

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 16, 1989

## A REVIEW OF SALIENT TRENDS IN PROCEEDINGS' CHARACTERISTICS: A FIFTEEN YEAR PROFILE OF ABSEL

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### ABSTRACT

This principally descriptive paper reviews the past 15 years of ABSEL Proceedings and traces the following trends: multiple authorship; reference usage; institutional representation; author turnover; and various article characteristics. One particularly important trend, according to the authors, is author turnover. This trend averages 522 for the 15 year period. Based on this finding, the authors suggest an interesting typology for categorizing ABSEL contributors: (1) the 'one-timers,' (2) the "regulars," and (3) the "inspired." The authors provide some interesting and provocative speculations as to why this and other trends are both important to study in general and for ABSEL in particular. One of the conclusions the authors make is to suggest that ABSEL compare these trends to those found in other academic disciplines.

### INTRODUCTION

It is important for an academic organization to continually assess and evaluate itself. Obviously, there are many ways in which to do this. One could, for example, try to determine the extent to which the organization has contributed to enlightenment, refinements, or advancements in social science; or the examination could be in the form of a review of practical but anecdotal suggestions made in its particular field (e.g., an innovative teaching technique). For just about any kind of self analysis, investigator's often start examining the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses. Analysts begin to look at such things as original purpose, history, rigor of research, theoretical papers, award-winning papers, changes in orientation, etc., recommendations concerning the state of the organization, future directions, etc. Invariably, such analyses often lead investigators to make a 'State of the Association' pronouncement, i.e., that the organization is in good or bad condition and offering a host of normative recommendations of what should to be done in the future.

In reviewing articles submitted to ABSEL, we have found that there have been several assessment/valuative type of articles. In an early article, that is, early in the history of ABSEL, Goosen wrote a piece analyzing ABSEL's past accomplishments and offering suggestions for the future, one of the biggest being that ABSEL ought to develop greater exposure in order to promote the development and use of business simulations (Goosen, 1978). In 1986, Butler, Markulis and Strang rated contributions to ABSEL in terms of their research design and categorized contributions

according to Bloom's educational taxonomy (Butler, Markulis, & Strang, 1985). They concluded that there was an inordinate number of single shot case studies and hence ABSEL needed to be more rigorous if it was to receive serious attention as an academic organization. They also recommended that ABSEL ought to make some attempt at developing - or borrowing - an educational taxonomy in which to classify contributions, particularly for pedagogical purposes. In 1987, Gosenpud and Sanders used an organizational life cycle model to locate ABSEL's present status and the various choices which an organization must make at this stage. Their analysis suggests that ABSEL is at a critical state in its organizational life-cycle and must make some important choices in the next couple of years as to orientation, growth, and scope as well as accompanying tactics for accomplishing these. Another article by Goosen in 1986 classifies ABSEL articles, first in three broad categories (simulations papers, experiential papers, and general pedagogical papers and then subdivides these general categories into more discrete categories (Goosen, 1986). Along with some general recommendations at the end of the article, Goosen suggests that further classifications (perhaps a book) would be an important contribution for ABSEL.

It is the opinion of the present authors that a continuing self-appraisal is important. Hence, it is the purpose of this paper to view ABSEL from yet another perspective, i.e., contributorship. The paper is a collection of historical data from the past 15 years on ABSEL's contributors. The paper tracks trends over time in terms of multiple authorship, number of references used, author turnover, number of articles contributed, disciplines of contributors, principal colleges represented through contributions of their faculty, as well as other salient trends.

The authors make some comments about why they have looked at these trends (i.e., why they are important) and what the trends indicate, but the study is principally a descriptive one. This allows the reader to make his/her own conclusions. The authors feel that it would be helpful for interested readers to review the works cited above in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of ABSEL.

### INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Institutionalization representation is an important component for any academic organization. Table I lists the top 20 institutions which have contributed to ABSEL through the efforts of their

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faculty. The entire Table was not included because of its length (however, copies are available for those who would like one), but it should be reported that there were a total of 265 discrete institutions including a few non-teaching institutions. Of these, 97 were represented only once, that is, only one article (irrespective of the number of authors for that article). Also interesting is that out of the total of 265 institutions 37 were represented by 10 or more occurrences, while all institutions were represented by 20 contributions. While it is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate the Quality of these institutions or why these particular institutions are the ones represented we feel we can say that the spectrum of institutions is quite broad, in terms of small and medium sized colleges, with few so-called "big" name business schools represented.

