

2001 AECT Member Needs Survey

**Theodore Frick
Richard Stanley Dabrowski
Preston P. Parker
Homer Paul Robertson
Deepak Prem Subramony**

Department of Instructional Systems Technology
W.W. Wright Education Building
Indiana University
201 North Rose Avenue, Room 2274
Bloomington, IN 47405

Philip Harris

Executive Director
Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT)
1800 North Stonelake Drive (Suite 2)
Bloomington, IN 47404
Phone: (812) 335 7675
Facsimile: (812) 335-7678
E-mail: aect@aect.org

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Abstract

This survey was carried out on behalf of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) by a team of doctoral students and faculty in instructional systems technology at a large Midwestern university. The 2001 survey aims, like its predecessors, to determine the needs of AECT's members and to identify the Association's weaknesses. Administered via the Web, the survey attracted a total of 553 usable responses. According to the quantitative data gathered by this survey, most respondents were, on the whole, satisfied by the services provided by AECT with regard to conferences, publications, and online services. Members appeared to be more aware of certain online services as compared to others. However, the vast majority of those who *had* used any of the online facilities were indeed satisfied with their experience. Meanwhile, the qualitative comments expressed by the respondents provide a much more richer and complicated picture, describing specific, unique situations/problems/issues that, while they may not be "statistically" significant in terms of sheer numbers, nevertheless possess immense "real world" significance in terms of providing insightful commentaries regarding the quality of AECT services.

Introduction to AECT

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) is a professional association of thousands of educators and others whose activities are directed towards improving instruction through technology. Established in 1923, AECT has become a major organization for those actively involved in the designing of instruction and a systematic approach to learning. Providing an international forum for the exchange and dissemination of ideas for its members and for larger audiences, AECT is dedicated to the improvement of instruction, and is the world's largest publisher of information concerning a wide range of instructional technology (AECT History, 2001). The Association's mission is to provide leadership in educational communications and technology by linking professionals holding a common interest in the use of educational technology and its application to the learning process (Mission and Goals, 2001).

AECT Members

The Association's 3000+ members and subscribers work in schools and in colleges, in the armed forces and in industry, in museums, libraries, and hospitals ... in other words, in all the varied milieus where educational change is underway. AECT members carry out a wide range of responsibilities in the study, planning, application, and production of mediated communications for instruction (AECT History, 2001). By being members they enjoy a wide range of benefits, including free subscription to the *TechTrends* magazine, discounts for subscription to *Educational Technology Research & Development (ETR&D)* and *Distance Quarterly Review* journals, discounts on AECT publications and on automobile insurance, affinity credit card, numerous online services (including e-newsletter, membership directory, online publications, and listservs), discount to the annual conference, summer leadership institute, and membership to specialized divisions (Membership Benefits, 2001).

AECT Conferences

Conferences are an important function of the AECT. AECT initially held national conferences in conjunction with the National Education Association (NEA), but held a separate conference from the NEA for the first time in 1952, and by 1971 was no longer an official department of the NEA. Between 1982-1984, a major change took place in the configuration of the national conference, with the sponsoring of an international exposition of communication materials and devices along with the National Audio Visual Association (NAVA). This exposition, called COMMTEX International, was later known as INFOCOMM International due to co-sponsorship by the International Communication Industries Association or ICIA. In 1994, AECT broke away from the ICIA and held its own trade show, known as InCITE until 1999 (Frick, Duvenci, Kim, Richter, & Yang, 2000). The timing of the Conference was then changed in 2000 from February to October/ November in order to coincide with the National School Board Association (NSBA) trade show.

Introduction to the 2001 Survey

Instrument development, and data collection, analysis, reporting, and interpretation for this survey have been carried out on behalf of AECT by a team of doctoral students and faculty in instructional systems technology at a large Midwestern university. The 2001 survey aims, like its predecessors, to determine the needs of AECT's members and to identify the Association's weaknesses. This year's questionnaire instrument has been constructed by building on last year's survey questions, to identify both the aspects that have changed/improved as well as those that still need alteration relative to last year. The following research questions were identified following a literature review of past AECT member surveys and interviews with the AECT leadership regarding the vital aspects of the members and their needs:

1. What are the typical demographics of AECT members?
2. What AECT services are members aware of, and using?
3. What services provided by AECT (particularly with regard to publications, conferences, and the AECT Web site) are satisfactory to members?
4. What services provided by AECT (particularly with regard to publications, conferences, and the AECT Web site) are unsatisfactory to members?

Methodology

It was decided to survey the entire population of past and current Association members as listed in the AECT database. Following a literature review of past AECT member surveys, and interviews with the Association's Executive Director, the survey questionnaire instrument was prepared. In order to carry out data collection in the most speedy, efficient, and economical manner, a Web-based survey instrument was used, just as in the 2000 survey (although a small percentage of respondents were able to make paper-based submissions during the 2001 Conference at Atlanta, Ga.).

