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Messages from the 2003 ASIS&T Membership Survey

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For the past several years, the ASIS&T Board of Directors has recognized the need for a more detailed profile of the information professionals who belong to the Society, as well as a better understanding of their needs for professional development and their expectations of ASIS&T products and services in serving these needs. Other than the data collected at the time of a member's joining or renewing, information about members' preferences, opinions and needs has not been collected in a formal way since 1992 (Schwartz, 1994). Before that, no data had been collected since the 1979 membership survey that was reported by King et al. (1980).

Accordingly, an anonymous membership survey was developed as a joint effort of the Board of Directors and the Membership Committee. The final version was installed onto a website in the spring of 2003 and an e-mail invitation was sent on May 2, 2003, to all 3,062 members for whom ASIS&T had current e-mail addresses. It was taken down on May 22, 2003. See <http://www.asis.org/membership/surveys/> to find the complete survey questionnaire.

The survey collected some basic demographic data in order to draw a profile of members' age, membership status and length, gender, academic credentials and individual annual incomes. These data can be compared with the 1979 survey results to see how the Society has changed in 24 years.

The survey was not intended to collect opinions and preferences about every ASIS&T product, program or service. Rather, the board targeted certain ones in the expectation that changes could be made relatively quickly, making the most difference to the largest number.

Of the 3,062 e-mail invitations sent, about 450 bounced back, mainly due to address errors. Thus the invitation reached 2,612 members. After a follow-up reminder was sent in mid-May, 823 valid answers were received. The return rate was 31.5%, based on the fact that the invitation reached only 2,612 members.

Membership Profile

Gender. About 43% of the respondents were males and 57% were females. The gender breakdown is fairly close to that in 1979: 44% males vs. 56% females. So the membership has not changed much in this regard during this period.

Age. The mean age reported was 45.5 while the median was 45. To compare with the age data in the 1979 survey, which did not include students, we re-analyzed the data with students excluded. The mean rose to 48 and median 49. On average, the current membership is at least five years older than it was in 1979 when the mean was 43 and the median 41 (mean difference was 5 while median difference was 8). Although average age has increased during the past 24 years, aging is not unique to this Society; according to the Council of Scientific Society Presidents (<http://www.mdsg.umces.edu/CSSP/home.html>), most other scientific societies are facing the same demographic issue.

Membership Status. Respondents were asked to indicate how many years they have been members and their membership type (regular, students, retired, lapsed). The mean member year was 8 while the median was 4. It is encouraging to note that 21.6% of respondents were students who are likely to become future regular members.

Work Organization. The type of organization that members primarily work for has changed considerably since 1979. The largest group in 1979 was industrial sector (35.6%) while the corresponding group of business/commercial in the 2003 survey was only 18%. Currently only about 8% of members work for government while 16% did in 1979. The largest employer of current members is educational (57%) compared with 27% in 1979. Because the 1979 study did not include students, we re-analyzed the 2003 data excluding students. The result still shows "educational" to be the largest group, 53%, much larger than in 1979. Clearly, a significant change has occurred in this aspect of the membership profile.

Type of Work Performed. The two most frequently chosen categories were "teacher/instructor/trainer" and "researchers." Combined they represent almost 30% of ASIS&T members. They are most likely academic faculty members as numerous people chose these two categories together and their work organizations were educational. Academic librarian was the third largest group, about 11%.

Highest Degree Obtained. The largest group of people (55.6%) has a master's degree. The percent of doctoral degree holders (32.3%) is much higher than in the 1979 study (17.5%). This is probably the result of the significant increase of members in "educational" organizations, perhaps academics, reported above. Only 11.5% of people have bachelor's degree as their highest degree, a decrease from the 1979 figure of 17.1%. The educational level of current members appears to be much higher than that in 1979.

Field of Study for the Highest Degree. The results showed that the dominant field was library and information science (66.2%). A distant second was arts and humanities, only 9.1%. All other fields were under 5%. Clearly, ASIS&T has its roots in the LIS field.

Salary. Respondents' median salary was in the \$40,000 to \$60,000 range. To compare the 2003 salary data with that from the 1979 survey where students were not included, we analyzed the 2003 data without students. The median then rose to the \$60,000-\$80,000 range. The median salary in 1979 was \$25,500 (King et al, 1980, p. 11). This figure is equivalent to \$63,188 in 2003, according to the consumer price index calculation supplied by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (<http://www.bea.gov>). It appears that current ASIS&T members' salaries are at least comparable to or maybe higher than their 1979 counterparts.

