

ASR Membership Survey: Preliminary Findings

By

Jim Cavendish
Executive Officer

&

Gabriel Acevedo
2014 Chair of ASR's Membership Committee

As Presented to the ASR Council on August 13, 2014

Using SSSR's membership survey as a model, the Membership Committee worked together during the early part of 2014 to compose a membership survey questionnaire that would measure the attitudes of ASR members about a variety of aspects of our Association, including our administrative operations, our Annual Meetings, our publications, and our outreach to graduate students and prospective members. After the questionnaire was completed, the Executive Officer and his assistant, Sean Currie, converted the questionnaire into an online survey using Qualtrics. That online survey was initially activated on April 16, 2014. At that point, 785 email invitations were sent to members and former members who are on ASR's contact lists. Reminder emails were sent once a week during the first month of the survey's activation, and every other week thereafter. In all, at least 6 email reminders were sent.

Of the initial 785 separate email invitations sent, 23 were bounced emails. 561 (or 71%) of the 785 email invitations sent were opened, and of the 561 people who opened the email invitations, 439 (or 78%) started the survey. Of the 439 respondents who started the survey, 373 (or 84%) completed the survey. After cleaning up the data and adjusting for data entry errors, the final data include 430 respondents.

Table 1 shows descriptive data for the sample. The majority of respondents are male, with a median age of 47 for the total sample. In terms of academic rank, most respondents are Full Professors and Graduate students followed closely by Associate Professors. We also see from the data that while a majority of respondents are currently living in the US, almost 15% of responses came from overseas members. Below we consider some of the broader trends followed by results of bivariate statistical analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics ASR membership Survey (n=430)

<i>Gender</i> (n=368)		%
Male		59%
Female		41%
Transexual/Inter-sexed		0.3%
<i>Age</i> (n=314)		
Mean = 48; Median = 47; Std Dev = 14.10; Min/Max=17/88		
<i>Professional/Academic Status</i> (n=367)		
Full Professor		25%
Graduate student		18%
Associate Professor		16%
Assistant Professor		12%
Non-tenure track faculty (e.g., researcher, lecturer, or instructor)		10%
Other (please write in):		10%
Retired of Emeritus faculty		7%
Post-doctoral fellow		2%
Undergraduate student		0.3%
<i>Academic Discipline</i> (n=369)		
Sociology		70%
Religious Studies		14%
Theology		4%
Psychology		1%
Political Science		1%
History		1%
Economics		0.3%
Communications		1%
Other (please write in):		8%
<i>Country of Origin</i> (n=370)		
United States of America		74%
United Kingdom		4%
Canada		4%
Italy		2%
Australia		1%
Germany		2%
Israel		0.5%
France		0.8%
Japan		0.3%
Mexico		0.3%
Other		11%
<i>Institutional Type</i> (n=360)		
4-year institution, PhD granting		61%
4-year institution, MA granting		14%
4-year institution, undergraduate only		10%
2-year institution or community college		1%
Other		14%

Looking at Figure 2 below, most respondents have been members of the Association for either moderate spans of time (5-9 years) or have been regular members for extended periods (over 20 years). This is in keeping with the distribution for membership lapses shown as Figure 3. A large majority of respondents have not allowed their memberships to lapse and less than 10% have allowed their memberships to lapse more than once. This presents both data reflecting the stability of membership over time but also the opportunity to reach out to new members. Efforts can be made towards increasing membership representation among graduate students and new faculty as well as disciplines outside sociology. One goal of the organization might be increasing the representation in the “less than 5 year” range.

