

CORS takes the pulse – Results of the Membership Survey

by Paul Comeau, Membership Survey Coordinator

The Canadian Operational Research Society conducted a survey of its membership last fall through the Bulletin. A total of 30 surveys were returned from across Canada and these provide a wealth of information about the health of our society. The response rate was not as high as we would have liked but there were excellent comments offered. Results reported here might not be statistically significant, but they can be considered as generally indicative of member attitudes.

CORS definitely caters to senior professionals. Of the responses received, the average time as a CORS member was fourteen years with half being members for over eleven years. This bids well when compared to the average time in an OR/MS career of some 20 years. Approximately half the response group are also members of INFORMS. One respondent has been a member of CORS for 41 years ever since it was founded and got involved in OR/MS 51 years ago! For most members joining CORS, it is a lifetime association.

The response group was composed of 15 members from universities, 4 in government, 6 in industry, 2 in consulting and 3 retirees for which 20% have undergraduate degrees, 34% masters and 46% hold Ph.D's overall. Job titles include professor (full, associate, assistant), doctoral students, engineers, managers at various levels, senior analysts, and business proprietors. The table below summarizes sectors of work (recognizing that these are not always mutually exclusive) and corresponding areas of interest. The traditional areas of OR continue to hold our attention but there are also a number of emerging areas for OR such as strategic planning, scientific computing, and system dynamics.

Interest Areas	Academic	Business & Finance	Consulting	Defence	Transport	Utilities	Ret'd	Other	TOTALS
Optimisation	7	1	2	1	3	2		1	17
Simulation	8	1	1	3	2		1		16
Scheduling	5		1	3	2	2	1	1	15
Prob. & Statistics	8	1		3	1	1		1	15
Decision Analysis	7		1	3	2	1		1	15
Strategic Planning	2		1	3	2			1	9
Logistics	5			1	1	1		1	9
Project Management	3		1	2	2				8
IM/IT	2		2	1	1		1	1	8
Scientific Computing	3			1			1		5
System Dynamics	1			2					3

The multiple-choice attitude questions addressed a variety of services and benefits offered to CORS members. The table below shows individual response counts. In general, respondents were pleased with the level of service offered by CORS at what is seen as a reasonable cost. Services seem to be offered adequately to members of both official languages although the francophone sample was small. The results clearly indicate that CORS should take a more active role in publicizing the society to the public and especially to attracting new and younger members. CORS has some value to advancing both the theory and practice of OR/MS.

Local sections seem to vary in their levels of activity and participation. The CORS membership directory is a useful resource for most, and many support the idea of indicating areas of



interest. This information would most certainly be voluntary. CORS may be too small to formally establish Special Interest Groups (SIGs) but there may be popular or specialty interest areas where some form of virtual SIG might be useful.

It should be no surprise that there was strong support for the Bulletin. It keeps getting better each issue thanks to our dedicated editor and the excellent material that is submitted. In fact, many mentioned they especially liked survey articles as a vehicle to start exploring and learning about new subject areas. Many like the CORS website and list-server service even though they are not used as much as they could be. Specifically, there were suggestions that jobs and career openings be posted there. There is now an initiative to create a website page with CORS member links.

CORS conferences appear to have quite good coverage of OR/MS theory, and adequate coverage of practice. It is fair to say that conference organizers have been striving to have better coverage of OR practice. The good news is that most respondents plan to remain CORS members for the foreseeable future.

Questions that do not apply were to be left blank.	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>		Avg
	1	2	3	4	5		
I think CORS offers a good level of service to its members.		2	8	17	2		3.6
CORS annual membership fees are too high.	7	10	12				2.2
CORS should take a more active role in publicising the society to new members.			9	9	10		4.0
CORS should take a more active role in publicising the society to the public.		1	7	14	7		3.9
CORS offers its services adequately in both official languages.		1	6	12	6		3.9
My CORS Membership has helped me advance the theory of OR/MS.	5	4	10	8	1		2.9
My CORS Membership has helped me advance the practice of OR/MS.	3	5	8	10	2		3.1
I consider my local section to be active.	5	5	5	8	3		2.9
I participate in local section events.	2	4	5	7	8		3.6
I would be interested in joining a CORS Special Interest Group (SIG).	2	2	13	9	1		3.2
I find the CORS membership directory useful.	1	2	4	14	7		3.9
I would not object having areas of interest listed in the membership directory.	1	1	6	13	7		3.9
The Bulletin is a useful form of communication about CORS news and events.			2	16	11		4.3
The INFOR journal is a useful benefit as a CORS member.	5	4	3	14	2		3.1
I find the CORS Web site www.cors.ca a useful resource.	1	6	7	10	4		3.4
CORS List-server (subscribed email list) is a useful service.	2	1	15	7	1		3.2
CORS conference(s) have a good coverage of OR/MS theory.			6	12	6		4.0
CORS conference(s) have a good coverage of OR/MS practice.		4	11	7	3		3.4
I plan on remaining a member of CORS for the foreseeable future.		2	2	13	12		4.2

Open-ended questions sought member's views on priorities in the coming years, society contributions and other suggestions. The importance of better communication with industry, government and universities on the value of OR/MS was mentioned often. It was suggested that we should publicize the society through success stories in the press. Improved dissemination of

theory and practice of OR in Canada, partly through a re-designed INFOR journal, should be a priority.

Many respondents would like to see more local activities and to also involve retired members who possess much corporate memory and a wealth of experience. Respondents joined and remain members of CORS primarily for networking, and to keep abreast of developing theory and methods, thereby meeting their social as well as intellectual needs. Many like joint conferences and some even suggesting holding larger conferences only every two years. Problem sessions during conferences were recommended so that research areas can be discussed in their early stages instead of always presenting finished products. Even if half of respondents were also members of INFORMS, and they say they remain in CORS because it is distinctly Canadian.

I think the results re-affirm our values and provide excellent guidance as to how we might develop our society in the years to come. Thanks go to those who took the time to complete and return their survey. If you have points you feel strongly about or have other ideas for society events, why not write an article on it. Although there is room for improvement in some areas, the prognosis appears excellent for the future of our society.

*** ANNOUNCEMENT ***

For further discussion concerning the results of the CORS Membership Survey, be sure to attend the following session at CORS 2000 in Edmonton:

Monday, May 29, 2000 at 4:10 p.m.

Title: Open Session for CORS Members: How is CORS Doing?

Abstract

The findings of last year's survey of CORS members will be presented. All members of the society are encouraged to attend this session to give CORS Council further feedback on how the society is doing and suggest ways it could better serve them professionally.