Questionnaire Development

The researchers re-used several questions from the 2000 member survey, because these questions continued to be pertinent at the present time, and also this would permit comparison/discernment of trends if needed. However, efforts were made to quantify as many of the previously qualitative questions as possible – i.e., convert open-ended supply items into close-ended selection items – because of significant difficulties (and issues of reliability) involved in the coding and interpretation of qualitative data. Meanwhile, several new questions were framed regarding members' use of the online services offered through the AECT Web site at the behest of the Association's Executive Director. The 25-item questionnaire instrument, duly approved by the university's Human Subjects Committee, finally included four demographic questions, three general member opinion questions, and the following number of area-specific questions: two on AECT publications, three on AECT conferences, and 13 on the online services offered via AECT's Web site (see Appendix C).

Data Collection Procedure

The survey's target population received invitations to participate in the survey, via e-mail, from AECT's Executive Director. The e-mail message (see Appendix A) supplied respondents with the Web address (URL) of the survey information sheet (see Appendix B), which contained all of the statutory information as required by the Human Subjects Committee (such as survey information, benefits of the survey for the organization, confidentiality of responses, contact information, a notification of voluntary participation, and the research approval by the Human Subjects Committee). A hypertext link at the bottom of the survey information sheet took the respondents to the actual survey forms.

The researchers employed a Web survey enabling software package called *Transform* – provided by the university – to help collect respondent data using HTML forms on the Web. Once a respondent submitted his/her survey responses via the online form, s/he would have an opportunity to review and (if necessary) revise these responses. Both participants and researchers would receive the responses by e-mail as a confirmation of submission. If information was not entered on any of the "required" questions, the respondent would be prompted to return to the Web form and answer the specific question(s).

Data Analysis and Reporting

As of Tuesday, November 27, 2001, when the research team began to work with the data, there were a total of 553 usable responses. Respondents were treated in accordance with the ethical standards of the APA. The researchers analyzed the quantitative data (i.e. those that were generated by close-ended supply items) using the *SPSS* statistical software package, and graphically represented the results using the *Microsoft Excel* spread-sheeting software package. Simultaneously, the qualitative data generated by open-ended supply items were content analyzed (i.e., defined, sorted, and categorized) using two independent coders.

Findings

Survey Respondents

Roughly 94 per cent of the 553 usable responses were made up of online submissions, with only six per cent of the respondents submitting a paper version at the 2001 Atlanta conference. Nearly 94 per cent of the respondents were active and current AECT members, only around two per cent were non-members, and the rest were not sure of their membership status. Meanwhile, the biggest chunk of respondents (35 per cent) had been AECT members for around one year at the time of this survey, while around 92 per cent of the respondents resided within the United States. Higher education was the biggest field among the survey respondents, with around 70 per cent of the respondents being associated with higher education, either as faculty or as students. Other respondents included those from K-12 and private business/non-profit sectors, and retirees.

General Opinions

As can be seen from Figure 1, the annual conference and access to (educational technology) publications were perceived by the majority of the respondents (around 62 per cent) to be the most beneficial of the services provided by AECT. Networking came next in line with around 41 per cent of respondents perceiving it to be the most beneficial. Online services (around 22 per cent) and professional development (nearly 25 per cent) were also seen as significant benefits of AECT membership. Meanwhile, the annual conference and online services were also voted by the respondents to be the aspects *most* in need of improvement among the services provided by AECT, with roughly 42 per cent and 39 per cent of the respondents respectively saying this (see Figure 2). Other services significantly in need of improvement were (percentage of members voting for each in parentheses) communication between members and administration (around 33 per cent), professional development (nearly 27 per cent), access to publications (around 22 per cent), and organizational restructuring (roughly 13 per cent).

Figure 1: Services Most Beneficial to Members (n=553)

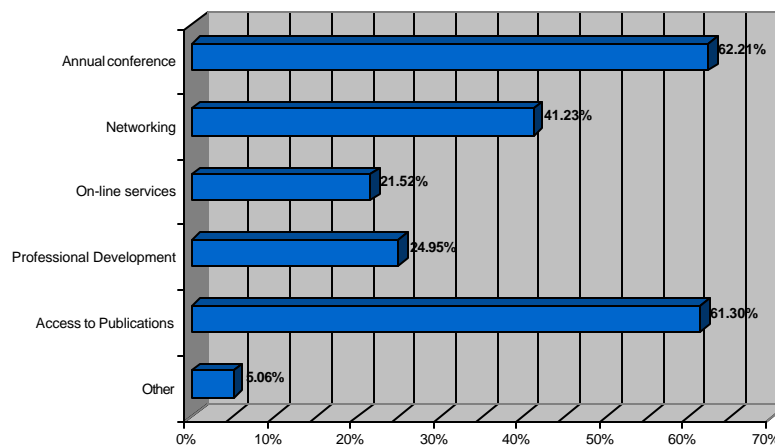
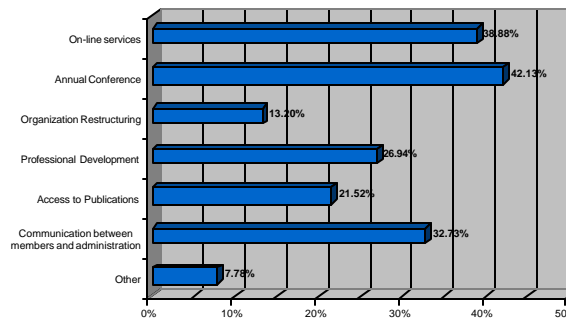


Figure 2: Services Most in Need of Improvement (n=553)



Qualitative comments by respondents also mentioned a need for improvement with regard to leadership, focus, networking, resources, employment, administration, marketing, lobbying, etc. Many of these comments expressed severe disappointment with the Atlanta conference, particularly the scheduling of presentations and the high expense. Timing the survey right after the conference appears to have added to this result. Several comments also stressed a need for increased focus on the part of the Association. Other comments provided qualitative feedback regarding AECT's on-line services, publications, and communications between AECT leadership and members.

