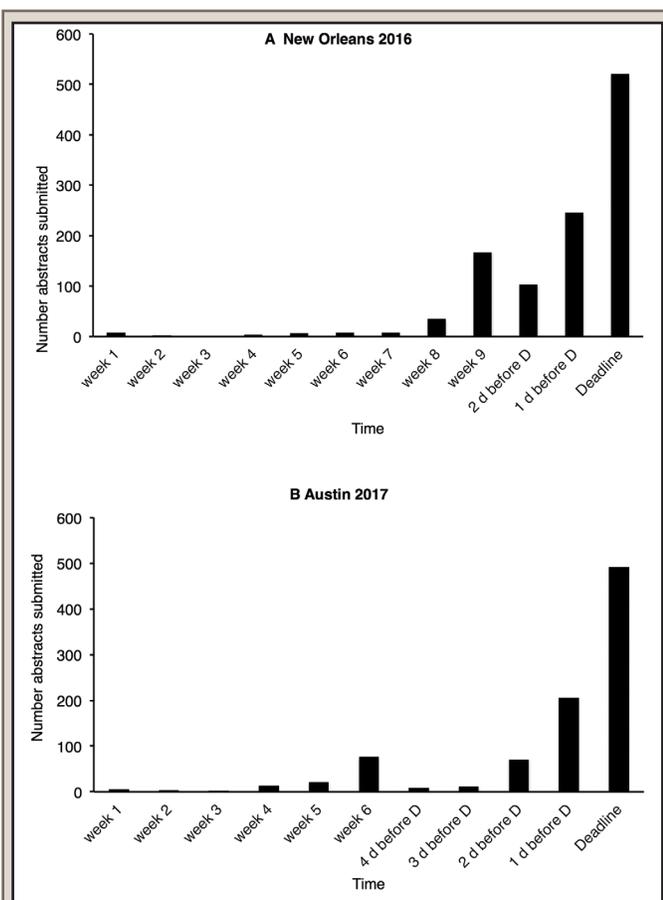

Fig. 4. Timing of abstract submission. Weeks 1 through 9 indicate the week following opening of abstract submission. Days 4 through 1 indicate the number of days before Deadline Day; D = Deadline Day. A = 2016, New Orleans, Louisiana; B = 2017, Austin, Texas.

Descriptive Statistics

Following are a few statistics from the 2014-2017 JMIH meetings. The ratio of herpetologists to ichthyologists submitting abstracts to the JMIH has ranged from 4.4:3.3 to 2.6:3.5 (Fig. 1). SSAR did not meet with the JMIH in 2015, likely explaining the

Table 1. Percentage of abstracts submitted without formatting errors or typos. Austin 2017.

	No. abstracts submitted	No. abstracts without formatting errors/typos	% abstracts "perfect"
Week 1	6	5	83.3
Week 2	4	2	50.0
Week 3	2	2	100.0
Week 4	13	7	53.8
Week 5	22	14	63.6
Week 6	77	29	37.7
4 days pre-deadline	9	5	55.6
3 days pre-deadline	12	7	58.3
2 days pre-deadline	71	36	50.7
1 day pre-deadline	205	97	47.3
Deadline day	492	207	42.1
TOTAL	913	411	45.0
Before deadline day	421	204	48.5
Deadline day	492	207	42.1

$\chi^2 = 3.7343$; p = 0.0533

higher than usual proportion of ichthyological abstracts that year. More than 50% of the talks and posters have been presented by students in each of the four years (Fig. 2 A–D). Each year, approximately two-thirds of the abstracts submitted have been for oral presentations and about one-third for posters (Fig. 3). Most submitters wait until the last week before the deadline to submit their abstracts (Fig. 4 A–B). In 2016, 765 abstracts (68.5%) were submitted on the day before the deadline or on Deadline Day; in 2017, 672 abstracts (73.6%) were submitted on the last two days. Of the 913 abstracts submitted for Austin 2017, 502 (55.0%) had formatting errors and/or typos. There was no significant difference in the number of abstracts with formatting errors/typos submitted before Deadline Day as compared to Deadline Day ($\chi^2 = 3.7343$; p = 0.0533; Table 1).

Formatting errors begin with the title. The instructions say, "Please use a mix of upper and lower case letters for your title," with an example given: "A New Species of Poison Frog from Colombia." In 2017, 295 abstracts (32.3%) did not follow these instructions. The instructions say, "Do not place a hard return at the end of the title." In 2017, 75 (8.2%) abstracts had hard returns. The instructions say, "The abstract must be a single paragraph of no more than 250 words in length." In 2017, 12 people submitted their abstracts as more than one paragraph. Some submitters italicize all scientific names (thank you!), while others italicize none; many abstracts with scientific names have some italicized, others not. In 2017, 126 (13.8%) abstracts had scientific names that were not italicized. Other formatting errors include author names and abstract titles in all caps, or the abstract in bold.

Proofreading seems to be a lost art. Just a small sample of typos in affiliations includes Zoo Atalanta, Santa Crux, Rhode Islad, Souteastern, Teeritory, Clarskville, Hololulu, Lasning, Kingsotn, Nordold, Dakonta, and Coloroado. The words University and Institute are misspelled, in every permutation possible, by at least 35 submitters each year. A handful of people misspell their own names, e.g., Chrisotpher and Elizabth. Some misspellings and typos cause me to smile or chuckle, welcome relief as I am buried in the "light editing" phase: resssearch,

species that live on the boarder with Mexico, connectration of femles, marcoevolution, and usefuel dater.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Many abstracts are formatted correctly and contain few or no typos, but more than 50% have incorrect formatting and/or are riddled with misspellings and non-italicized scientific names. Formatting errors result from not reading the online guidelines or the instructions embedded in the abstract submission form itself. Submitters, please proofread—especially your titles. I do not make corrections to abstracts until I begin work on the abstract book, which is *after* I send the schedule to K-State. Thus, the titles in the JMIH program reflect the submission information. If you submit your title as "Mimikery in a Sweet of Dessert Lizards," that is how your title will read on the program, unless I happen to notice the errors before working on the abstract book, in which case I will correct them.

The two JMIH "rules" most frequently ignored are the following:

1. An individual is permitted to present only <u>one</u> oral presentation and <u>one</u> poster (unless that person has been invited to participate in two symposia or is a plenary speaker, in which case he/she may not present a poster). (A person can co-author any number of abstracts.)

2. Students wishing to compete in AES, ASIH, HL, and SSAR competitions <u>must</u> be members in good standing of the respective society. Students may compete for only <u>one</u> award with a given abstract. (Students may compete for two awards—one oral and one poster—with two different abstracts.)

Procrastinators, take heart! Not only are you not alone, you are in the majority. In 2017, more than half of all abstracts were submitted on Deadline Day, and the good news is that you don't make significantly more formatting errors or typos than submitters who send off their abstracts weeks or days before the last day.

But enough grumbling. It is an honor to serve as JMIH Program Officer for my colleagues. Some of you were presenting at the ichs and herps meetings while I was still in high school. Many of you are my contemporaries, and many more are the next generation. It is a joy to watch the "job status" of submitters change from "graduate student" to "postdoctoral fellow" to "professional." I may not know you personally, but when I ride the elevator with you at the JMIH and read your nametag, chances are good I will recognize your name.