Figure 2: Membership Duration in ASR

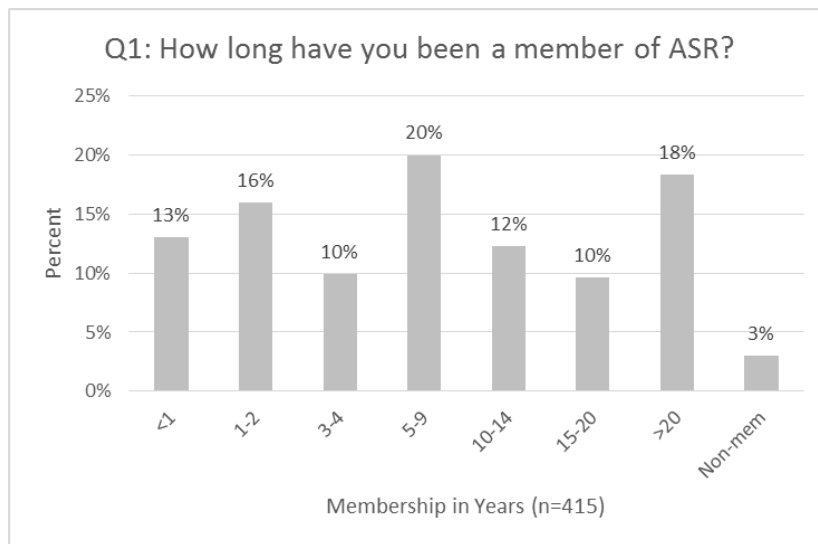
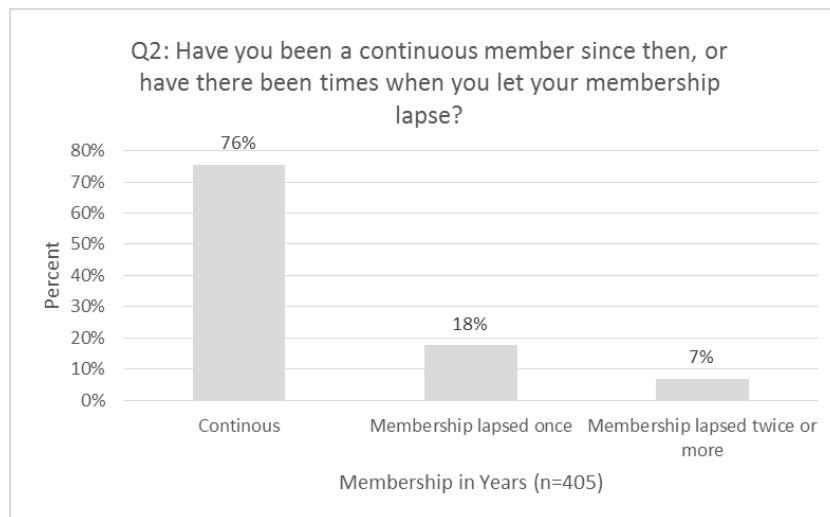


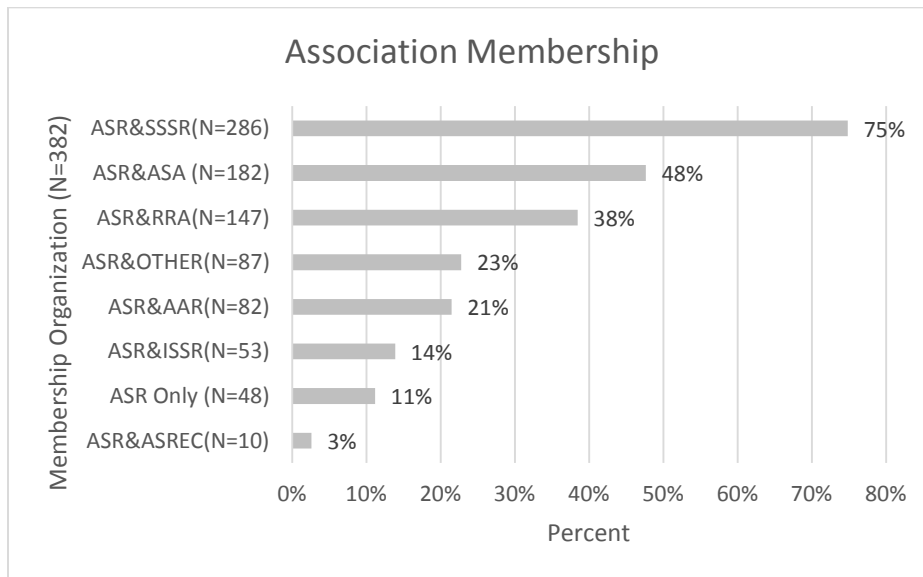
Figure 3: Membership Lapses While an ASR Member



Last year’s membership Committee Report noted succinctly that, “Some individuals in recent years have raised questions about whether ASR serves a distinct purpose and constituency that differentiates it from comparable scholarly associations such as SSSR, RRA, the ASA Religion Section, and AAR.” We decided to continue this line of investigation and present results based on the survey data. These results are shown as Figure 4.