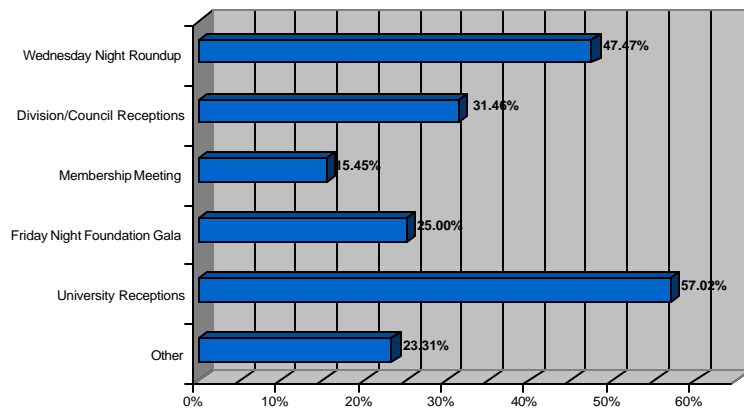
Opinions Regarding AECT Publications

AECT seemed to be performing adequately with respect to its flagship publications, since nearly 71 per cent of respondents (n=469) indicated being either *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with *TechTrends* and around 81 per cent of respondents (n=343) indicated likewise for *ETR&D*. On the other hand, around two per cent of respondents were "very dissatisfied" with *TechTrends*, while an even lower number (around one-half per cent) expressed similar sentiments about *ETR&D*.

Opinions Regarding AECT Conferences

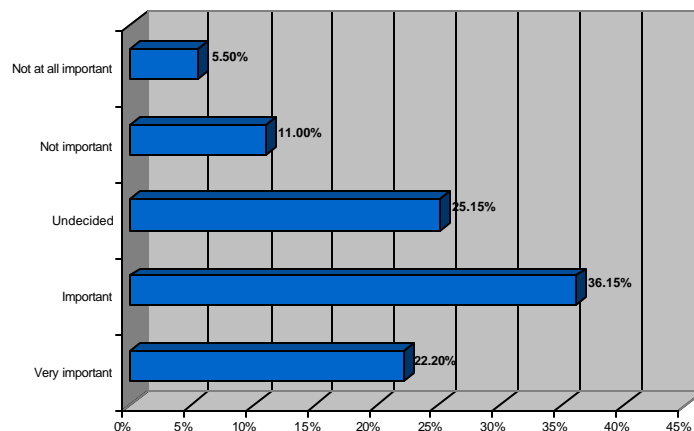
Out of the three recent AECT annual conferences, most respondents had attended the Atlanta conference in November 2001 (53% of n=553), followed by Long Beach in 2000 (28% of n=553), and then Denver (26% of n=553). Within these conferences, the university receptions and the Wednesday Night Roundup were considered by the majority of the respondents to be events that were helpful in facilitating their meeting other people (i.e. networking), with around 57 and 47 per cent of the respondents voting for each of these events respectively (see Figure 3). Other gregarious events included (number of respondents voting for each event in parentheses) Division/Council receptions (around 31 per cent), Friday Night Foundation Gala (25 per cent), and the membership meeting (around 15 per cent). Meanwhile, through qualitative comments, several respondents stressed how much they liked having an area with tables and chairs in the lobby area of the hotel for informal meetings (33) between sessions. Such comments also praised the conferences' roundtables, sessions and workshops (22), graduate lounge, international lounge, and hospitality suite (11), and luncheons/meals (8).

Figure 3: Conference Activities Helpful for Meeting People (n=356)



AECT changed the timing of its Annual Conference in 2000 from February to November in order to coincide with the NSBA trade show. The majority of the respondents (75% of n=478) agreed with this change. Also, nearly 59 per cent of the respondents felt that the trade show was important or very important for the conference (see Figure 3). However, 20 respondents provided qualitative comments about the trade show, saying they don't care/are not interested/wouldn't attend anyway. There were in all 59 comments against having the conference in November, and 26 in favor of it. Also, 61 respondents commented negatively about the fact the conferences and trade shows were held physically so far apart from each other that it was difficult to get to one from the other. An appreciable 16 comments expressed lack of interest in the "K-12" theme of the trade show. Many of the aforementioned comments can be viewed in the original in Appendix D-2 of this report.

