

ASIS&T Membership Survey 2008: Responses from ASIS&T Members

by Margeaux Johnson and Nancy K. Roderer

As the ASIS&T Board of Directors began investigating the feasibility of making the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* an open access journal, they and the journal's current publisher, Wiley-Blackwell, decided to survey current ASIS&T members, current *JASIST* authors and researchers in the broader field of information science about the notion of open access. Through this and future surveys ASIS&T would be able to monitor the effects that an open access policy may have on membership, submissions, access, readership and attitudes towards open access. The survey also had the benefit of allowing the board to gauge demographics, publication trends and attitudes toward open access among current ASIS&T members.

In late 2007, a survey developed jointly by ASIS&T and Wiley-Blackwell was distributed to a randomly selected group of 2,414 ASIS&T members. Additionally 3,740 researchers in the fields of "information science & library science," "library science" and "information technology and communication systems" were contacted to complete the survey.

We received 581 responses, with 348 (59.9%) from ASIS&T members. This is approximately a 15% response rate by ASIS&T members, and because the survey title concerned scholarly communication, there may have been a greater response from authors. The description of the survey

results below makes some comparisons between the responses of ASIS&T members and the overall respondent population, but a more detailed analysis of the general survey results can be found in the last issue of the *Bulletin*. [1]

The survey allowed us to answer four questions about ASIS&T members:

- Who are our members?
- What are the publication trends among ASIS&T members?
- What level of access do ASIS&T members have to journal literature?
- Are our members aware of and/or participating in the open access movement?

Who Are Our Members?

Regionally. Not surprisingly, the majority of ASIS&T members that responded to the survey are from North America (84%). While there is a trend in the overall data indicating that an increasing number of non-westerners are researchers in information science, 94.2% of ASIS&T members are from either Europe or North America. There are, however, a small

number of ASIS&T members from Asia (2.9%), Australia (0.9%) and the Middle East (0.6%).

Professionally. Nearly 64% of ASIS&T members are affiliated with a college or university. This is slightly lower than the general responses to the survey in which 70% of respondents report working in academic settings. ASIS&T members have a higher rate of employment in commercial organizations (9.5%) than the general survey population (6.7%). Employment by colleges and universities almost certainly has an effect on publication trends, access to journal literature and participation in the open access movement.

Stage of career. When questioned about their amount of research experience, ASIS&T members are either beginning their careers or they are very experienced. The largest number of respondents had 1-5 years of research experience (33%). This was followed by 22.4% of members who had 21+ years of research experience, 15.8% with 6-10 years of experience, 13.8% with 11-15 years of experience and 11.5% with 16-20 years of experience.

Margeaux Johnson is a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD. She can be reached by email at margeaux@umd.edu

Nancy K. Roderer is director of the Welch Medical Library, Johns Hopkins University, and current president of the American Society for Information Science and Technology. She can be reached by email at nroderer@jhmi.edu

What Are the Publication Trends among ASIS&T Members?

Fifty-three per cent of ASIS&T members publish research in peer-reviewed journals. This is lower than the results from the general survey in which 68% of respondents published in peer-reviewed journals. The difference may be due to the higher rate of affiliation with universities and colleges among the general survey respondents. However, publication trends among the ASIS&T members who publish in peer-reviewed journals are almost identical to the trends seen in the general survey.

Members who do publish in scholarly journals consider the same journals when submitting their articles, and they value the same factors when choosing where to publish. The top four journals for both the general survey and the ASIS&T member responses are exactly the same and are ranked in the same order: *JASIST*; *Information Processing & Management*; *Journal of Documentation*; and *Library & Information Science Research*.

The rest of the list is strikingly similar as well. There are only two differences. ASIS&T members consider ACM journals (ranked 8th out of 10) and the journal *Information Research* (10th out of 10), whereas the general survey respondents are more likely to consider the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (7th out of 10), the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* and *Portal* (both tied for 10th).

This similarity is also true of the factors considered when deciding where to publish. ASIS&T members and the general survey respondents consider exactly the same criteria important and rank them in the same

order: kind of readership, speed of reviewing, impact factor, standing of editorial board and coverage by abstracting services.

The number of articles published by ASIS&T members in the past three years is also indicative of the general survey response: 63% of members published or co-authored 1-5 articles in the past three years, 22.2% published 6-10 articles and 7.4% published 10+ articles in the past 3 years. This is very similar to the general response in which 61.5% published 1-5 articles in the past three years, 22.8% published 6-10 articles and 12.2 published 10+ articles.

Overall trends in publishing throughout their careers are similar for the two groups – 47.8% of ASIS&T members report publishing 1-10 articles in their career, 36.4% report publishing 21+ articles and 15.8% report publishing 11-20 articles. These responses are consistent with the number of years of research experience reported.

What Level of Access Do ASIS&T Members Have to Journal Literature?