Primary Society

About half of the respondents reported that ASIS&T is their primary professional society and half listed some other society. Among the other societies listed, American Library Association (ALA) was the most common, followed by Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and Special Libraries Association (SLA). Respondents' primary reason for maintaining ASIS&T

membership was "learning about new developments/issues in the field." However, respondents who said that another society was their primary society said their main reasons for maintaining membership in the other society were "networking" and "learning new skills/knowledge to use on the job." It appears that ASIS&T is doing well in providing opportunities for learning about new developments in the field while other societies are better serving the needs of networking and learning job-related skills.

Conference

For the question about what would make ASIS&T conferences more appealing, the top two responses were both cost-related: make conference registration and conference hotel less expensive. The third-ranked response probably was also cost-related: conference closer to home (which means less travel expense). "More informal networking opportunities" and "More opportunities to meet leaders in the field" were the two highest-ranking factors following the cost factor.

Among members who attended the Annual Meeting in the past three years, the vast majority (83%) gave the primary reason as "listen to papers and presentations." Face-to-face contact and networking with other information professionals was another important reason for attending the conference. In contrast, only about 40% of people attended a conference to deliver papers and presentations. The two lowest ranking reasons were related to job seeking (looking for jobs or looking for job candidates).

In looking more closely at the data on paying for conference attendance, we discovered that students are more likely to pay out of pocket. Students also fall disproportionately more into the group who did not attend a conference in the past three years. Given the aging of ASIS&T, more needs to be done in making the Society and the conference more appealing and accessible to the young members, especially students.

In contrast, people who have a higher degree (doctorate) are more likely to attend the Annual Meeting and also more likely to have the cost fully paid by their employers. As people with higher education levels also have higher salaries (a finding reported later), the study found that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer; people who earn less are more likely to pay for the conference themselves. These findings, combined with the finding that cost is a main deterrent of conference attendance, suggest that ASIS&T needs to find ways to reduce conference costs in order to have larger attendance with broader representation of different types of members.

To find out how conference attendance relates to other factors, we analyzed how "membership age" (number of years being an ASIS&T member) related to conference attendance (currently attend or not) and primary society (whether ASIS&T is the primary society). The analysis showed that older members are more likely to attend conferences and also consider ASIS&T as their primary society. This suggests that ASIS&T needs to promote itself to the relatively new members, attracting them to attend the conference, which could also result in them considering ASIS&T as their primary society.

Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology

In answer to the question "What would make the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* more appealing to you?" the most frequently chosen answer (58%) was "more general interest articles on current trends and developments." This suggests that the *Bulletin* needs to revise its content coverage to have more general interest articles on current trends and developments in information science. However, 27% of respondents were so satisfied with the *Bulletin* that they recommended no change.

The percent of people who had opposite opinions on the value of news about ASIS&T

members was very close and very small, suggesting that no change is needed in this regard. However, the number of people asking for *more* news about SIGs was more than four times than the number of those asking for *less* SIG news. There is no clear winner between the two options of more vs. less chapter news.

Value of Proposed Products and Services

The survey asked: "What do you anticipate will be the level of value to you of each of the following proposed ASIS&T products or services?" The products/services in order of value assigned by members were digital library, applications magazine, website, continuing education and job services. Even though job services ranked lowest, we found with further analysis that an important constituency of ASIS&T values job services: younger people with lower incomes. If ASIS&T wants to improve the Society's value to younger, newer members, it should make enhancing job services a priority.

Relationship Between Gender, Education and Salary

We found a gender difference in salary, with males earning more on average. The 1979 ASIS&T survey also found that females had lower salaries on average. However, further analysis of other factors revealed that this difference could be attributed to the gender difference in education level. Not surprisingly, we found that higher degrees correlated with higher salaries. Males were over represented in the doctoral level of education while females were over represented in the bachelor level of education. Further, there was significant gender difference in field of study; females fell disproportionately more into the LIS group while males more into the fields of computer science, physical and life sciences.

Among current members, those working in the business/commercial sector are better paid than those in the educational sector. This contrasts to the 1979 situation where the two sectors were comparable in salary.

Open-Ended Responses

In addition to the particular issues discussed above, the Board of Directors hoped that respondents would convey other important issues or concerns. Therefore an open-ended question appeared at the end for that purpose. Because of space limitations, we can report only a sampling of the comments here, grouped thematically. We have condensed the ideas into our own words, for the sake of brevity and clarity.

Conferences. The lead-time for submitting papers or proposals for SIG sessions is too long and the submission process is too cumbersome. Some members want the Call for Papers for the Annual Meeting to allow presentations from people in the private sector who do not have time to write formal papers. Others want ASIS&T conferences to stay focused on research, because that is what distinguishes us from other societies.

Continuing Education. ASIS&T should offer more interactive, online continuing education workshops on new, fresh topics. ASIS&T should offer symposia or seminars in local areas that are easier to get to than the national conference.