Figure 3: Importance of Trade Show for Conference (n=509)



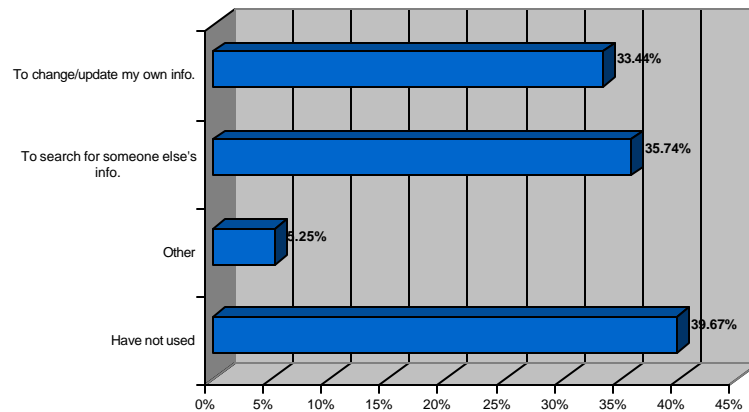
Opinions Regarding AECT's Online Services

Ninety-five per cent of the respondents (n=550) said they have visited the AECT web site at: <http://www.aect.org>. Sixty-eight per cent (n=541) responded that they have tried to log on to the site as a member, of which eighty-seven per cent (n=349) managed to log on successfully.

Fifty-six per cent of the respondents (n=548) were aware of the web site's online membership directory. Those who had used the directory had done so to change/update their own information, or to search for another member's information (see Figure 4). Qualitative comments from respondents also indicated use of the directory to check accuracy of own information, to find people of like research interest by job location, to know who else in the

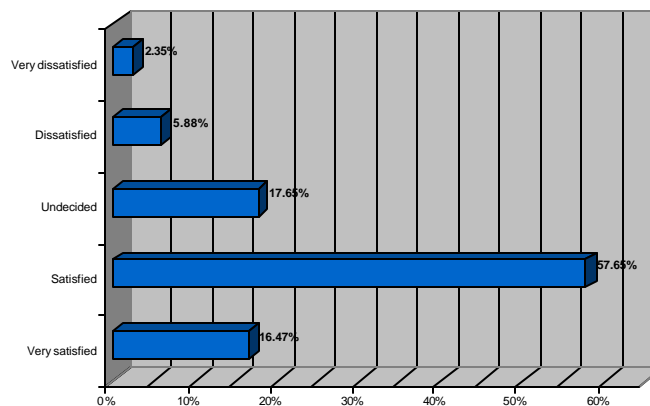
area belonged to the Association, to get a list of members within a state, to find a list of division members, and to find AECT members at one's own institution.

Figure 4: Usage of Online Directory (n=305)



Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents (n=507) were *not* aware of the availability of *ETR&D* in electronic format on the web site. Ninety per cent of these said they would use it had they been aware. Of those who read *ETR&D* online, around 74 per cent were satisfied (or very satisfied) with it (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Satisfaction with *ETR&D* Online (n=85)



Similarly, the majority of respondents (around 56 per cent of n=516) were *not* aware of the availability of books in electronic format on the web site, but said they *would* have read them online if they knew of their existence. Most (roughly 80 per cent) of those who *had* read books online expressed satisfaction with them (see Figure 6). The same trend was also seen with regard to purchasing books electronically (see Figures 18 and 19).

Figure 6: Satisfaction with Books Online (n=119)

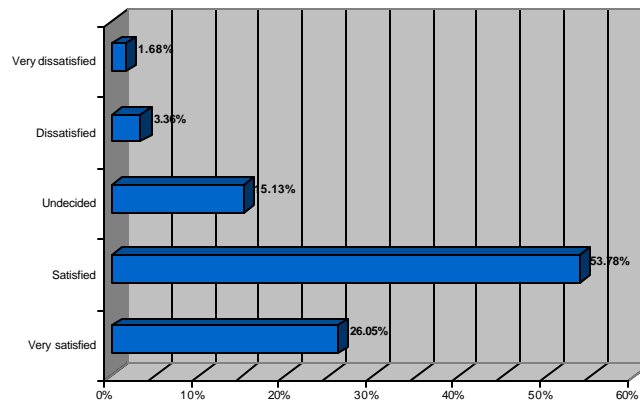


Figure 18: Online Feature (Purchasing Books Electronically) (n=520)

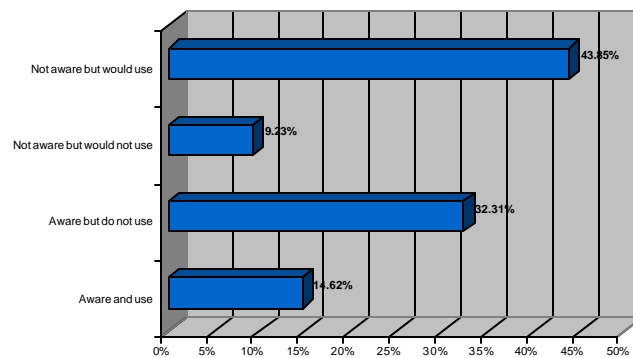
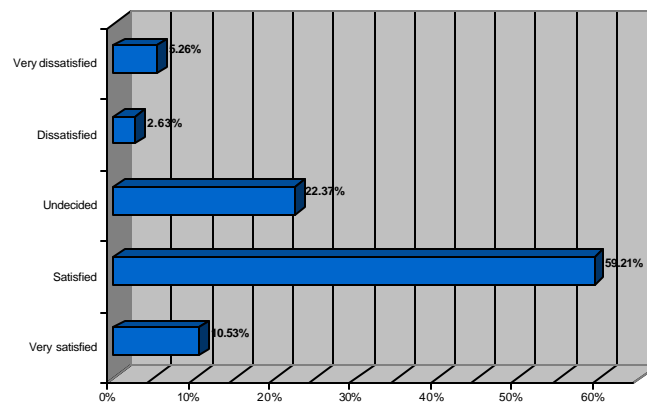


