

Our Strength in Numbers: A Closer Look at TMS's Membership Development Efforts

David F. Bahr



Think for a moment about how you came to solve a tough problem, made a new discovery, or came up with a better idea or approach to doing something. That flash of insight might have been yours alone, but chances are the seed for it was planted through the interactions that you had with colleagues and friends who were able to fill in a gap or help you look at the situation a little differently.

As materials scientists and engineers, our careers are built around solving problems and looking for that “better way.” TMS exists to enable us to do our best work and accelerate the process of discovery by providing us with an array of avenues to connect

with the ideas and insights of others who share our professional interests.

To keep these connections strong, it is vital that TMS continues to grow and reflect the evolving diversity of the materials science and engineering (MSE) community. This has been a challenge—not just for TMS, but for many other professional societies—in the wake of a global recession and ongoing economic concerns that can weigh on the decision to invest in a membership. Keeping TMS on an upward trend for the long term was the goal of a two-phase growth plan that was implemented in early 2010.

The first stage of this effort focused on reaching out to recently lapsed TMS members by offering them a trial membership providing access to online-only TMS resources as a means of reacquainting them with the Society's benefits. By the close of 2010,

TMS had increased its overall professional membership—to include “e-members”—by 9.5% over the 2009 baseline. Persuading these individuals to become full dues-paying members in 2011 was the goal of the next year's membership development activities. These yielded extremely positive results, with the number of TMS professional members increasing by 11.3% over the 2010 baseline.

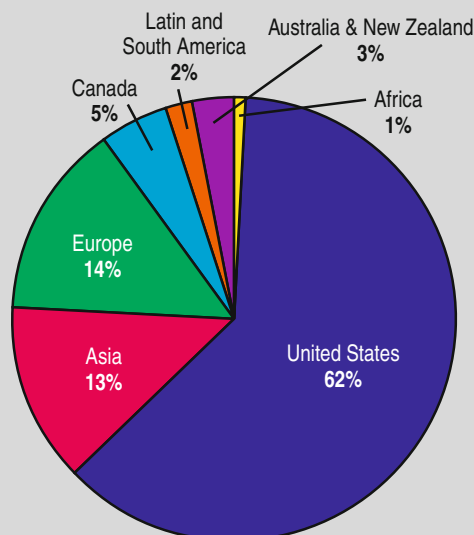
As part of this process, TMS staff examined each and every membership record to ensure that our numbers and tracking were as accurate as possible. This provided some interesting insights into who our members are and how they are changing.

According to our most current membership statistics, TMS is 11,676 strong, with 7,142 dues paying professional members and 4,534 student members. The largest segment of our professional members (45%) hails from industry, followed by academia (33%), and government (14%). About 6% of our members have retired from full-time employment, but still retain their membership with TMS to connect with their profession.

TMS has also clearly evolved into an international organization, with members calling every populated continent of the world home (Figure 1).

In light of the critical need to attract women into science and engineering, it is interesting to note that TMS's membership demographics have presented a distinct generational shift (Figure 2.) Among our youngest members, the percentage of female scientists and engineers makes up between 20 and 30% of the total membership in their age group. Much work still needs

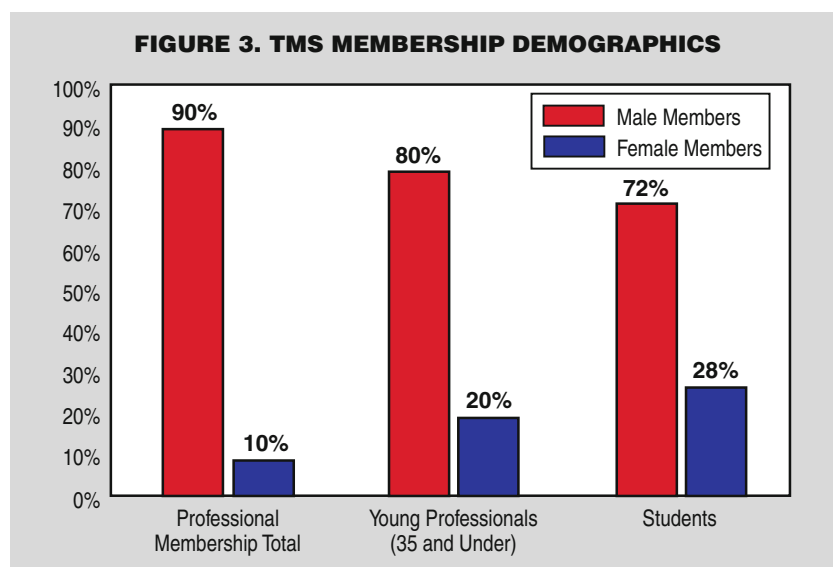
FIGURE 1. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF TMS MEMBERS



to be done to recruit and retain women in MSE, but these numbers indicate a heartening trend. (Please note that this information is based on data that each member chose to share, so these figures are approximate rather than exact.)

While these facts and figures have been helpful in creating a portrait of who TMS members are, it has also become very apparent that we still have much to learn about their interests. A full 27% of TMS members have not indicated their technical division affiliation as part of their membership registration (Figure 3). Knowing this enables TMS to best match its resources to every member's needs, while also providing you with connections to the committees, projects, and people who can most benefit your professional development and provide the greatest value to your work.

Another important insight that we are missing from many of our members is indication of "keyword interest areas." Knowing the topics that are of the most value to you helps TMS ensure that the information you receive is targeted and relevant. (As an interesting data point, TMS's top ten keyword interests, in descending order, are: mechanical properties; aluminum; high-temperature materials; characterization; iron and steel; modeling and simulation; advanced



materials; nanotechnology; advanced processing; and molten metal and solidification.)

Finally, a significant portion of TMS's membership also falls into the "associate member" category—These individuals have yet to provide their educational background or professional work history necessary so that TMS may update their membership status.

Many readers of this article will soon be receiving their TMS dues renewal invitation for the coming year. If you have not yet indicated your division alignment, provided your education details, or specified your tech-

nical keyword interest areas, I urge you to take this opportunity to do so.

In addition to ensuring a steady infusion of new members, TMS has also set its sights on enhancing its retention efforts in order to continue strengthening our base of membership experience and expertise. Our goal is to achieve an 81% renewal rate by 2014, which is considered an industry benchmark for associations offering compelling benefits and volunteer opportunities. The key to our success in achieving this is also what defines TMS as an organization—our volunteer-centric culture. The programs and resources that TMS offers are largely developed by our members for our members, with the greatest benefit of all being the opportunity to connect with others, while contributing in a meaningful way to your profession.

I am confident that the TMS statistical profile will continue to show we are reaching broader communities in the coming year. But, the real story of TMS is the one that will be told by its people—as we plan TMS2013 in San Antonio, prepare articles for our journals, and develop new ways to strengthen our professional network. That's the story that I'm really looking forward to hearing and I invite you to be part of it as an active TMS member.

David F. Bahr is the the TMS director of Membership & Student Development and director and professor of Mechanical and Materials Engineering at Washington State University.

FIGURE 2. TECHNICAL DIVISION AFFILIATIONS OF TMS MEMBERS

