

Southern Sociological Society
Annual Meeting Satisfaction Survey
SSS 2015

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Overview

As SSS did in the late spring of 2014, after our meeting in Charlotte, on April 7, 2015, the Executive Office deployed an Annual Meeting Satisfaction Survey using Google Forms in order to assess various dimensions of membership satisfaction with the 2015 SSS Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA (March 25-28, 2015) in order to improve the annual meeting in 2015. This questionnaire mirrored last year's and added items on the new 2015 conference "app" as well as questions about members' need for childcare at future SSS annual meetings.

The survey was sent through the Mail Chimp SSS Email List that contains some 5000 past and present SSS members and/or conference attendees. The survey remained open until April 17, 2015. In total 269 people responded to the survey. This is up 58% from last year's 170. Of course there were more people who attended record-breaking SSS2015 – in fact some 1300 people! Thus, the 269 represents a 20.7% response rate from conference attendees.

The survey contained a broad range of questions designed to capture the experience of the annual meeting for our members. This brief report covers the very basic quantitative results. There is a *wealth* of qualitative information with suggestions from members about how to improve the experience at the meetings. Sometime soon Executive Office will summarize those for the current Program Committee, President, and Executive Committee. It is important that we keep an eye on these data. Now that we have two years we can begin to see some patterns.

Executive Office intends to continue collecting these data each year. Our transition to CVENT will make the collection and analyses of such data much simpler and fully integrated. The Executive Office is happy to conduct other kinds of analyses should Executive Committee members wish to see additional ones from these data or any other.

Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 269 respondents, 100% attended SSS 2015 indicating that those members who did not attend as well as those who are in our database, but not members, see this survey as something that only conference attendees should complete. The case was similar in 2014.

These respondents are between 20 and 85 years old ($M=40.3$, $SD=15.22$). Two-thirds (66%) of the respondents are women, while 34% are men. The racial/ethnic makeup of these respondents are: 75.5% White (down from 82.6% in 2014); 8.2% Black (down from 10.3% in 2014); 5.2% Latino (up from 3.9% in 2014); 2.6% Asian/Pacific Islander (up

from 1.9% in 2014); 3.3% Other (up from 1.3%); and, 4.5% Multiracial (not used in 2014). For the sake of comparative analyses a dummy variable was created (White=1, NonWhite=0).

These respondents have been SSS members between 0 and 45 years ($M=7.51$, $SD=8.33$). Interestingly, Women and NonWhites (7.26 years and 5.65 years on average) have been SSS members significantly less years than Men and Whites (9.98 years and 8.85 years). Slightly less than half (46.1%) come from Research Intensive Universities, 42.8% from Colleges/Universities, 8.6% (down from 2014) from Liberal Arts Colleges, 0.4% (down from 2014) from Community Colleges, and the rest from Other.

As Executive Committee will recall, a new initiative for SSS2014 was encouraging Pre-Registration for the conference – it was a major success last year. This year, in 2015, some 85.4% (very similar to 2014) of respondents did preregister. Slightly over four (4.8%) are Sustaining Members (this increased ever so slightly), 53.2% (slightly down from 2014) are Regular Members, 33.5% (up from 2014) are Graduate Students, 7.4% (up from 2014) are (Undergraduate Students), and 1.1% are Emeritus/Emerita Members. These membership numbers are those who attended the conference (1301) and filled out the survey, not our actual membership numbers (1423).

Program Participation

The number of annual meetings that these respondents have attended range between 1 and 45 ($M=5.47$, $SD = 6.74$). Last year's survey showed that whites have attended more meetings than nonwhites – this year that relationship is not significant.

The vast majority of respondents (99.3%) were on the program in some capacity, whether presenters, presidors, organizers, committee members, discussants, officers of the Society, and other roles. Of course, many respondents played multiple roles in SSS 2015 as they do every year.

President Maume continued the upgraded look of the physical program started last year. The overall rating for the physical program was high on the 1-5 scale ($M=4.26$, $SD=0.90$). These ratings were virtually the same as last year's – only slightly lower.

SSS 2015, for the first time ever, boasted a conference application (“app”) for attendees' mobile devices and laptops designed and curated by EO and CoreApps. Over three-fourths (76.9%) of the conference attendees downloaded and used the app! This is a significantly high number according to our discussions with CoreApps. Those who did rated the app highly ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.93$). People used all of the features with some regularity, but the calendaring/scheduling, the program, and the participant list were used most often. The app, by all measures, was an absolute success – our contract with CVENT will boast another app that will be fully integrated with all of our databases.

This calls into question, of course, the need for both a mobile app and a physical program. Last year when asked if respondents would benefit from a digital copy of the program, 72.3% reported that they would – we accommodated. When further asked if there were a digital copy of the program, would the physical program still be necessary, 51.2% in 2014 said that a physical copy still would be desired in addition to the digital one. However, this year, when we *did* have the app in reality (and not just theoretically), the percentage that said they would still want a physical copy declined to 27.9%. This is what EO expected, about a quarter. As such, there will be many fewer physical copies of the program as well as tote bags and swag at SSS 2015.