Figure 19: Satisfaction with Purchasing Books Online (n=76)



Meanwhile, the majority of respondents (around 58 per cent) was *indeed* aware of the availability of online conference registration facilities on the Web site *and* used these facilities (see Figure 20). Once again, most (roughly 78 per cent) of those who *had* registered online expressed satisfaction with the experience (see Figure 21).

Figure 20: Online Feature (Registering for Conference Electronically) (n=496)

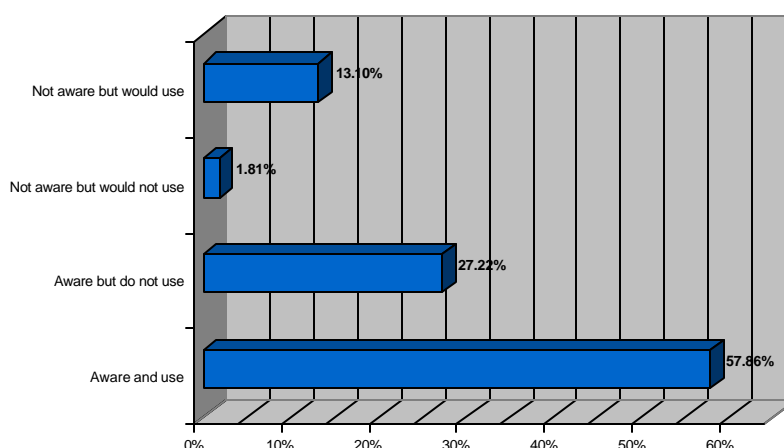
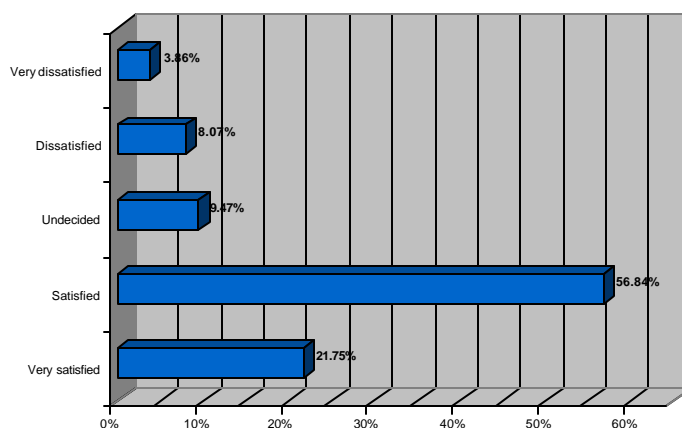


Figure 21: Satisfaction with Registering for Conference Online (n=285)



On the other hand, while the majority of respondents (around 60 per cent) *were* aware of the availability of online registration for the summer leadership meeting, more than three-fourths of these respondents did *not* use this facility (see Figure 22). Once again, most (roughly 70 per cent) of those who *had* registered online expressed satisfaction with the experience (see Figure 23).

Figure 22: Online Feature (Registering for Summer Leadership Meeting Electronically) (n=498)

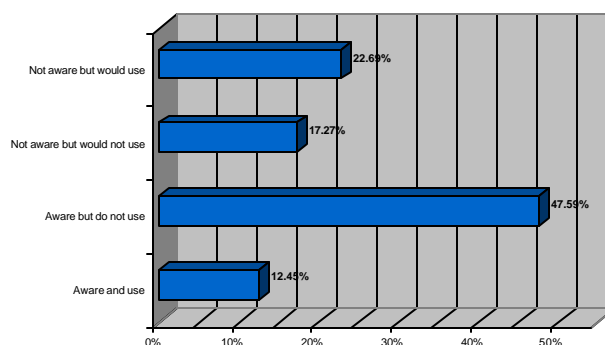
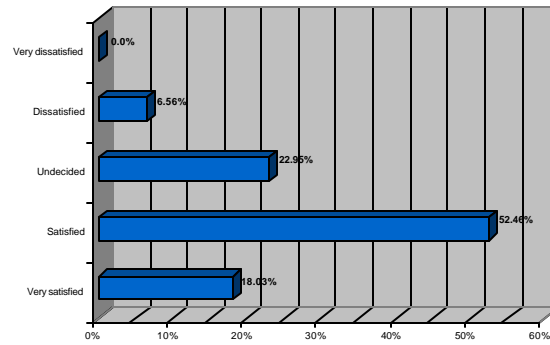


Figure 23: Satisfaction with Registering for Summer Leadership Meeting Online (n=61)



Regarding submitting *new* membership applications via the Web site, most respondents (69 per cent) were aware of this option, and were almost equally divided into those that used this option and those that did not use it (see Figure 24). Of those that did submit new membership applications online, most (78 per cent) expressed satisfaction (see Figure 25). The exact same trend was observed with respect to respondents' use of the Web site's facilities to *renew* memberships online (see Figures 26 and 27).

