

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

ABSEL: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON THE STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION

James W. Gentry Oklahoma State University
Joseph Wolfe, University of Tulsa

ABSTRACT

A re-examination of ABSEL members' opinions and attitudes about various topics of concern to the Association was undertaken with a more complete data base. ABSEL scored very high regarding the supportive and open atmosphere of its Conferences and the currency of its teaching techniques while it scored lower in the areas of research quality. Other conclusions were drawn regarding programs for spouses, the use of practitioners, and sites and meeting dates for future conferences, as well as the sources of opinion divergencies existing within the Association.

INTRODUCTION

As befits any professional group, ABSEL has demonstrated long-term interest in improvement, self-evaluation and criticism. These interests have most recently been evidenced in Goosen's [1] 1977 paper and program sessions in 1979 and 1980 on the future of ABSEL. This paper, which is the result of a charge given to the two newly-elected Directors-at-Large, reports the findings a larger data-based survey of ABSEL's 1980 Conference attendees to determine certain views held by its membership.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey questionnaire designed by Duane Hoover with the help of ABSEL's National Advisory Board and other officers and members of the Association. Hoover had attempted census of the members attending the 1980 Conference but only 44 of the 97 attendees completed the questionnaire. Given a desire to poll the entire membership, list of non-attending members was compiled by the Association's Executive Director, David Fritzsche, and another list of non-responding conference attendees was created by comparing the attendance list with the addresses given on the completed questionnaires already collected. A summary of the response rates for the three different groups, attendees, non-responding attendees, and non-attendees is presented in Table 1. An overall response rate of approximately 67.5% was obtained from ABSEL's 163 member record for 1978-1980.

TABLE 1
RESPONSE RATES FOR THE THREE ABSEL GROUPS SURVEYED

Group	Approximate Number in Group	Number of Responses	Response Rate
Conference Attendees	97	44	45.4%
Non-responding Attendees	53	33	62.3%
Non-attendees	66	33	50.0%
Total Membership	163	110	67.5%

A copy of the questionnaire is not included here but the

nature and phraseology of the questions can be deduced from the items in Table 2 - 6. The instrument covered ABSEL's image, meeting dates and sites, future actions, and demographic characteristics. Our paper will follow that format.

IMAGE FINDINGS

The questionnaire's first section dealt with the Association's image and the atmosphere of its annual Conference. The results are shown in Table 2. ABSEL rates very high with more than 80% responding "very good" or "good" on the following dimensions: enthusiasm, supportive atmosphere, and currency of teaching techniques.

TABLE 2
ABSEL's IMAGE

Criterion	Favorability Score ^a	Non-Response Rate
Quality of Research	52.4	5.5%
Enthusiasm	82.8	4.5
Supportive Atmosphere	82.0	6.4
Time of Year	58.0	4.5
Presentation Quality	61.4	5.5
Open Discussions	73.2	8.2
Currency of Teaching Techniques	74.1	5.5
Paper Review Process	62.6	10.0
Demonstrations	50.7	16.4
Image	46.6	14.5
Program for Spouses	24.1	45.5
Proceedings	71.7	8.2
Inclusion of Practitioners	38.9	15.5
Interdisciplinary Nature	67.6	9.1
Continuity of Research Efforts	50.7	10.9
JELS	60.7	18.2
The "ABSEL style"	70.9	14.5
Membership Promotion to Date	43.3	10.0

^aVery Good = 100; Very Bad = 0

More than 70% of the respondents rated ABSEL "very good" or "good" on the dimensions of open discussions, proceedings, interdisciplinary nature, and the "ABSEL style." On the other hand, those dimensions receiving less than 50% ratings of "very good" or "good" were programs for spouses, membership promotion, image, in-

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

elusion of practitioners, quality of research, continuity of research efforts, and demonstrations. These poorly-rated dimensions were often associated with relatively high non-response rates which could reflect either the lack of an opinion, an unwillingness to cast a negative response, or a lack of understanding of the question.