As illustrated in this figure, of the 382 ASR respondents who are members of multiple associations (48 are members of ASR only), 75% are also members of SSSR, 48% are also members of ASA’s Religion Section, 38% are also members of RRA, and 21% are also members of AAR. Interestingly only 11% of all respondents (N=430) report being only members of ASR. This would indicate that the large majority of ASR members find specific advantages from ASR membership that compliments what other organizations offer. We also find that multiple membership influences the likelihood of renewing membership in a positive direction. We ran a simple bivariate correlation between the number of memberships in comparable organizations and an increased level of renewing their 2015 membership. The moderate but highly significant correlation between these two variables ($r = .172$ $p < .001$, $n = 373$) indicates that multiple memberships may in fact influence continued renewal. And while the effects of multiple membership fail to reach statistical significance in multivariate models, we can be quite certain that multiple memberships do not negatively impact odds of renewal.

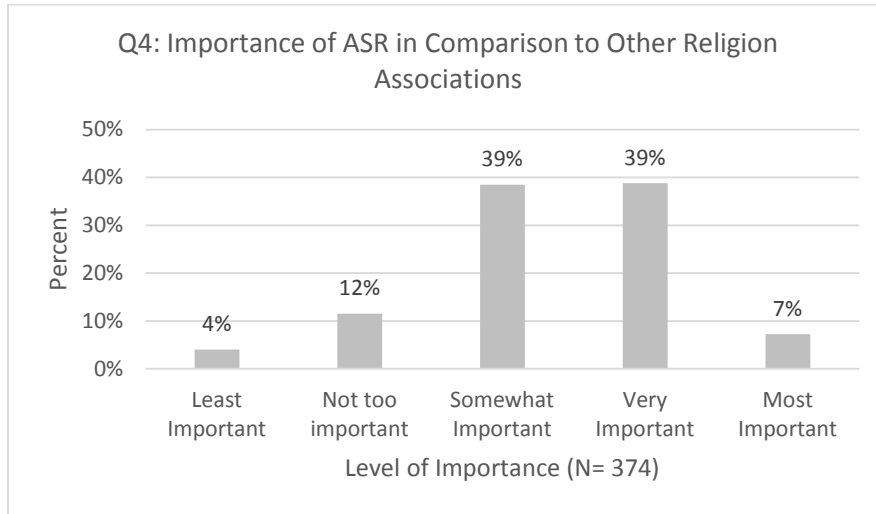
Figure 4: Membership in Professional Organizations Focusing on Religion ^a



^a Percentages based on the 382 members with multiple affiliations. The 11% ASR only membership is based on the total sample of 430.

In light of multiple association membership it seemed relevant to ascertain that importance of ASR membership in comparison to other associations that focus on religion. As shown by Figure 5 below, responses to this question follow a relatively normal distribution. That is to say, the majority of respondents rate the ASR as either “somewhat” or “very important.” The lowest percentages report ASR membership as the “least” important while a similar percent rates ASR as the ‘most’ important. This would indicate that the importance of ASR membership is largely incorporated into the participation with similar organizations.

Figure 5: Importance of Membership ASR and Other Professional Organizations Focusing on Religion



The results of Figure 5 led us to consider the role that age would play in impacting where it is that ASR members rank the association in relation to other organizations that focus on religious scholarship. Figure 5 below indicates a significant effect that was confirmed by a simple chi-square test showing a significant relationship between responses to this question and age ($X^2 = 9.83, p < .05$). As indicated by Figure 5, ASR members in the middle age categories (42-55 yrs.) are most inclined to identify ASR as either “very” or “most” important while older members tend to see ASR membership as “somewhat” important. It is also important to note that while the overall percentage of members who see ASR membership as unimportant is relatively low (see Figure 4 above) the highest percentage is found among the younger age groups. This suggests a need to continue reaching out to graduate students and other scholars at earlier stages of their careers and to continue tailoring services aimed at that constituency.

