

REPORT ON THE AFS 2002 MEMBER SURVEY

In order to articulate our goals, and to plan the most productive work toward them, it is critically important that the Board has accurate and timely information about AFS members, their professional status, and their perspectives on the Society's present and future activities. Our most recent member survey—carried out in December 2001 and January 2002, and the first such survey in five years' time—was created to fill that need. Our thanks go to the 257 of you—about 25% of our membership—who submitted responses (221 online and 36 on paper) to the survey.

Most of what follows summarizes the results of this recent canvassing. Before that, though, let's look at the larger picture. Assuming that those who responded constitute a representative sample of the Society—and the number of responses suggests that we can be confident this is so—the Society the survey responses describe looks like this:

1. The membership of the AFS is aging, evidenced by the relatively high average age of members, the fact that many members received their various degrees some time ago, and the relatively advanced rank of AFS members working in academe. This aging trend is not being balanced by a comparable number of incoming younger members.
2. This is a membership of more-than-average organizational loyalty: well over half of those responding have been members for 10 years or more.
3. The membership of AFS is less culturally diverse than it was five years ago.
4. Although most AFS members continue to work in academe, almost half (44%) work primarily in the public sector, generally defined, and a small number hold both public and academic positions.
5. The primary benefits of membership to members are access to current research and methodology, and a set of what we might call “solidarity” benefits: the opportunity to express professional identity, build professional and personal relationships, and the like. These intangible, community-creating and community-building benefits are what keep people members in the Society. (For your information, this result is exactly the same as that found for all 64 American Council of Learned Societies associations in a 2001 survey.) As a result, almost all members (87%) define themselves as folklorists at least some of the time, and about 4 in 10 do so all the time.
6. Following from that sense of benefits, members continue to regard the *Journal of American Folklore* (access to research and methodology) and the annual meeting (access to research and methodology, and the Society's annual in-person gathering) as the Society's most important present activities, though many respondents suggested possible improvements in both.

7. However, members believe that the most important new activities for the Society are those related to outreach, either to scholars and practitioners in related fields or to the public.

These patterns have already helped the Board consider decisions about Society actions. The fact of our aging membership implies (accurately, we believe) that there are a significant number of graduate students and young professionals well below the average age of 47 who are involved in the field but not in the Society. This suggests that for folklorists of younger ages, membership in AFS is less important than for older folklorists, or that the Society seems less relevant to younger professionals than to older ones. These younger professionals are the Society's future, and it is critically important that they become a more active part of the Society. We are now planning several efforts—primarily by creating a better AFS, but also by making more effective solicitations—to build and retain membership among graduate students and young professionals.

The same is true of the diversity of AFS membership, which if anything appears to have declined since the time of our last survey. Here, too, better outreach will need to be combined with the offering of a more active and energetic Society. As a way to achieve this goal, we plan to use our annual meeting—our most effective and lively public presentation—as the key element of multi-year partnership-building work with institutions (such as Atlanta's historically Black colleges and universities mentioned above in the 2005 annual meeting article) that serve the minority scholars and practitioners we want to reach and include.

And finally, we are taking steps, as outlined in the lead article of this issue of *AFSN*, to add into AFS's repertoire new outreach activities to other fields and the public.

These are certainly not the only conclusions that can be drawn, or possible actions taken, from the survey results. We will continue to work through the response data over the next several months, and encourage you to share your own reactions with us. Thanks again to those of you who took the time to share your information and opinions.

SUMMARY REPORT OF SURVEY RESPONSES

1. Demographics

[Average] Age? 47.1 years

Gender? F: 56%
M: 44%

Culture/Ethnicity/Race?

44 different responses, predominantly Anglo/Caucasian/WASP/White (152 total responses); African American (4), Asian/Pacific Islander (3), Chicano/a/Latino (1), Native American (2)

US State or Other Country of Residence?

Top 10 states: Pennsylvania (16 responses)

California (15)

Indiana (14)

New York (14)

Maryland (11)

Ohio (8)

Utah (7)

Virginia (7)

District of Columbia (5)

Florida (5)

9% from outside the US

2. Education

Almost all respondents followed some part of the BA/MA/PhD track. 59% of bachelor's degrees were earned before 1980; 30% before 1970.

70% of master's degrees were earned before 1990. 63% of doctoral degrees were earned before 1990.

Four most frequently cited undergraduate fields: English (75 responses), anthropology (35), folklore (19), history (17).

Four most frequently cited master's fields: folklore (91), English (39), anthropology (20), American studies (11).

Four most frequently cited doctoral fields: folklore (84), anthropology (18), English (17), American studies (11).

3. Employment

Are you employed at the present time?

Y 88 %

N 10 %

No response 2 %

If you are not employed, are you retired or unemployed?

Retired 15 (58 % of those unemployed)

Unemployed 11 (42 % of those unemployed)

Is your employment related, at least in part, to folklore?

Y	68 %
N	10 %
No response	21 %

Is your folklore-related employment full- or part-time?

FT	50 %
PT	20 %
No response	30 %

Category of employer(s):

Arts organization	10 %
Community development organization	2 %
Cultural organization (humanities, museum, etc.)	15 %
Independent folklore organization	5 %
Self-employed (freelance, consulting)	<u>12 %</u>
Subtotal “Public Sector”	44 %
University or college (administration)	10 %
University or college (faculty)	<u>46 %</u>
Subtotal “Academic”	56 %

Eight respondents indicated that they held both public and academic positions.