There were many sessions at SSS 2015 as well as many types of sessions. We asked respondents how many of each session they attended as well as how they would rate the quality of those sessions (5-point scale ranging from 1=poor to 5=excellent). These are summarized as follows:

| Session Type | Attend Range | Attend Mean | Quality Mean |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Paper Sessions | 0-15 | 4.15 | 3.99 |
| Plenary Sessions | 0-5 | 0.83 | 4.21 |
| Roundtables | 0-3 | 0.52 | 3.59 |
| Author Meets Critics | 0-3 | 0.43 | 3.95 |
| Posters | 0-6 | 0.54 | 3.70 |
| Presidential Sessions | 0-5 | 0.66 | 4.07 |

Women were more likely to attend the Authors Meets Critics than men. Women were also more likely than men to rate the quality of both Paper Sessions and Roundtables higher. There were no differences across major demographic variables in 2014 on these issues.

SSS 2015 continued the new initiatives - Book Signings (8.6% went) and the Meet the Authors (22.7% went) sessions – that were begun last year. The book signings have not yet caught on although Whites were significantly more likely to go to them than NonWhites. Indeed the percentage who went to the Meet the Authors events went up from last year (22.7% versus 15.7%) – likely due to the number and quality of the scholars in these events. EO feels that we should continue to try harder to advertise these and see if they can't be instituted more fully.

We continue to focus on improving the registration process, the conference swag, as well as the amount and quality of beverages and food at SSS 2015. The following summarizes satisfaction with these initiatives. Overall the satisfaction went down slightly across all categories. Of course, many of these processes are almost fully related to the logistics of the hotel space as well as the hotel offerings, staff, and amenities. Indeed, the Astor Crowne Plaza did not fair exceptionally well with our members (3.06 out of 5 rating), though NonWhites liked it better than other venues.

| Item | 2014 Mean | 2015 Mean |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Registration Process | 4.59 | 4.42 |
| Beverage | 4.39 | 3.98 |
| Food | 3.84 | 3.20 |
| Conference Materials | 4.52 | 4.37 |
| Conference Staff Was Helpful | 4.68 | 4.47 |
| Conference Facilities | 4.44 | 3.95 |
| Overall Organization | 4.67 | 4.49 |

The majority of respondents (57.6%), when considering the length of sessions would like to continue to see 75 minute sessions, while 24.2% would like 60 minute sessions, and 18.2% would like sessions to be 90 minutes. This is similar to last year and indicates that the session timings are ok; however, there was considerable backlash against having more than four papers in sessions – something that we should refrain from doing in the future (again, dependent upon hotel space – something our RFP process is now attempting to fix). Concerning the length of time respondents would like to see between sessions, 71% would like 15 minutes, 16.4% would like 20, and 12.6% would like 10 minutes – again, virtually the same as last year. When respondents considered potential length of time for lunch break each day of the conference, 49% wanted 60 minutes, 42% would like 75 minutes, 8.9% would like 45 minutes, and the rest would like 30 minutes – even in New Orleans!

We also asked the extent to which respondents felt welcome at SSS 2015 ($M=4.48$, $SD=0.79$). I could find no significant differences across major characteristics of respondents on feeling welcome – although the qualitative data will tell a fuller story. Additionally, we asked in respondents felt the program was inclusive ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.84$). One the most statistically significant comparisons in the entire data set was regarding inclusivity where Whites felt the program was significantly less inclusive than NonWhites. The instrument did not define “inclusive” for respondents.

SSS has been looking into the possibility of having childcare available for those attending the conference – whether onsite or offsite. We asked respondents to indicate whether they would used childcare services at an upcoming SSS annual meeting – 15.6% indicated that they would if it were available. NonWhites were significantly more likely to say they would use childcare if available. This percentage mirrors the percentage indicated by the membership survey conducted some 5-7 years ago. Of those who said they would use it, 19% would need it for 1 child, 5.2% would use it for 2 children, 0.7% would use it for three children, and 1.1% would need care for 4 or more children. When asked how much they would pay for childcare if SSS made it available, responses ranged from free to \$25/hour; however, the categories with the largest frequency were \$10/hour (6.7%) and “free” (4.5%). We can utilize these distributions to make more efficient plans for SSS 2016, should we secure childcare.

Survey respondents were also asked what types of sessions would you like to see *more* as well as *less* of at future meetings. Those at SSS 2015 would like to see more (in order): Workshops, Panels, Mini-Conferences, and Film Screenings. They would like to see less (in order, and not surprisingly): Roundtables, Posters, and Author Meets Critics.

The survey results indicate that 56.5% of those in New Orleans plan on coming to Buckhead for SSS 2016, 31.6% Did Not Yet Know, and 11.9% said they would not be coming (likely a regional effect). Overall, 97.4% would recommend SSS to colleagues.

Conclusion

This brief report sought to highlight the contours of the satisfaction survey results. Overall, SSS 2015 was a resounding success for the vast majority of the participants.

There is a great deal of qualitative data available with member suggestions for the meetings. These have not yet been analyzed.

Again, the Executive Office is happy to conduct analyses that are possible with these data. Do not hesitate to ask.

Respectfully submitted.