Figure 24: Online Feature (Submitting New Membership Application Electronically) (n=490)

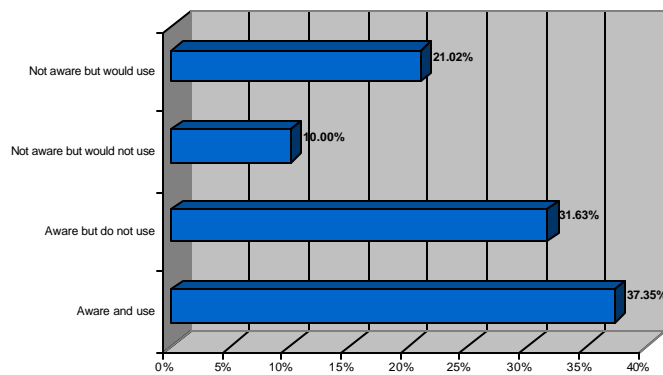


Figure 25: Satisfaction with Submitting New Membership Application Online (n=182)

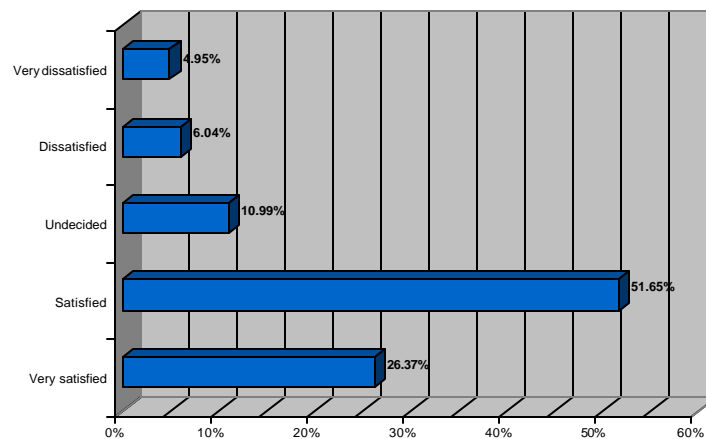


Figure 25: Online Feature (Renewing Membership Electronically) (n=491)

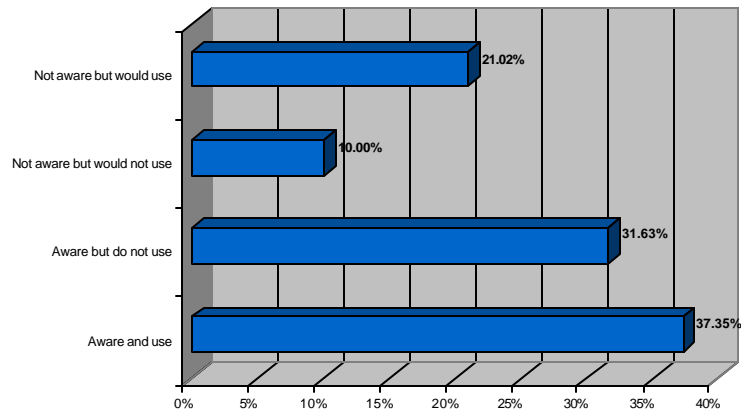
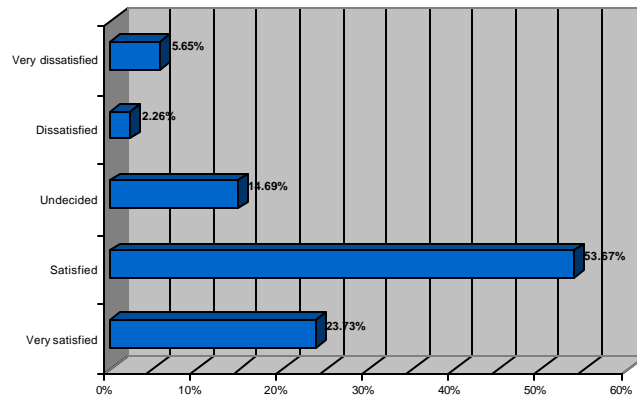


Figure 27: Satisfaction with Renewing Membership Online (n=177)



When it came to submitting conference presentation proposals through the Web site, the majority of respondents (47 per cent) were aware of, *and* used this facility (see Figure 28). Of these, most (nearly 84 per cent) expressed satisfaction with the experience (see Figure 29).

