

# **ADSA Membership Survey, September 2009 - Short Summary of Findings**

## **Survey**

This report presents the data gathered during a survey of the ADSA membership in September 2009.

The survey was designed to gather data on the factors that motivate members to attend or not attend ADSA conferences, the aspects of ADSA conferences most valued by members, and the value-for-money of ADSA conferences.

The response rate was 20.7%, and 65 of 314 members responded. The respondents were a reasonably representative mix of ADSA's membership, including Senior Academics (33.3%), Junior Academics (30.0%), Higher Degree Research Students (20%), Sessional Academics (6.7%), Independent Scholars (5.0%) and Practitioners (5.0%) and others (12.3%). The respondents also represented a reasonably diverse geographical mix, from New South Wales (32.3%), Victoria (20.0%), Queensland (12.3%), New Zealand (10.7%), Western Australia (9.2%), ACT (4.6%), South Australia (3.0%), Tasmania (3.0%), USA (3.0%), Canada (1.5%), and Scotland (1.5%).

## **Survey Findings**

The Survey data suggests that the membership is, by and large, happy with ADSA conferences, and find them a valuable opportunity to share research, to connect, re-connect and network with colleagues, pursue opportunities, and participate in the association's culture via events like the AGM.

This said, the Survey data suggests that the motivating factors for attending ADSA conferences do differ for different groups within the membership.

For Senior Academics, the value of ADSA conferences tends to cohere around chances to connect, reconnect and network with colleagues, learn about developments in the field, and present research. The theme, papers, panels and keynotes, and the chance to publish in conference proceedings are slightly less important, and the chance to present creative work is unimportant. The date of the conference is important, and some Senior Academics raise issues about ability to attend in the context of commitments to other conferences internationally. For Senior Academics, there seems to be about a 60-70% chance that their institution will cover basic costs such as registration, travel and accommodation, so this is not the most important factor in their decision to attend.

For Junior Academics, too, the value of ADSA conferences coheres around chances to connect, reconnect and network with colleagues, learn about developments in the field, and present research. The chance to attend the AGM, attend panels on topics relevant to researchers, and identify job and publication opportunities is slightly more important for Junior Academics than for Senior Academics, but, again, the chance to present creative work is unimportant. The date of the conference is very important, and some Junior Academics raise issues about ability to attend in the context of workload. For Junior Academics, there seems to be about a 30-50% chance that their institution will cover basic costs such as registration, travel and accommodation, so this is a slightly bigger factor in the decision to attend than it is for Senior Academics.

For Higher Degree Research Students, the cost of registration, travel and accommodation are most critical in the decision to attend ADSA conferences, and the data shows the chance of securing institutional support is slim. The chance to network, and present research, is important to Higher Degree Research Students, but they place more value on the chance to publish (particularly in conference proceedings), and the chance to present creative work, than Senior and Junior Academics.

Indeed, the Higher Degree Research Students and the Sessional Academics were the only groups who suggested the chance to present creative work was a key motivating factor for attendance. The date of the conference is a slightly less important issue for Higher Degree Research Students, and the major concern remains the cost.

Sessional Academics, Independent Scholars and Practitioners valued the theme, papers, keynotes and panels on topics of interest slightly more than most groups. The cost of registration, travel and accommodation was the biggest factor in the decision to attend ADSA conferences for Sessional Academics and Independent Scholar, though not necessarily for Practitioners. The Sessional Academics advocated in favour of institutional support to cover their costs. Sessional Academics shared the Higher Degree Research students' interest in presenting creative practice. Independent Scholars shared the Higher Degree Research students' interest in publishing in conference proceedings. However, for Independent Scholars and Practitioners, whilst there was some interest in pursuing publication, the opportunity to present creative work as part of the conference program was not considered an important motivating factor.

## **Survey Recommendations**

The responses from members have enabled the ADSA Executive to identify a range of recommendations which ADSA may be able to pursue to further enhance the experience of an access to the ADSA conferences for different groups within the membership. The recommendations arising from the survey data can be grouped into six categories – Cost; Location, Date and Timing; Publication Opportunities; Performance Opportunities; Opportunities to learn about developments in the field; and opportunities to connect, re-connect and network.

### **Cost**

The Survey data showed that although the majority of members agree that attending ADSA is comparable to or cheaper than attending other conferences, the cost of attending is a motivating factor, because about 80% of members self-fund their attendance. The cost of attending is a critical motivating factor for Students, Sessional academics, and, to a lesser degree, Junior Academics, although this last group tend to cite cost in the context of broader issues regarding their time and teaching workload.

The key recommendations were –

- ADSA should investigate the possibility of broadening its cost categories to create concessions for retired academics, and for New Zealand academics traveling to Australia, to create a more equitable registration cost for these membership groups.
- ADSA should investigate the possibility of billeting, and perhaps a limited number of bursaries targeted to groups, such as Sessional Academics, who are unable to secure institutional support.
- ADSA should investigate the possibility of advocacy in the area of institutional support for Sessional Academics.

