

Members Rate MRS Services High, Surveys Show

The Materials Research Society recently undertook its first membership surveys to gain a sense of the importance members place on various aspects of MRS activities and to obtain baseline data for planning future MRS projects. Two separate but similar questionnaires were distributed to all MRS members in the fall of 1989 and to first-time members in 1990.

The results of these surveys indicate a highly positive member perception of MRS meetings and publications as a whole, but suggest the need for improvement in some areas. The results also confirm that most MRS members join the Society through MRS meeting attendance and that conference programming will, therefore, continue to play a major role in maintaining the growth of the Society.

The general membership survey, distributed in October and December of 1989 to all 9,200 MRS members, drew 1,981 responses—a 22% return rate. The new-member survey, distributed last August to 3,650 first-year members, drew 710 responses or a 19% return rate (i.e., 7% of the total 1990 MRS membership of 10,438).

Although the first survey attempted to gauge overall member opinion and the second one polled an important subset of the MRS membership, a number of survey questions were essentially the same, and the results pointed to similar conclusions.

How Members Join MRS

More than 58% of the respondents to the full membership survey reported that they joined MRS through meeting attendance, with more than 66% of the first-timers reporting likewise. The results clearly show that the MRS policy of granting complimentary membership to meeting registrants is the major factor in building MRS membership. Although 14% of members in the full membership survey and 18% in the new member survey joined the Society in response to direct mail promotions (with similar numbers joining at the suggestion of a colleague), the Society's most successful membership-building strategy has been and continues to be through meeting programming.

MRS Publications

Both survey groups responded quite favorably to the question, "Are you satisfied overall with the scope of MRS publications?" In each survey, the positive response was better than 86%. The *MRS Bulletin* fared even better in member perception, with 87% of the full survey respondents and 91% of the first-time

members reporting that they usually find something worth reading in each issue. In the 1989 survey, 94% of the respondents also said that the *Bulletin* has the "right technical level" and 82% said it is "useful for students."

Journal of Materials Research is held in high esteem by MRS members, but it still has room to grow. Of the respondents to the full-membership survey, 45% said they would submit their "most important research" to *JMR* for publication, as did 60% of the new-member survey respondents. In the 1989 full-membership survey, the primary reason offered for not submitting research to *JMR* was that its topical coverage was not broad enough in particular areas, such as polymers.

It is interesting to note that 45% of the full-membership survey respondents and a full 60% of the new-member respondents said that they would submit their "most important research" for publication in *JMR*. Further study is needed to determine whether the growth in *JMR*'s editorial content and activity during the time between these surveys, differences in demographics, or other factors resulted in the apparent gap between the two survey groups.

More Active Public Role for MRS?

Results of the full-membership survey suggest that members would like to see the Society assume a more visible role in the scientific community and in education. Nearly 77% of the members said they would like to see MRS become more active in multisociety organizations addressing multiple topics, such as the American Institute of Physics, the American Institute of Mechanical Engineers, and the Federation of Materials Societies. Additionally, 84% said they would like MRS to take a more active role in representing materials research issues to government agencies. A lower percentage of the full-survey respondents—62%—would like MRS to become more involved in high school and undergraduate education.

Members' View of Benefits

Among the other subjects addressed in the surveys were the current and potential benefits of MRS membership. For example, first-time members were invited to rank current benefits from "least important" to "most important." Tabulation of these data is not yet complete, but some general trends are apparent: Receiving advance meeting information (calls for papers and preliminary programs) and subscriptions to *Journal of Materials Research*

and the *MRS Bulletin* ranked highest in importance with most respondents. Publications discounts, the membership directory, and discounts on meetings and short course registrations tended to be regarded as of "average" importance. Interestingly enough, voting rights in MRS elections tended to be ranked as the least important of all the current benefits.

The subject of job placement services at MRS meetings was the only instance where the two surveys appeared to be significantly at odds. Among full-survey respondents, 60% described job placement as an important membership benefit, with 17% disagreeing and 23% not responding. This benefit, at first glance, appears to have been less important to the first-timers, who tended to rank it only above voting privileges. This discrepancy may be due, at least partly, to the difference in survey methodologies: The full-member survey asked merely whether job placement was important, while the first-timers were asked to rank it with other benefits.

A majority of respondents to the full-member survey said, by a 51% to 44% margin, that they do not wish to see MRS institute an electronic bulletin board or newswire.

A smaller group—46%—said that a wider program of MRS awards is not necessary, while 40% were in favor of more awards. However, among the same group 50% said "yes" when asked whether MRS should institute "fellowship" as a grade of membership to recognize outstanding members; 37% said "no"; and a resounding majority of the full-member survey respondents—78%—rejected the idea of offering group life insurance, health insurance, and MRS credit cards as new benefits.

Conclusion

Although these two surveys—the first MRS has attempted—differ in design and population, they indicate the strength of some current MRS activities and member services. From the point of view of the MRS Membership Committee, they have also provided a useful learning experience. The Committee will undoubtedly continue to sample the membership, refining the methodology and eliminating ambiguities in these surveys. The goal will be to continue to develop an accurate profile of the views and priorities of the MRS Membership.

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