Figure 28: Online Feature (Submitting Conference Presentation Proposals Electronically) (n=491)

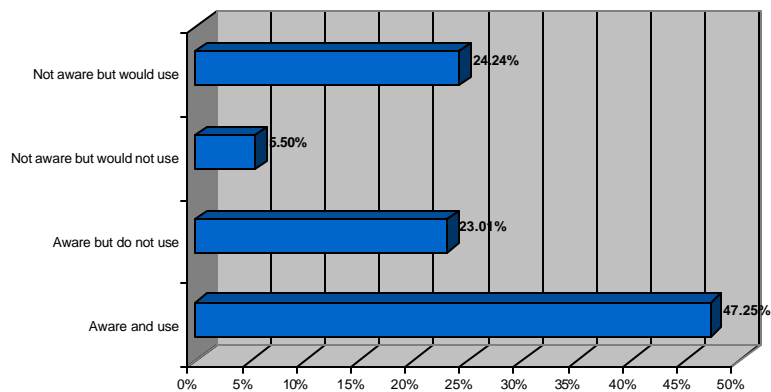
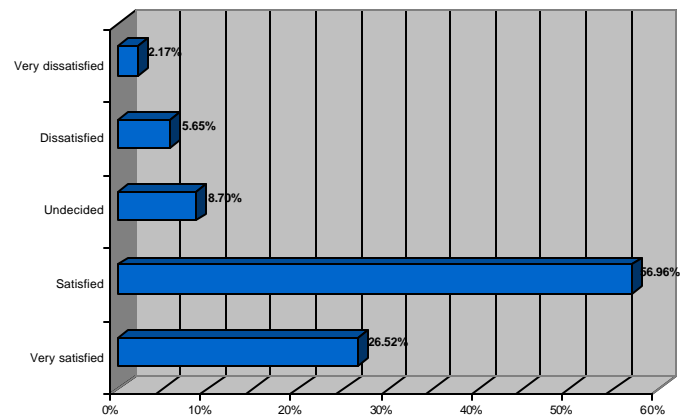


Figure 29: Satisfaction with Submitting Conference Presentation Proposals Online (n=230)



With respect to reading job postings electronically, the findings were rather curious, with significant proportions of the respondents (35 per cent each) divided into the “not aware, but would use” and “aware, and use” categories (see Figure 30). But once again, most (roughly 70 per cent) of those who did reading job postings electronically were satisfied (see Figure 31).

Figure 30: Online Feature (Reading Job Postings Electronically) (n=514)

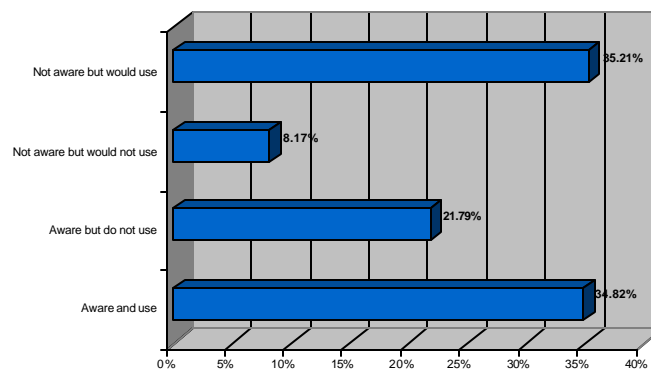
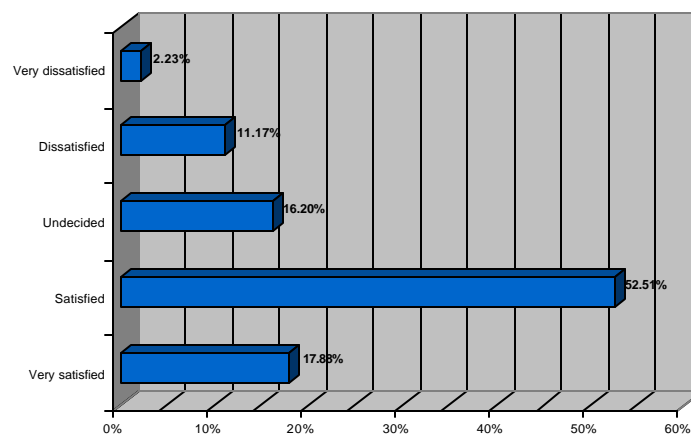


Figure 31: Satisfaction with Reading Job Postings Online (n=179)



Meanwhile, the majority of the respondents (around 40 per cent) were *not* aware of the availability of listserv newsletters, but said they *would* have availed of them if they knew of their existence (see Figure 32). Most (roughly 66 per cent) of those who *had* availed of these listserv newsletters were satisfied (or very satisfied) with the experience (see Figure 33).

Figure 32: Services Online Feature (Listserv Newsletters) (n=512)

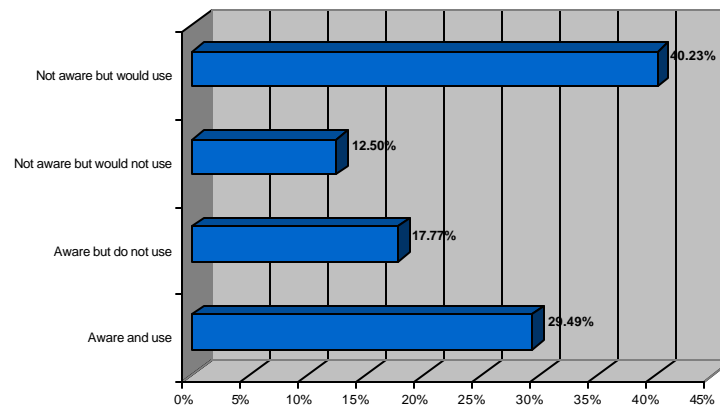
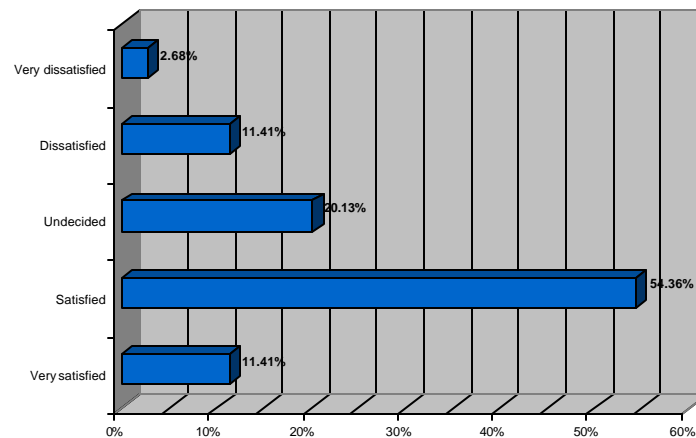