Summarizing this section's results, it appears that AESEL is doing sane things very well and has problems in other areas. The strong teaching orientation and the informal and supportive Conference atmosphere are strong virtues which need to be maintained, while simultaneously, the academic aspects, such as research quality and its continuity, and the quality of research presentations, need to be improved. It would seem that membership promotion, programs for spouses, and demonstrations could be enhanced without affecting ABSEL'S pedagogical orientation or its supportive atmosphere. On the other hand, improving research quality, and consequently ABSEL's image, may conflict with the Association's strengths by interjecting a harsh and judgmental element into its meetings and paper review process. Basically supportive steps should be taken to improve research quality and measures such as 'best paper awards and JELS. As a subscription to this journal is included in the Association's membership dues a serious problem exists either with the journal's subscription list or the membership's desire to stay current with the literature. Approximately 18% of the respondents failed to rate the Journal and another 9% rated it neutrally.

TIMING OF ABSEL MEETINGS

Approximately 51% of the respondents rated the time of year of ABSEL meetings as "very good" or "good," while only 19% rated it 'bad' or "very bad." Results of other questions dealing with the timing of ABSEL meetings are shown in Table 3. Only 8% of the respondents agreed that spring meetings might prevent their attending future AESEL meetings, while 77% disagreed. These results offer strong support for holding AESEL meetings in the spring semester.

Other problems are evident, however, as 45% of the respondents agreed that travel money tends to run out by AESEL time. Moving to a fall meeting might not solve these problems though, as 47% disagreed (compared to 35% that agreed) that travel money would be easier to acquire in the fall. One problem associated with a spring Conference is that papers must be submitted early in the fall semester, which does not provide a semester between the Conference and the due date for the conduct of classroom research. This problem was referred to as a "summer slump" in the questionnaire. The number of respondents who agreed that they experienced a summer slump (32%) was very close to the number that disagreed (33%).

The questionnaire also examined the best months for the annual meeting. If the meeting was held in the spring the months of February, March and April appear to be equally popular. October and November were the most popular choices for a fall Conference.

MEETING SITE PREFERENCES

The respondents were asked which part of the country they preferred for a meeting site, which cities they preferred, and whether they preferred a college town or a convention city. The results are shown in Table 4. More than 40% of the respondents indicated that they preferred conference sites in the Southeast, Rockies, West Coast, or Southwest areas.

After eliminating cities recently used by AESEL for its meetings, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Atlanta, Boston, San Diego, Miami and Phoenix were the cities most frequently chosen. A larger percentage (58%) rated convention cities favorably, but a substantial percentage (46%) also rated college towns "very good" and "good."

TABLE 3
TIMING OF ABSEL MEETINGS

Question	Agreement Score ^a	Percent Non-Response
At my school, the travel money tends to run out by ABSEL time.	48.6%	4.5%
I would have a better chance of getting travel money if the meeting was in the Fall.	40.9	3.6
If ABSEL continues to meet in the spring, I will be unable to attend.	18.2	2.7
I experience a "summer slump" with ABSEL every year by getting the call for papers at/or before the time that I am into academic productivity and work.	42.5	12.7
If ABSEL decides to retain its "spring" meeting policy, in which month should the meeting be scheduled? ^b		
January	1.4%	
February	26.4	
March	27.9	
April	29.4	
May	2.9	
June	1.5	
If ABSEL decides to move to a "fall" meeting date, in which month should the meeting be held? ^b		
August	1.5%	
September	4.4	
October	36.8	
November	36.8	
December	5.9	