Figure 5: Importance of Membership ASR and Other Professional Organizations Focusing on Religion

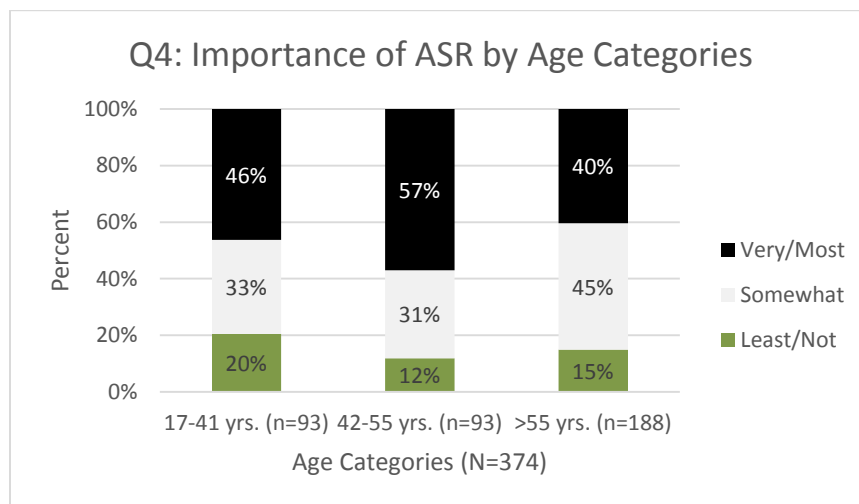
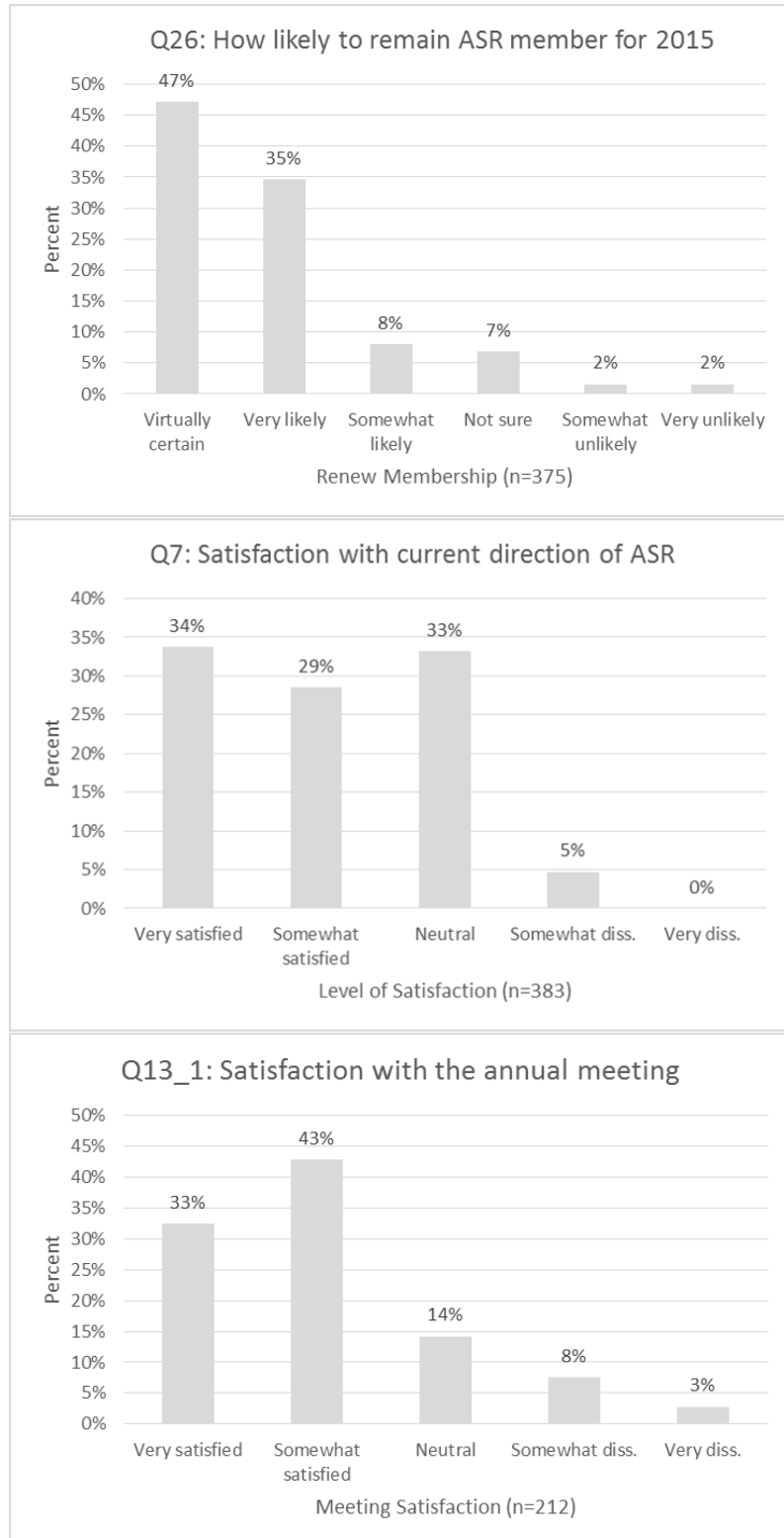