Responses from ASIS&T members show that 76.5% have “good” or “excellent” access to journal literature. The largest group, 44.2%, rates access as “Good: I have access to most journals I need.” This is followed by 32.3% who say their access level is “Excellent: I have access to all the journals I need.” Only 4.4% of members rate their access as “poor” or “very poor.” These results are consistent with the general survey, although, ASIS&T members seem to have a slightly higher satisfaction with their level of access to the literature.

As expected, ASIS&T members read the *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* more

often than respondents to the general survey. Some 93.3% of ASIS&T members reported they read *JASIST*, and 50.6% report they read every issue, compared to 33.6% of the general survey respondents.

Ease of access to *JASIST* is higher among members, as expected, and many access the journal through their membership. The majority of ASIS&T members, 68.4%, choose to access the journal online either through their membership or their library’s electronic license. While the membership print copy is used by 55% of ASIS&T members, only 5% of members use print copies in a library.

Are Our Members Aware of and/or Participating in the Open Access Movement?

Awareness of open access is very high among ASIS&T members. Some 96.3% have heard of open access, and 56.4% reported knowing “a lot” or “quite a lot” about open access. There is a slightly lower rate of publication in open access journals by ASIS&T members (26%) compared to authors from the general survey (29.4%). However, since the overall publication rate among ASIS&T members is also lower, this does not indicate a significant gap in open access publication.

The majority of ASIS&T members have positive attitudes towards the open access movement. When asked to rank how closely they associate certain qualities with the concept of open access, they rank “free to access,” “no hard copy journal” and “high quality” the highest. They do not associate open access with negative stereotypes like “radical,” “ephemeral” or “not archived properly.” All of these negative associations

averaged around a 2, or “associate a little” on a 5-point Likert scale. Like the respondents to the general survey, ASIS&T members do not associate “author pays to publish” with the open access movement. It averaged a 2.3, or “associate a little” on the rating scale. This finding is interesting because page fees are often found in one current gold road or full open access model.

The final question of the survey solicited open comments on “any other thoughts or experiences you [participants] would like to share about the topics of this survey.” Of the 348 ASIS&T members who took the survey, 61 chose to comment. 50.8% commented on open access. These comments also followed the trends of the general survey. The majority of the comments, nearly 55% refer to open access positively and urge ASIS&T to take a leadership role in promoting open access. Comments typical of this category include “I believe that this [open access] is – and should be- the future for scholarly research and I hope that the society begins to move in that direction for our publications” and “open access is vital for the future of publishing. I would love to see *JASIST* become open access.” About 29% of the comments were neutral, mentioning open access, but not being particularly supportive or critical of it. Typical of these comments are “I want to be able to publish freely, but I am quite happy with a commercial embargo for a number of months or years before it becomes freely available” and “open access is fine if it is peer reviewed.”

Some 16% of the comments are hesitant towards open access. Typical of this category are comments like “I am not sure that the rush to e-journals and open access is so sensible” and comments about print journals.

While many of the general survey responses talk about the author pays to publish model, many of the ASIS&T member responses talk about wanting to maintain access to print journals. Comments like “I still prefer journals that appear in print” are among ASIS&T member’s responses. Overall, however, general enthusiasm and support for open access is typical of both ASIS&T members and the general survey responses. And it was common for ASIS&T members who supported open access to urge ASIS&T to take an active role in supporting this publication model.

Conclusion

For the most part, responses given by the set of ASIS&T members are consistent with the general survey responses.

ASIS&T was able to answer the following four questions about their members, thus establishing a baseline for further survey data after the *JASIST* open access policy has been in place for a period of time:

Who are our members?

ASIS&T members are based regionally in North America; professionally, they are most often employed by colleges and universities. There are a growing number of new members beginning research careers who have 1-5 years of research experience and a number of very experienced members who have had 21+ years of research experience.

What are the publication trends among ASIS&T members?

ASIS&T members are slightly less likely to publish in peer-reviewed journals than general survey respondents. However, the 53% of ASIS&T members who publish in scholarly journals consider the same

journals for publication and value the same factors when deciding where to publish as the respondents to the general survey.

What level of access do ASIS&T members have to journal literature?

The large majority of ASIS&T members, 76.5%, have “good” or “excellent” access to journal literature. Only 4.4% have “poor” or “very poor” access. *JASIST* readership is much higher among members, as expected, with 93.3% reporting that they read *JASIST* and 50.6% reporting that they read every issue. Like in the general survey, the most common way to access *JASIST* is online (68.4%). Even though electronic is the most common way to access the journal, many members report reading their ASIS&T member copy in print (55.2%) and some commented on their preference for the print version of the journal.

Are our members aware of and/or participating in the open access movement?

Some 96.3% of ASIS&T members are aware of open access and 26% are publishing in open access publications already. Strong support exists among members for ASIS&T taking a leadership role in the open access movement. ■

Resources Cited in the Article

- [1] Johnson, M. & Roderer, N. (2008). ASIS&T Scholarly Communication Survey. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 34 (5), 10-13 Available June 7, 2008, from www.asis.org/Bulletin/Jun-08/JunJul08_Johnson_Roderer.pdf