^aAgree = 100; Disagree = 0

^bQuestion not asked of Conference Attendees

FUTURE ACTIONS BY ABSEL

This section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to evaluate several future actions which could be taken by ABSEL. These results are shown in Table 5. The question of whether ABSEL should affiliate with a larger organization was answered with a resounding "No." 68% agreed that AESEL should stay independent and 59% disagreed that AESEL should affiliate. If ABSEL did decide to affiliate, the consensus was to affiliate with AIDS or the Academy of Management. A strong interest was also expressed in ABSEL sponsoring a national collegiate gaming competition. The proposed 'mini-workshop similar to the OB Teaching Conference' was also supported, although

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

TABLE 4
MEETING SITE PREFERENCES^a

General Area			
Southeast		Northeast	
Rockies	43.6		29.1
West Coast	41.8	Big 10 Area	28.2
Southwest	40.0	Plains	17.3
City Choices ^b			
San Francisco	44.5	Kansas City	21.8
Denver	43.6	Chicago	
New Orleans	42.7	Memphis	20.9
Las Vegas	41.8	Austin	
Atlanta	38.2	New York City	20.0
Boston		Cincinnati	
San Diego	30.9	Portland	19.1
Miami		Tulsa	17.3
Phoenix	30.0	Atlantic City	15.5
Los Angeles		Louisville	14.5
Washington D.C.	29.1	Philadelphia	
Houston		Minneapolis	12.7
Montreal		Little Rock	10.9
San Antonio	27.3	Pittsburgh	10.0
Orlando	27.2	Milwaukee	9.1
St. Louis	26.4	Indianapolis	
Reno		Wichita	6.4
Tampa	24.5	Baltimore	
Seattle	23.6	Cleveland	5.5
		Detroit	.9
City Type	Favorability Score ^b	Percent Non-Response	
College Town	53.7	8.2%	
Convention City	62.7	9.1	

^a Expressed as a percent of people selecting area.

^b Very Good = 100; Very Bad = 0

the majority of respondents apparently were unfamiliar with the concept.

PROFILE OF ABSEL MEMBERS

Table 6 shows a demographic profile of ABSEL's members. The modal member is between 30 and 39 years of age, is an Associate Professor, and has attended two other conferences in the past year. Approximately 70% of the respondents indicated a strong interest in simulation gaming and in experiential exercises. Approximately 56% of the respondents also expressed strong interest

in the use of cases.

Ten percent of the respondents had attended all six of ABSEL's previous conferences while another 13% had attended five of the six. About one-fourth of the respondents indicated that they had attended the first conference in Oklahoma City, while 60% had attended the 1979 ABSEL meeting in New Orleans.

TABLE 5
FUTURE ACTIONS BY ABSEL

Question	Agreement Score ^a	Percent Non-Response
ABSEL should have a "mini-workshop" similar to the OB Teaching Conference	46.6%	30.9%
ABSEL should stay independent and hold its own individual meetings.	68.6	10.9
ABSEL should affiliate with a larger national or regional meeting.	25.8	12.7
I would like to hear more about and am willing to discuss ABSEL sponsoring a national collegiate gaming competition.		
Yes	60.9%	
No	20.4	
With whom should ABSEL affiliate?		
National Academy of Management		32.7%
National AIDS		34.5
Southern Meetings		24.5
Midwest Meetings		17.3
Other		10.0

^a Agree = 100; Disagree = 0

CROSS-TABULATION ANALYSIS

A chi-square analysis was also undertaken on differences in opinion which could be associated with factors such as the respondent's age, academic rank, and meeting attendance. The results reported are all significant $p=.05$. Given the high number of relationships investigated, the number of significantly different relationships is quite small indicating that ABSEL's membership is quite homogeneous in its opinions.

Dallas attendance, initial non-response and non-attendance. The non-attending members rated the quality of ABSEL presentations and the proceedings lower. As one would expect, the non-attendees were also most likely to indicate that they would not be able to attend a spring conference. Those completing the questionnaire at the conference were the most likely to favor ABSEL affiliating with another organization, while the initial nonrespondents were the most strongly against affiliation. Interest in ABSEL sponsoring a national gaming competition was greatest among those who filled the questionnaire out at the conference. Additionally non-attendees were the most likely to respond to the image questions.