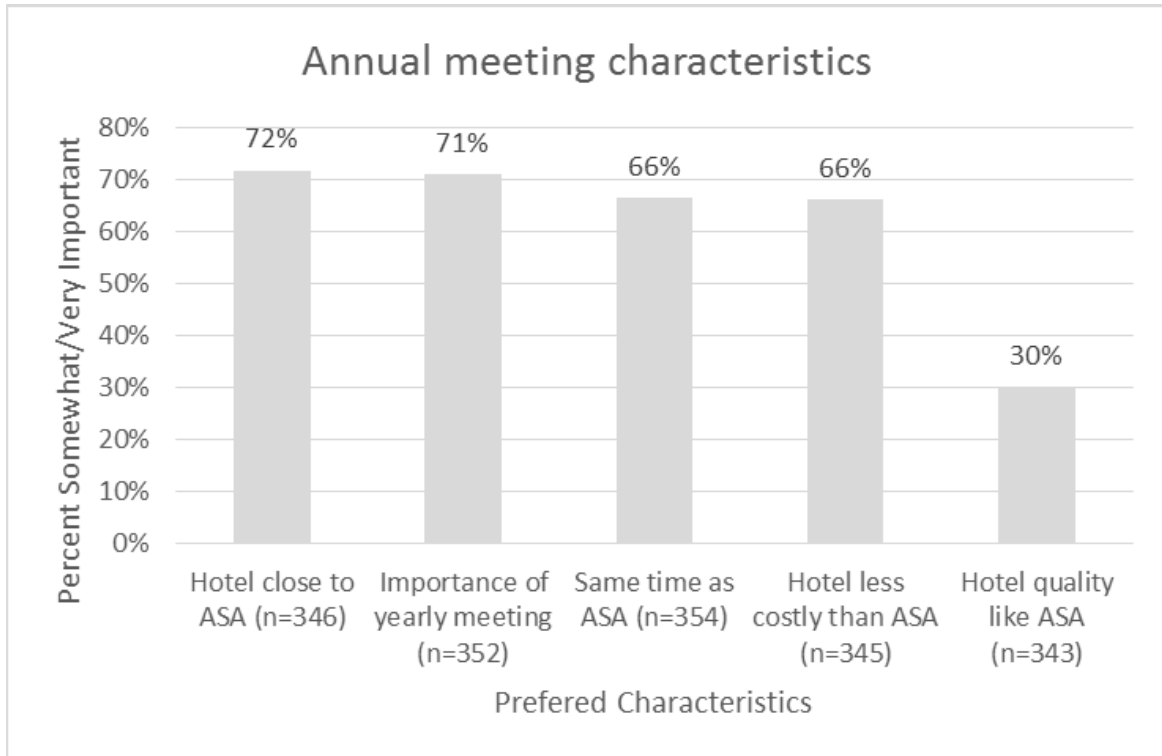
Figure 6: Membership Retention and Satisfaction