TABLE 1  
INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

Rank	Institution	Occurrences
1	SUNY*	39
2	Oklahoma	33
3	Texas Tech	32
4	Indiana State	28
5	Arizona State	26
6	Wisconsin*	26
7	Indiana	23
8	Arkansas	22
9	Hawaii	21
10	Rochester Institute of Technology	21
11	Southern Illinois	20
12	Tulsa	17
13	Louisiana State	16
14	Oklahoma State	16
15	San Diego	16
16	Kansas State	15
17	West Florida	15
18	Wayne State	15
19	Clarkson	14
20	Georgia State	14
21	Illinois State	14
22	North Dakota	14
23	Northern Arizona	14
24	Southern Methodist	14
25	Southern Missouri	13

\*includes university systems

## ARTICLE PROFILES

Table 2 illustrates the trends in articles and pages contributed by ABSEL authors over the past 15 years.

TABLE 2  
ARTICLE PROFILES

	Total Articles	Total Pages	Pages Per Article
1974	52	304	5.8
1975	40	328	8.2
1976	42	476	11.3
1977	48	361	7.5
1978	48	306	6.4
1979	70	265	3.8
1980	69	218	3.2
1981	84	267	3.2
1982	78	294	3.8
1983	43	166	3.9
1984	66	267	4.0
1985	49	197	4.0
1986	67	274	4.1
1987	64	255	4.0
1988	75	279	3.7
Total	895	4257	4.8

Yearly Average      60                      284

As can be seen, the number of articles accepted per year has varied considerably, from a low of 40 in 1975, to a high of 84 in 1981. Obviously, the average of 46 articles in the first three years is understandable for a fledgling organization. What is more difficult to explain are the large fluctuations in the remaining 10 years. For example, 1983 and 1985 saw 43 and 49 articles, while the average for the 1979 to 1988 period was 67 articles. It is difficult to believe that interest in broad interest in simulations/experiential exercises changed radically during these years. On the other hand, it may not be important to understand why. Some have hypothesized that variables like where the conference is located may be the influencing factor.

Total pages and pages per article provide an interesting dimension by which to view the data on articles. However, one must be careful regarding data on total pages and pages per year. It must be remembered that in 1977 ABSEL changed its publication format and this greatly decreased the total number of pages, and hence total pages before 1977 is not a good way to gauge ABSEL's total quantity output. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that 1976 had the highest number of pages, but had one of the lowest number of articles per year rates. This was probably due to the fact that most of these articles came in the third year of ABSEL and coincides with the dawn of interest in writing and using games. Hence, many of the articles were long, descriptive explanations of simulations. On the other hand, 1982 showed the highest number of pages (i.e., 294 pages with 78 articles) with 1988 a close second with 279 pages and 75 articles. Page size per article seems to have risen slightly over the past three years, but has generally remained steady at about 4 pages per article - which seems to be the "informal" but mandated size of an ABSEL article.

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS - A PROFILE

Certainly, one of the more interesting aspects of any organization are its contributors. Several

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questions are important here: What is the periodicity or regularly of contributorship by authors over time? What is the "turnover" rate, that is, writers who write once or twice and then never again? What is the percent of new contributors each year? And, finally, what is the number of contributors per article and has that changed over time?

Tables 3 and 4 contain data which address many of the above questions. Before discussing some of the findings, however, some clarifications might be in order. Note the TOTAL AUTHORS column in Table 3. This refers to the total number of contributors to ABSEL each year. The reason why the number is frequently higher than the number of articles contributed is due to the fact that many Conference submissions were co-authored. This fact is expressed in the AUTHORS/PER ARTICLE column. Furthermore, turnover is expressed in the column entitled NEW CONTRIBUTORS. For example, in 1980, there were 69 articles submitted, by a total of 97 authors (includes multiple authors), and out of those 97 contributors, 48 had never submitted or had an article published previously.

TABLE 3

TOTAL CONTRIBUTORS AND NEW CONTRIBUTORS

	Total Contributors	New Contributors	% New Contributors
1974	61	61	100
1975	63	47	75
1976	40	20	50
1977	64	36	56
1978	73	40	55
1979	101	53	52
1980	97	48	49
1981	109	56	51
1982	117	68	57
1983	68	31	46
1984	101	55	54
1985	76	29	38
1986	103	54	52
1987	94	45	48
1988	111	44	40
Total	1278	687	52
Yearly Average	85		

TABLE 4  
CONTRIBUTORS PER ARTICLE

	Number of Contributors Per Article							Authors Per Article
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1974	38	13	1					1.2
1975	22	14	4					1.6
1976	27	15						1.0
1977	28	17	1	2				1.3
1978	26	13	8	1				1.5
1979	40	17	11	2				1.4
1980	46	13	7	2	1			1.4
1981	49	30	5					1.3
1982	40	29	9					1.5
1983	17	19	9			1		1.6
1984	25	31	7	2	1			1.5
1985	24	16	8				1	1.6
1986	35	21	9	2				1.5
1987	32	22	8	2				1.5
1988	29	34	12					1.5
Total	478	304	96	13	2	1	1	

Looking horizontally across at the percent of NEW CONTRIBUTORS column in Table 3, one readily sees that ABSEL has had a rather high turnover" rate (52% being the overall average and 46% being the average for the last five years). It is NOT clear why this is the case.