Figure 33: Satisfaction with Listserv Newsletters (n=149)



Summative Comments

Lastly, several respondents wrote qualitative comments regarding things they wanted to say about AECT's services as a whole. 25 responses touched on the need for defining the focus of AECT, 17 responses stressed the need for improved communications between the AECT administration and membership, 81 responses mentioned about improving the conference, 61 responses mentioned the need to improve on-line services, three responses suggested active marketing of AECT to new members, 19 comments expressed happiness with AECT's performance and provided encouragement, 26 responses mentioned the need to improve AECT's leadership, 19 suggested improving AECT publications, 10 mentioned the need for better employment postings, and 11 comments mentioned the need for improved networking. Many of the aforementioned comments can be viewed in the original in Appendix D-3 of this report.

Inferences/Conclusions

It can be seen from the *quantitative* data collected by this survey that most respondents were on the whole satisfied by the services provided by AECT. More than half the respondents found the annual conference and AECT

publications to be most beneficial. Within the conferences, they found events such as the university receptions, Wednesday Night Roundup, and the division/council receptions to be most useful for networking. Most respondents were also in agreement with the decision to change the conference date from February to October/November. Most also considered the concurrently-held NSBA trade show to be important to them.

Meanwhile, most of the respondents were satisfied to various degrees with the flagship publications *TechTrends* and *ETR&D*. Furthermore, the vast majority of them had visited the AECT Web site and successfully logged on as members. Most were aware of the availability of the online membership directory, which they used for various purposes. Respondents did not seem to be very much aware of the availability of *ETR&D* and books in electronic format, the facility to purchase books online, and the availability of listserv newsletters. They were most aware of the possibility to register for the conferences and summer leadership meetings online, of the ability to submit and renew Association memberships online, and the ability to submit conference presentation proposals online. The respondents were divided with respect to awareness about online job postings. However, the vast majority of those who *had* used any of the above facilities were indeed satisfied with their experience.

On the other hand, the *qualitative* comments expressed by the respondents provide a much more richer and complicated picture. The qualitative data shows that even within the broader categories of agreement/disagreement or satisfaction/dissatisfaction, there are several nuances involved. A lot of member opinions are conditional to various contingencies. Others describe specific, unique situations/problems/issues that, while they may not be “statistically” significant in terms of sheer numbers, nevertheless possess immense “real world” significance in terms of providing insightful commentaries regarding the quality of AECT services. Also, the qualitative comments are a way the respondents were able to express views/opinions that could not be adequately obtained by the close-ended, selection-type questions.

Directions for Future Action

Conduct of the Survey

First of all, this year’s survey’s respondent total (n) of 553 was lower than the 590 who responded to last year’s survey. Reasons for this could be many, such as holding the survey immediately after the 2001 Atlanta conference (when respondents were tired and had lots of work to catch up on), or holding the survey so close to the end of semester and its attendant demands, or the fact that the questionnaire had a total of 25 (albeit mostly close-ended) items. The next time around, one may want to conduct the survey at a different point during the year/semester. One may also want to have fewer, more focused, more pertinent questions. Conducting the survey immediately after the annual conference may have also negatively influenced the respondents (this is especially seen in their qualitative comments) due to various events that happened (or did not happen) at the conference. The relatively small proportion of the total population that participated in this survey also raises issues regarding the representativeness of the survey sample to the whole AECT membership body.

Using the Data Gathered by this Survey

The quantitative data gathered through this survey is mostly self-explanatory, once it has been analyzed and graphically presented, and is mostly complementary regarding the services provided by AECT. It would serve as a useful reference to the AECT leadership about the current state of affairs regarding AECT member services, and as valuable evidence in support of their efforts. One finding provided by the quantitative data – that respondents were *not* aware of certain online services available on the AECT Web site (such as reading *ETR&D*, books, and job postings online, purchasing books online, e-mail listservs, etc.) – suggests that AECT should launch an active awareness campaign to educate/inform its membership about these services. Meanwhile, the *qualitative* comments might be most valuable for the AECT administration in terms of helping them locate important lacunae in the current set-up and significantly improve the quality of their services and thus increase member satisfaction. The qualitative data gathered by this survey are too voluminous and too diversified to adequately report in this document (barring those provided in Appendices D-1/2/3), but they remain available in the entirety for the AECT leadership’s perusal and reference.

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