For university faculty respondents (N=117) only:

Department? 66 different responses

Departments with more than 1 response:

English	33 responses
Anthropology	17
Folklore	8
American studies	6
Music	6
History	3

Academic rank?	Assistant	17 %
	Associate	17 %
	Full	35 %
	Other	31 %

Tenured?	Y	52 %
Adjunct?	Y	16 %

Back to all respondents:

Years in current position or current mix of positions: 12.1 years/average

Approximate salary in 2001 from folklore-related work: \$ 38,537 average

Average annual salary from folklore-related work, 1997-2001: \$ 36,989 average

4. Professional Identification

Do you identify yourself as a folklorist?

Y	38 %
N	10 %
Sometimes	49 %
No response	3 %

If you answered N or Sometimes, how (or how else) do you identify yourself professionally?

135 responses, 105 different (23 said anthropologist, 8 ethnomusicologist, 5 English, 4 American studies)

Do your colleagues identify you as a folklorist?

Y	40 %
N	11 %
Sometimes	44 %
No response	5 %

5. Other Society Memberships

Hundreds of different responses

Top five societies mentioned: American Anthropological Association (36 mentions)

Modern Language Association (21)

Society for Ethnomusicology (16)

American Studies Association (14)

Vernacular Architecture Forum (8)

All others well below 10

6. AFS Membership and Participation

How long have you been an AFS member?

>1 year	4 %
1-5 years	20 %
6-10 years	19 %
10-20 years	27 %
20+ years	30 %

How important is your membership in the AFS for each of the following?

Percentage of respondents answering “very important” or “somewhat important”:

To keep abreast of research and methodology	93 %
To express my professional responsibility and identity	86 %
To establish, develop, and sustain my professional relationships	85 %
To see people with whom I want to have a personal or social relationship	80 %
To represent my field to the larger public	74 %
To provide an opportunity for reading and discussion across disciplines or in more than one field	74 %
To make presentations at AFS annual meetings	62 %
To contribute actively in support of my profession	49 %
To publish my work in the <i>Journal of American Folklore</i>	43 %
To involve or acculturate my students in the field	41 %
To improve my teaching skills	40 %
To help in finding employment	33 %

When have you engaged in these AFS activities or used these AFS services?

Percentage of respondents indicating engagement in or use of activity or service:

Obtained information from the AFSNet web site or a section web site	93 %
Read the <i>AFS News</i> or the newsletter of an AFS section	83 %
Voted in AFS elections	83 %
Referred to a print or on-line member directory	82 %
Read the <i>Journal of American Folklore (JAF)</i>	80 %
Attended the AFS annual meeting without being on the program	56 %
Made an individual presentation at an AFS annual meeting	49 %
Organized a session at an AFS annual meeting	44 %
Used AFS resources to locate info re ethical standards for the field	40 %
Submitted items for one of these newsletters	38 %
Used AFS resources to locate a fellowship or grant opportunity	36 %
Published a review in <i>JAF</i>	34 %
Served as a member of an AFS committee	28 %
Published an article in <i>JAF</i>	26 %
Nominated someone for an AFS prize or section prize	18 %
Made financial contributions to AFS, over and above membership dues	14 %
Served as a chair of an AFS committee	14 %
Received an AFS prize or section prize	13 %
Served in an editorial capacity for <i>JAF</i>	12 %
Nominated someone for an elected AFS position	12 %
Served in an elected AFS position	10 %

7. American Folklore Society Present and Potential Activities

Please indicate [up to three] present Society activities you believe are the most important.

Percentage of respondents answering that a present activity was among the “most important”:

Annual meeting	82 %
<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>	77 %
<i>AFS News</i>	40 %
AFSNet web site	39 %
Section activities	28 %
Annual meeting travel stipends	15 %
Prizes	5 %

If the AFS planned to eliminate one of its present activities, which would you recommend for elimination as of least importance to you?

40 % did not respond; number (not percentage) of responses as follows:

Prizes	55
<i>AFS News</i>	18 (most of these suggested incorporation into the AFSNet web site)
Section activities	13
AFSNet web site	11
Annual meeting travel stipends	11
<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>	6
Annual meeting	0
Other	29 (most said “Wouldn’t change anything,” “Don’t make me choose,” etc.)

Would your employer provide financial support for you to attend the AFS annual meeting if you did not present a paper or participate in the program in some way?

Y	27 %
N	50 %
N/A	23 %

If your answer was N, would this lack of support keep you from attending the annual meeting?

Y	58 %
N	42 %

If the AFS, in trying to achieve its mission, could change one thing about the way it operates now, what single change would make the greatest positive difference?

131 (51%) no response; 126 (49%) other responses, quite varied.

Please indicate the potential AFS activities [up to three] that you believe will be the most important in helping the Society reach its mission.

Percentage of respondents answering that a potential activity was among the “most important”:

Create an AFS media office to actively promote the field	34 %
Produce additional multidisciplinary meetings on critical cultural issues, designed to place folklorists at the center of major cross-discipline conversations	32 %
Expand the AFSnet web site to become a more active site for information exchange within the field and for public education about folklore and folklorists' work	31 %
Advocacy concerning regional, national, and international cultural issues	30 %
Create engaging, innovative materials for folklore courses, both Introductory and advanced	30 %
Create teams of folklorists to make effective long-term connections with related fields and disciplines	30 %
Serve as applicant organization, project manager, and coordinator for folklorists' initiatives; e.g., "think tanks" to encourage the most creative new scholarship, a series of NEH teacher institutes or summer seminars, coordinated national documentation activities, public education projects	28 %
Develop AFS services (financial support, meetings, mentoring,	

networking) to encourage the production of scholarship	28 %
Carry out a major initiative to market our field to targeted audiences, including culturally diverse audiences, to increase AFS membership	23 %
Develop new publications to serve new needs	13 %
Create teams of folklorists to make effective long-term connections with communities of color and relevant cultural institutions	12 %
Transform the existing annual meeting	10 %
Produce additional meetings on specific topics within the field	8 %
Other alternatives: 228 (89%) no response; 25 responded; no consensus	