Table 4 contains information on the number of contributors per article over 15 years and also includes an AUTHORS PER ARTICLE AVERAGE column.

It is interesting to note that the average number of authors per article has shown a slow but steady growth over the first 8 years and has remained relatively stable for the last 7 years at 1.5. What is even more fascinating is that in 1983, 1984 and 1988, co-authored articles out numbered a single authored contributions, and in fact, if one looks at Table 6, it shows a growing trend in co-authored articles, although, triples do not seem to illustrate any trend.

One observation not directly found in any of the above Tables, but observed by us as we compiled the data was that contributors seemed to fall into one of three broad classifications:

1. The "one-timers" - those that contributed once and were never heard from again, (Out of a total of 687 unique contributors over ABSELS fifteen years, 375 were one-time- only contributors while 106 contributed just twice, 53 thrice and 30 four times or more);
2. The "regulars" - those that published just one article yearly and did so on a regular basis (15 contributors fit this category covering at least 5 years or more);
3. The "inspired"--those that published two+ articles per year (88 contributors here).

It should be noted that the above figures include multiple authored articles (i.e., if a contributor wrote co-authored articles in one year, that contributor would be categorized as an "inspired").

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## CITATIONS PROFILE

One standard by which to measure an article's scholarly rigor is to count the number of references. The authors looked at this in two ways - the number of references over the years (total) and the number of references per article over the years. Table 5 Illustrates these results.

TABLE 5  
CITATION INDEX

	Total Articles	Total References	References Per Article
1974	52	82	1.6
1975	40	219	5.5
1976	42	222	5.3
1977	48	271	5.6
1978	48	241	5.0
1979	70	415	5.9
1980	69	338	4.9
1981	84	491	5.8
1982	78	511	6.6
1983	43	352	8.2
1984	66	586	8.9
1985	49	448	9.1
1986	67	631	9.4
1987	64	676	10.6
1988	75	669	8.9
Total	895	6152	-
Yearly Average	60	410	6.9

As seen in Table 5, the total number has increased steadily over the years, except for 1981, 1983, and 1985, and for these years, if one controls for number of articles, then references also increased. Nineteen eighty-seven saw the highest total number of references with a total of 670. Nineteen eighty-seven also had the highest number of references per article with an average of 10.5. Since 1983, the average number of references rose to about 8.3 per article and rose slightly for the next few years to around 9 and has remained around that level ever since. An issue which possibly deserves attention is reference source. For example, did contributors principally cite past ABSEL works, or other sources? And why? In any event, citation growth rate seems to indicate an increasing emphasis on scholarship and research.

## CONCLUSION

One of the most startling trends discovered in the analysis of the historical data on ABSEL's contributors is the high turnover rate of authors. The mean percentage of new authors contributing to ABSEL each year is 52%. Two possible hypotheses to explain this phenomenon:

1. It is possible that many authors' research interests have been channeled into areas outside of gaming and experiential learning.
2. Authors have used ABSEL as a stepping stone in developing research interests and now publish in alternative publications.

One must ask the question, Does ABSEL provide researchers/authors with sufficient benefits to encourage further publication? Goosen states in his "1977" article:

The ability of ABSEL to influence the future of business simulation usage will depend, in part on the size of its membership, (Goosen, 1977).

At the time of this statement ABSEL had 250 individuals join, but only 140 remained active. Currently ABSEL has grown to approximately 350- 00 members, of which approximately 235 are active.

Some encouraging trends indicate that the number of references per article is increasing, together with a greater number of authors engaging in co- authorship. These trends are indicative of a possible increase in "scholarly rigor" as mentioned earlier. The increase in collaborative efforts could provide the avenue needed by ABSEL to continue to grow not only in sheer numbers, but also in retaining the current authorship base.

This research adds to the both of self-analysis research conducted on ABSEL. Future research in evaluating ABSEL would be to determine if the trends found in ABSEL's contributorship parallel that of other similar academic organizations. Certainly it would prove interesting if a researcher would compile the above research along with the other self-analysis articles conducted on ABSEL and develop a history/profile for an academic research organization. This history/profile would be interesting and instructive for other research organizations and for the social scientific community in general.

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