Age. Older respondents expressed a more favorable image of ABSEL. Respondents over the age of 60 were

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

more likely to have attended the first ABSEL meeting, to be interested in simulation gaming, to favor holding the conference in a college town, and to favor Minneapolis or Tulsa as a meeting site. Respondents under the age of 40 were more likely to like experiential exercises and prefer Denver as a meeting site.

TABLE 6
PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Age:			
-30	4.5%	50-59	14.5
30-39	35.5	60+	2.7
40-49	27.3		
Academic rank:			
Graduate student	0.0%	Associate	
Instructor	2.7	Professor	36.4
Assistant Professor	23.6	Full Professor	25.5
		Other	2.7
Number of other Conferences attended in the past year:			
0	7.3%	4	16.4
1	11.8	5	3.6
2	28.2	6	1.8
3	22.7		
Past ABSEL Meetings attended:			
Oklahoma City	24.5%	Wichita	29.1
Bloomington	30.0	Denver	48.2
Knoxville	28.2	New Orleans	60.0
Number of past ABSEL meetings attended:			
0	27.3%	4	2.7
1	18.2	5	12.7
2	20.0	6	10.0
3	9.1		
Interested in:		Interest Score	Percent Non-Response
Simulation Gaming		70.7	8.2%
Experiential Exercises		73.6	8.2
Cases		61.0	8.2

^aHigh = 100: Low = 0

Rank. Full professors were most likely to rate ABSEL less favorably in terms of the quality of research and the currency of the teaching technology. These professors were also the most strongly opposed to ABSEL's affiliation with any other organization; they were likely to have attended the first four ABSEL meetings, were most interested in holding the conference in a college town, and were least interested in holding the conference in Denver or Phoenix. Associate professors were most opposed to moving ABSEL meetings to the fall while Assistant Professors expressed the most interest in experiential exercises.

Number of Other Conferences Attended. Respondents who had attended two or three other Conferences last year were more likely to rate the proceedings more favorably. Respondents attending two or more Conferences were more likely to express preferences for Phoenix, Denver, the Rockies area, and a college town as a meeting site, and those attending fewer Conferences were more likely to choose Boston as a meeting site.

Number of Past ABSEL Meetings Attended. Respondents who had attended more ABSEL meetings were more likely to rate ABSEL's enthusiasm, supportive atmosphere, quality of presentations, "style," and interdisciplinary nature more favorably. Those who had attended more than three previous meetings were much more interested in ABSEL sponsoring a national gaming competition and in simulation gaming in Tulsa. Those who had attended three or fewer meetings were more likely to be interested in experiential exercises and cases. Those who have attended more meetings were more interested in the Southwest, Louisville, and Tulsa as meeting sites and less interested in Washington D.C. as a meeting site.

CONCLUSIONS

To a large extent, the results of this survey are very consistent with the same conclusions reached in the panel discussions held at the 1979 and 1980 Conferences. ABSEL has an image problem, but its members find that the meetings provide an informal and supportive atmosphere. The research revealed other conclusions of interest. There is little sentiment favoring affiliation with a larger organization, and although travel money is a problem, spring meetings are still favored. ABSEL apparently started with a very strong emphasis on computer-based gaming but newer members are more interested in experiential exercises. More attention should be directed towards improving membership promotion, the inclusion of practitioners, demonstrations and programs for spouses. Although the heightening of ABSEL's research quality presents a dilemma to the organization, current steps appear to be generally supportive of that end.

REFERENCES

- [1] Goosen, K.R. 'An Analysis of ABSEL: Its Past Achievements and Future Prospects.' in Carl C. Neilson (ed.) New Horizons in Simulation Games and Experiential Learning, (Wichita, Kansas: Wichita State University, 1977), pp. 207-214.