The Readership Has Spoken

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Abstract
Thanks to everyone who completed the "Do You Know JAC" readership survey.

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The Readership Has Spoken

Dennis Hinkamp
JAC Professional Development Editor

Thanks to everyone who completed the “Do You Know JAC” readership survey. We hope you felt it was time well spent, rather than another 10 minutes of your life wasted on the Internet when you could have been watching dog tricks on YouTube.

That said, we do take the results seriously and will use them to shape the future of the JAC. We presented the results at the ACE conference in Albuquerque and provided a Web link with the results to the membership e-mail list.

The problem with most readership surveys is that they often don’t reach the people you most want to hear from: the nonreaders, who may have long ago given up on your publication. According to the recently released JAC Task Force Report, only slightly more than 50% of the ACE membership requested printed copies of the JAC. This is a problem, since the journal’s mission is to serve the whole membership. My sense is that there are many reasons we’ve gradually lost readership over the years. I’m not sure how we can better reach this audience, but we need to know why they have drifted away.

For now, we need to be responsive to that half of the membership who reads the JAC by incorporating some of the survey findings. Some of the highlights are as follows:

About 93% of the 129 respondents are or were university affiliated. Nearly 30% describe themselves as writers or editors, and 22% list education and teaching as their primary job responsibility.

Only 27% hold tenure-track positions, with only slightly more (35%) responding that peer-reviewed publishing is required for advancement.

Respondents are well balanced in terms of gender, at 54% female and 46% male. Our survey included retirees, so it should not be a big surprise that 23 of the respondents had 20 or more years in ACE. Although experience and age are not perfectly correlated, it is encouraging to know that 53% of the respondents had been in ACE 10 years or less.

I was most interested in the open-ended survey questions that asked respondents for suggestions for new JAC categories and topics. In the spirit of change, I’m going to present the answers to these questions with a new content analysis tool called “word clouds” that gives a visual representation of word frequency. (A number of content analysis programs incorporate...
word clouds. One free one can be found at http://www.usingenglish.com/.) The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned. First, “What new sections or categories would you like to see added to the JAC’s editorial content?”

Next, “What new topics, if any, would you like the JAC to address?”
As you review these results, you can see that—beyond the common words such as "communication" and "extension"—"marketing," "tips," and "tools" also were frequently mentioned. Please squint at this further and make your own interpretations.

Again, you have spoken and we have listened. We are starting to be more proactive and to solicit articles on the topics identified in the survey. This material may come from within the ACE membership, but we are not opposed to soliciting outside contributors. Just as we don't rely on our membership for all of the ACE conference presentations, we don't need to ask that the membership supply all of the JAC's content. If you have an idea, please send it to us.

I am sometimes discouraged by all the changes in this publication and its seemingly declining readership, but history reveals that some of these issues have always been with us.

At this stage, it is a bit difficult to say what will make up the July-September issue of ACE Quarterly. We have had inklings from a few members, but no outright promises of forthcoming manuscripts. We do have a couple on hand which we shall probably use.

... So, "The Lord willing and the crick don't rise" (too high), we'll have another issue this summer. (Chapman, 1977, p. 29)

References