With regards this last recommendation, however, it should be noted that the Survey data showed that in the current climate – in which 60%-70% of Senior Academics, 30-50% of Junior Academics, and only a few students receive any institutional support towards basic costs such as registration, airfare and accommodation – advocacy in this area may be an investment with little likelihood of success.

## **Location, Date and Timing**

The Survey data showed that the location, date and timing of the ADSA conference is a motivating factor, particularly for those currently employed as Senior Academics or Junior Academics.

The key recommendations were –

- ADSA should avoid clashing with other conferences in the field, such as PSi and IFTR.
- ADSA should investigate the possibility of eConferencing for those who are unable to attend in person due to distance, cost, or timing in relation to other activities in their workload
- ADSA should circulate a schedule of accepted papers, panels and presentations well prior to conferences, to assist members in making a decision about the value of attending.
- ADSA conference convenors should make every effort to ensure that papers are placed in appropriate sessions, that there are not too many parallel sessions, and that sessions run to time, to ensure that members get the best value for their investment of time and money in attending.
- ADSA conference convenors should, wherever possible, try to ensure that the critical mass of conference activities are conveniently co-located to ensure that attending is as simple as possible, and ensure that members have a feeling of connectedness throughout the conference.

## **Publications Opportunities**

The Survey data showed that pursuit of publications opportunities is a motivating factor for many members in attending ADSA conferences, but that the nature of the publications opportunities members were interested in pursuing differed between different groups within the membership. Students and Sessional Academics were particularly keen to have the opportunity to submit work to conference proceedings – an opportunity which has been offered at many recent conferences, with papers from the ‘Boom or Bust’ conference to be published in an issue of *Double Dialogues*, papers from the ‘Turangawaewae’ conference recently published in an issue of *ADS*, and papers from the ‘Being There: Before, During and After’ conference published via the University of Sydney’s eRepository. For Junior and Senior Academics, conference proceedings were less of a motivating factor, but there was an interest in pursuing opportunities to publish individual research, or pursue connections with working groups that might lead to joint project, publications or grants.

The key recommendations were –

- ADSA should continue to make every effort to ensure a published proceedings from each conference, with advice from the recent conference convenors who have done this.
- ADSA may wish to investigate models which make it easier for a greater proportion of Students and Sessional Academics to have work accepted into conference proceedings – whilst models where students can submit papers for a peer reviewed stream of the ADSA conference may hold potential for the students, this would likely require the support of Senior and Junior Academics who may not themselves be submitting their papers, to act as peer reviewers.

- ADSA should investigate possible models for versions of the sort of ‘publications market’ that operates at international conferences to be incorporated into the ADSA conference program.
- ADSA should investigate possible models by which it might facilitate working groups.

## **Performance Opportunities**

The Survey data showed that, whilst most ADSA members do not see the opportunity to present creative work as a motivating factor in their decision to attend the conference, it is a critical motivating factor for Students and Sessional Academics. This may reflect the nature of the work being undertaken in PhD programs at present, and, indeed, the recent ‘Boom or Bust’ conference has already responded to this by investigating possibilities for performative presentations, and this conference, like many conferences in recent years, has incorporated performances into the conference program.

The key recommendation was –

- ADSA should investigate ways to align the creative presentations component of conferences with the (admittedly quite varied) models of performance-as-research Students are currently working in as part of their PhD programs, as this seems to be the group that benefits most from this arm of the conference programming.

## **Opportunities to learn about developments in the field**

The Survey data showed that the opportunity to learn about developments in the field is a motivating factor in the decision to attend ADSA conferences for Senior, Junior and Sessional Academics, Independent Scholars, Practitioners, and, to a lesser degree, Students. Whilst there was interest in panels on topics of relevance to researchers, the data showed that these opportunities to learn should perhaps compass a broader range of industrial issues in the field, in formats such as roundtables, working groups or workshops, as well as in panels.

The key recommendation was –

- ADSA should investigate whether there are a broader range of issues in relation to teaching, research, practice and external engagement the members would like featured at conferences, and where there is a critical mass of interest in a specific issue, look at ways in which developments and opportunities in that area might become part of the discussions at the annual conference.

## **Opportunities to connect, re-connect and network**

The Survey data showed that opportunities to connect, re-connect and network are an important motivator in the decision to attend ADSA conference, particularly for Senior and Junior Academics. Although these groups – and, indeed, the membership as a whole – did not see the social program at ADSA as a particularly important motivator, there were suggestions about incorporating a broader range of social opportunities, such as short drinks sessions at the end of the day, into the formal conference program.

Dr Bree Hadley  
Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology  
Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove QLD 4059

[bree.hadley@qut.edu.au](mailto:bree.hadley@qut.edu.au)

26<sup>th</sup> February 2010