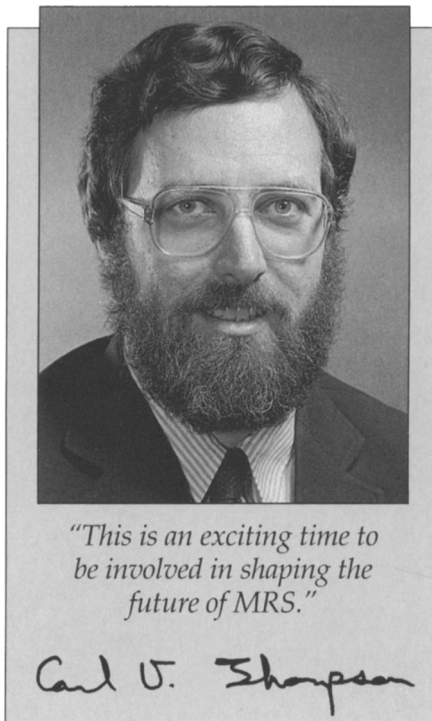


# What's Up?

Last Spring, the Materials Research Society conducted two surveys, one by mail and one at the MRS Spring Meeting. The surveys asked different questions in different ways, and had different but overlapping demographics, so the results are subject to complex interpretations.<sup>1</sup> However, some general conclusions are clear and can serve as important input to guide the committees, councillors, officers, and staff of the Society as they set the stage for MRS's continued evolution into both new roles and to improved versions of traditional activities. I'd like to share some of the survey results since they bring out important issues for all MRS members.

First, unsurprisingly, most of us became MRS members, and continue to be MRS members, because of the meetings. MRS members come from a variety of disciplines (as many trained in physics as in materials science, with many trained in other science and engineering fields), and work in a variety of environments (50% university, 25% industry, and 20% government and national laboratories). However, despite these diverse backgrounds, we share the view that MRS meetings provide the best means of presenting and learning about results from crossdisciplinary research on materials. The meetings also serve important networking and educational functions, the latter not only through short courses (now evolved into tutorials), but also through the symposia themselves, which allow us to quickly and efficiently come up to speed on unfamiliar or new research activities.

The meetings, and therefore the Society, are at a crossroad. We now have two large successful meetings that "fill" their east and west coast sites. Our meetings have always had the luxury of being in growth mode. New exciting topics could be added without pressure to remove or de-emphasize existing topics. Some traditional topics have evolved into fundamentally new topics, and some have faded away over time, but this process has never been forced. MRS has been very open and democratic in this sense. However, without changing sites to allow the Fall and Spring meetings to grow further, or without starting a third meeting, the Society will have to change the way it develops programs. This is an



important challenge that the members and leadership of the Society must address in the coming years. If we choose to fix the size of the meetings rather than let them grow or spawn new meetings, we will need to find new mechanisms to keep the Society as agile and open as it has always been. We should think about how the meetings should evolve with new constraints.

The *MRS Bulletin* was also chosen as a very important benefit of MRS membership, with 20% of the respondents identifying it as *most* important. The *Bulletin* has steadily improved over the years, becoming an important learning as well as networking tool. Recognizing its important roles, the council and officers will be focusing on further improving the *Bulletin*. One of the possibilities is having the *Bulletin* publish contributed peer-reviewed letters on particularly important new research results. What do you think of this?

One MRS activity that did not receive high marks in the survey was the Society's Public Affairs Office in Washington, DC. This was the case despite a high ranking

given to the importance of a role for MRS in representing a strong and unified voice on U.S. government research policy. We need to clearly define what we *want* to do and what we *can* do to effectively assist U.S. government in making informed decisions on actions which affect materials research. The DC office *has* helped the Society develop a voice in Washington, but we need to think carefully about how to use it. You can learn more about the Society's public affairs activities on the homepage. Have a look and tell us what you think.

In terms of new activities, the surveys showed the highest ratings by far for the future expansion of electronic services. We've made great progress in this area, with the World Wide Web site providing a wide range of information about meetings, publications, and other activities. Use of the web site is already growing rapidly in the order of 10,000 "hits" per week. By the time this letter is published, there should also be an all-electronic journal (*MRS Internet Journal of Nitride Semiconductor Research*, <http://nsr.mij.mrs.org/>) as well as a bulletin board for discussion of materials research, Society operation, or whatever is on your minds. The leadership is committed to further expansion of electronic services, and to experimentation with fundamentally new uses of the electronic media. We look forward to your help and feedback as we explore these services which *will* fundamentally change the way we communicate our research results, as well as how we network as professionals.

This is an exciting time to be involved in shaping the future of MRS. We have many mechanisms, both new and old, through which we can work on this together. Surveys are only one mode of communications. Let me know what you think of the options ahead for the Society. Also, volunteer for committees, post messages to the bulletin boards on the Web site, corner a councillor or a committee chair and give them an earful. Be an activist. You'll have an impact.

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1. A more complete summary of the surveys (as well as the raw results themselves) should be available on the MRS Homepage (<http://www.mrs.org/>) by the time this letter is published.