Members of the Executive Committee were interested in the level of overall satisfaction with specific aspects of the services and benefits provided by the ASR. Later analysis will explore these areas in detail. For this report we look at several broader areas starting with the potential that members will be retained for the upcoming year. One can expect that individuals planning to renew their membership to be generally satisfied with the benefits of membership as well as the overall direction of the organization. Figure 6 captures three dimensions of overall membership satisfaction. The first graph indicates that a clear majority of current members intend on renewing their membership. Over 80% of respondents are either “virtually certain” or “very likely” to remain ASR members while less than 5% are either “somewhat” or “very” unlikely to renew their memberships. We would then expect this high level of retention to translate to high levels of satisfaction with two key measures of organizational capacity. First, level of satisfaction is generally quite high with most respondents (63%) indicating that they are either “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the current direction of ASR, while approximately 5% are somewhat dissatisfied. However, it is just as important to consider the 33% of individuals who are “neutral” and the factors that influence this view. Future reports will consider these questions in greater detail. Finally, since the annual meeting represents a major event and benefit to ASR members, we explore level of satisfaction with the meeting. Once again, levels of satisfaction are quite high with 76% reporting that they are either “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the annual meeting. However, the level of “satisfaction intensity” (e.g. percent “very” satisfied) is lower than average satisfaction (e.g. “somewhat” satisfied).



The ASR annual meeting represents one of the principal benefits offered to members of the association. The ASR Executive Committee is interested in the salience of specific features that are associated with the overall annual meeting experience. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance they place on a series of items having to do with the annual conference. Figure 7 below shows the percentages who ranked a series of annual meeting characteristics as either “somewhat” or “very” important, ranked from highest to lowest. Looking at this trend it seems clear that the annual meeting is valued by the majority of ASR members.

Figure 7: Importance of Annual Meeting Characteristics



ASR Membership Survey: Channeling Resources

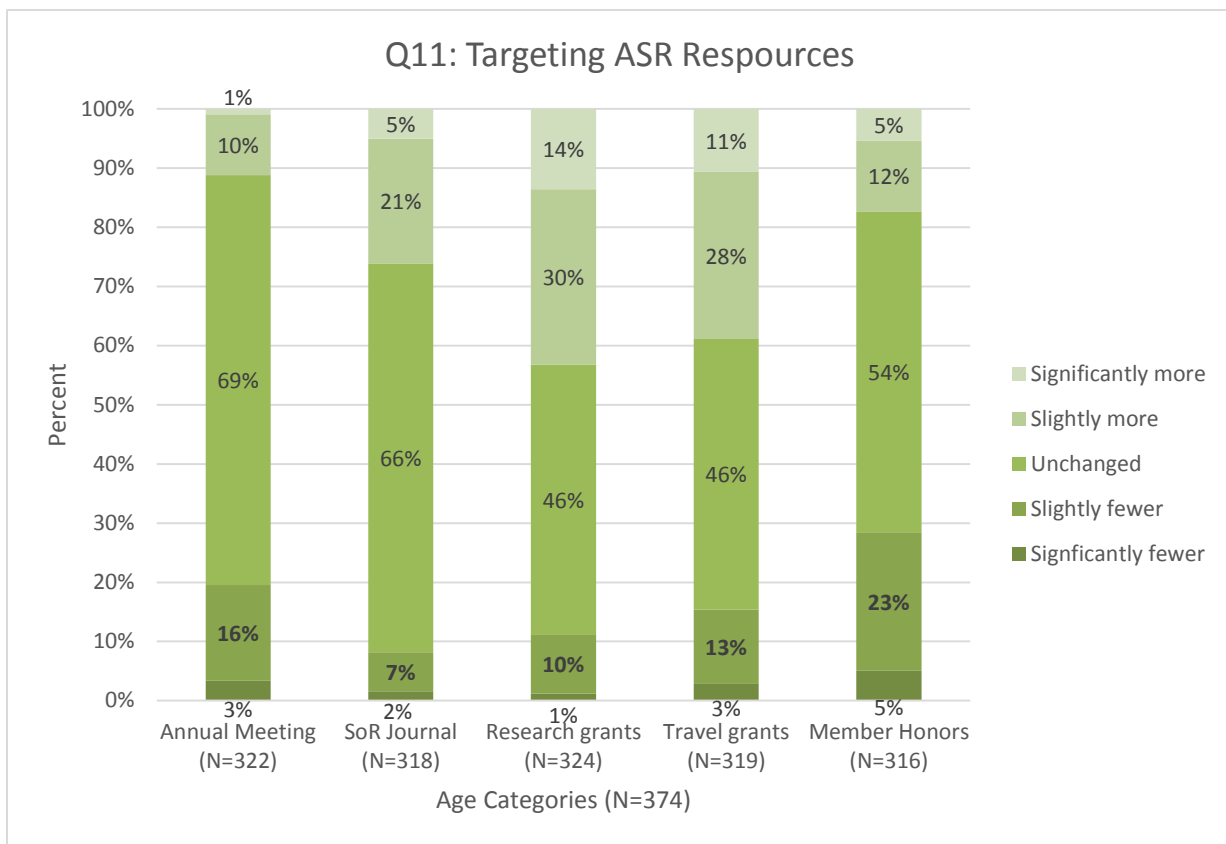
One important issue we felt required further consideration has to do with the allocation of ASR resources. The Membership Survey asks respondents to indicate their level of preference for channeling resources towards some of the major ASR is involved in: (a) the annual meeting, (b) The Sociology of Religion journal, (c) research grants (d) travel grants and (e) “Honors” given to members for their contributions in research and teaching. The prompt reads as follows:

In 2013, over a third of ASR’s expenses went to our Annual Meeting, approximately a quarter went to the production and mailing of the journal, and another quarter went to paying for members’ grants and awards. If it were possible in the future for ASR to adjust the proportion of resources it allocates to these endeavors, what would be your preferences? Indicate the level of allocation you would prefer next to each of the following ways that ASR fulfills its mission.

Figure 8 examines this question and provides distributions for each possible category. The lighter bars indicate a greater level of allocation for that given area. Figure 8 sheds light on several noteworthy patterns that can be summed up as follows:

- While most ASR members do not see that any changes need to be made to the amounts spent on the Annual Meeting and the SoR journal, about 20% do feel that fewer resources should be directed at the Annual Meeting.
- Members seem to prefer research and travel grants as areas of enhanced resource allocation.
- Very few members seem interested in increasing resources aimed at honoring members for achievement. This area also boasts the highest percentage who feel less resources should be directed at this area.

Figure 8: Preferences for ASR Resource Allocation



Keeping in mind the importance of resource allocation for our membership, we thought one area of interest would be to consider the effects of age on individual perceptions of ASR resources and priorities that members place on specific endeavors ASR is engaged in. In order to explore this issue in greater detail, we collapsed the categories with the least representation to create a three level measure where “significantly less”/ “slightly less” are combined, “unchanged” is retained as one category, and “significantly more” / “slightly more” are combined.

Figure 9 shows the distribution of responses to this item by age and by the specific area of interest. The darker portion of the bar indicates a greater level of desired location. A Chi-square analysis was performed to explore statistically significant differences based on age and are shown above each item.

While there is not a significant age effect on views of resource allocation aimed at the annual meeting or ASR journal, age does seem to impact the other three areas. In particular, the effect of age is most pronounced when considering views towards ASR sponsored research grant funding. This is an area where younger members (ages 17-41) are most supportive of greater support for research grants, followed by the middle range age category (42-55). A similar but less significant pattern is present for travel funding where younger age members prefer more resources in those areas. Finally, while across age groups support for Honors for members is low, older members seem the least inclined to favor greater resources for this. It is quite plausible that overall, members favor resources that they perceive as offering the most immediate benefit at their particular career stages.

Figure 9: Preferences for ASR Resource Allocation by Priorities and Age