SIGs and Chapters. Every SIG should communicate (perhaps via the *Bulletin*), "What's new in our field this year." SIGs not only need to sponsor activities and programs every year, they need to communicate what they do. SIGs and chapters need to do more outreach to potential volunteers. Chapter members who live geographically remote from the "core" of chapter members are frustrated at not being to attend chapter meetings. One respondent said, "Local chapter activities distinguish ASIS&T from ALA and motivate me to keep my membership."

International. In order to build an international information science and technology community, ASIS&T should support a networked collaborative structure, including an electronic list or forum for discussing global issues. ASIS&T should have more chapters around the world (e.g., in India). ASIS&T should focus more on needs of members or potential members from developing countries, including reduced membership fees. Hold the Annual Meeting or a summit in Europe. Drop the word *American* in the name; substitute *International*.

Website. The ASIS&T website needs a major facelift. It is difficult to get around and find information in it. The ASIS&T website should have summaries of the ASIS&T Board meetings, access to older archived journal articles of *JASIS&T*, papers and presentations from the Annual Meeting after the conference and free online courses for members.

Membership Data. The membership database should be accessible to all members. Headquarters should provide accurate, useful and timely membership data to chapters.

Information Architecture. ASIS&T should sponsor traveling lecturers in the field of IA. If this were too expensive, Webinars (Web seminars) would be the next best thing, or offer smaller symposiums that are close enough to afford travel and short enough during the work week to fit into one's schedule. ASIS&T should offer more on Web portals, usability and design of information systems and services, and offer more seminars for IAs close to the beginning of their careers. ASIS&T should lead the development and professionalization of information architecture as a sub-discipline of information science. Build bridges between academia and information architecture practice. Increase the visibility and prestige of information science. Help recruit top students to IS graduate programs.

Students. ASIS&T should provide more support for student chapters from the professionals in the organization and should lengthen the time for student membership.

Conferences (Real and Virtual). Place Internet kiosks throughout the conference area, both for display of posters and conference information, as well as to allow attendees to chat, maintain blogs and check e-mail. Have more detailed abstracts of each conference presentation to allow for a more informed decision as to which one to attend when there are simultaneous sessions. With travel budgets getting tighter, offer ways for people to "attend" programs virtually. Funding and travel restrictions make *non-conference* ASIS&T services increasingly important.

JASIS&T. Some respondents said that *JASIS&T* articles are very academic or "too technical." They want more practical articles on various topics that would be more accessible to people in the business environment. Some also expressed a desire for publications and programming that are more applications-oriented, that would help people do their jobs (e.g., case studies, advice/tips). Some members would like not to get *JASIS&T* (too technical, too theoretical, too mathematical, too academic), and do not want the cost of *JASIS&T* bundled into membership dues. On the other hand, some expressed appreciation for the high quality of *JASIS&T* ("real science") and said that it was an important reason for continuing their membership.

Careers/Jobs. ASIS&T members should help students and young professionals in building portfolios and resumes and give advice in navigating the job market or changing careers in the information field. Job listings should include more than just academic positions.

Sense of Community. There is too much cliquish behavior in ASIS&T, especially at receptions and social events. Some members wish that the atmosphere at conferences felt friendlier. The first-timers breakfast is a good start, but more needs to be done to make newcomers feel welcome. There is too much snobbery on the part of senior researchers. ASIS&T should do a better job of bringing together researchers and practitioners – they have much to learn from each other. Information science researchers should be bringing into ASIS&T researchers from other fields with whom they are working.

General:

- ASIS&T needs to help educate corporations on the value of library science, knowledge management and information architecture so that companies would be more willing to engage our services either as contractors and/or full-time employees.
- ASIS&T members need to straighten out the definition of information science and the questions the science aims to answer. Our field is not easy to explain to outsiders; we need to do a better job of articulating it and using that articulation to market the Society to people in related disciplines.
- One respondent posed a question, "Should ASIS&T continue to try to serve multiple audiences, or decide who it wants to be and then be it?"
- And finally, in addition to all the suggestions for changing and improving, we received this advice, "Don't change too much – one of the reasons I like ASIS&T is because the size, the scope and the focus of the organization seem just right." Another member affirmed, "I find the fragmentation of information science and technology by the proliferation of organizations which address small aspects of it to be very frustrating. ASIS&T needs to position itself as the integrator of all these chunks."

Conclusion

Valuable data were obtained from this survey which provide not only ASIS&T but also the information science community in general useful information on current status and future development. The Society's leadership, the executive director and headquarters staff, and every other member in a position to recruit or mentor young information professionals need to study all the data and suggestions very seriously, and use them for taking action, setting priorities for the future and improving ASIS&T.

More details about the methodology and findings will appear in a forthcoming article in *JASIS&T*, which will be found at the ASIS&T Web address mentioned above. Also, we will be leading a discussion session on the findings and implications for the future of ASIS&T at the 2004 Annual Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island.

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Reports of Previous Surveys

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