

Learning from our Members: Findings from the Special Interest Group on Information Seeking and Use (SIGUSE) Member Survey

In autumn 2016, the Special Interest Group Information Seeking and Use (SIGUSE) Executive, with the assistance of New Leader Kayla Hammond Larkin, developed and administered a member survey. We received 79 responses (15.5% response rate).¹

Respondents

Of those who responded, the majority were faculty members ($N=45$, 57%)², while approximately one-fifth ($N=16$, 20.2%) were doctoral students and another one-fifth were library, archival and information professionals; 3 respondents were Masters students (3.8%). Of those who stated other ($n=6$; 7.6%) and supplied a role, there were two postdoctoral fellows, two retired faculty or information professionals, and a climatologist. The majority of respondents were currently employed ($N=69$, 87.3%), while five people (6.3%) were retired and another five were unemployed. Respondents' current (or most recent) job titles varied widely, spanning Doctoral Student, Teaching Assistant, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor, Visiting Professor, Lecturer, Postdoc, Associate Dean, Public Services Librarian, Cataloging & Metadata Librarian, Associate Librarian, Regional Manager of Library Services, Online Professional Content Services & Development, Senior Taxonomist, Principal Information Architect, Information Technology Specialist, Senior Business Analyst, and Junior Technical Writer.

Respondents were asked about their relationship with SIGUSE and ASIS&T (see Table 1). There were comparable numbers of new ASIS&T and SIGUSE members (3 years or less). More people reported being longstanding members (10+ years) of ASIS&T ($N=31$) than SIGUSE ($N=18$), suggesting that some people joined SIGUSE after becoming established members of ASIS&T.

Length of relationship	How long have you been a member of ASIS&T?	How long have you been a member of SIGUSE?
Less than 1 year	10 (12.7%)	11 (13.9%)
1-3 years	17 (21.5%)	18 (22.8%)
4-5 years	9 (11.4%)	15 (19%)
6-10 years	12 (15.2%)	17 (21.5%)
More than 10 years	31 (39.2%)	18 (22.8%)

Table 1: Number of years of SIGUSE and ASIS&T membership

¹ Correspondence with Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) Headquarters staff indicated that there were 510 SIGUSE members at the time the survey was conducted. We calculated the response rate based on this data.

² Percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Participation in the ASIS&T Annual Meeting (AM) and SIG-USE Symposium

We asked respondents about their attendance at the ASIS&T AM over the past five years (2012-2016). For each of these five years, the range of people who *had attended* the AM was 38.9-43.1% (N=28-32), while the range for those who *had not attended* was higher at 56.9-61.1% (N=41-44) (some people did not answer this question).

Of those people who did attend the Annual Meeting, only about half attended the SIGUSE Symposium (N=15-19 across each of the five years). People shared why they attended the Symposium based on a list of “check all that apply” options (Table 2), but also mentioned the opportunity to network with colleagues and present work beyond the regular AM program.

Reason for attending	Number of Responses (N=32)
Relevant/interesting theme	26 (81.2%)
Relevant/interesting program	20 (62.5%)
Time slot works with travel schedule	16 (50%)
Interesting keynote speakers	11 (34.4%)
Provides value for money	9 (28.1%)
Other	7 (21.9%)

Table 2: Reasons why people attend the Annual SIGUSE Symposium

Respondents (N=16) shared general feedback on the symposium, and we grouped this thematically. One person noted that it would be useful to make discussion notes and other Symposium materials available to attendees following the event; this related to another comment about having clear, realized outcomes for the Symposia.

Three people mentioned the length of the Symposia; half a day was optimal and ending a bit earlier preferred. Another said that Symposium information (theme, speakers, call for participation) should be available earlier and more widely disseminated. (Note: the Symposium needs to be formally accepted as an AM workshop, so our timeline for dissemination is dependent upon conference deadlines.)

The topic of the Symposium was another issue raised. It was noted that trying to find a universally appealing theme given the varied interests of SIGUSE members was challenging, and one individual felt it should be broad to “attract a range of techniques.”

Other comments pertained to the structure of the Symposium. Some called for more interactive sessions and that roundtable discussions should be more “engaging or generative.” Some said they felt the number of presentations should be curtailed to allow for these more interactive opportunities to take place or poster sessions, as these enabled people to circulate and discuss research interests; however, one person did not wish to see poster sessions as part of the Symposia. A “provocative” keynote speaker was a draw.

We also asked respondents to tell us why they did not attend the Symposia; 68 people answered this “check all that apply” question, though 10 said this was “not applicable,” as they had attended. The most popular response was related to the cost of the workshop (N=33, 48.5%), and, relatedly, adding travel days to the AM was not possible (N=18,

26.5%). Fourteen people said that the theme or program was not relevant or interesting (N=14; 20.6%) to them. Other reasons were provided by 16 people and these included not attending the AM in general (N=5) or for specific reasons, such as not presenting at the AM (N=1), living in a country other than where the conference usually takes place (N=2) or the timing of the AM (N=2). Other reasons included scheduling conflicts with other AM activities (N=1), needing to take a break due to previous involvement (N=1), being a student (N=1), or a new member (N=1), lack of awareness (N=1), or missing information about the upcoming Symposium due to the website not being updated (N=1).

Awards

SIGUSE sponsors several types of awards each year, including research awards (Innovation Award, Elfreda A. Chatman Research Award), travel awards (Student Conference Travel Award, Interdisciplinary Conference Travel Award) and conference paper/poster awards (Best Information Behavior Conference Paper Award and Best Information Behavior Conference Poster Award). Seventy-eight respondents answered the question about whether they had applied for one of the SIGUSE awards; just 15 (19.2%) said they had applied for at least one of these awards. These 15 respondents provided feedback on the awards process (Table 3). Please note that the item “Ability to determine eligibility” only elicited 14 responses.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Advertising	1 (6.7%)	7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)
Ability to determine eligibility	1 (7.1%)	5 (35.7%)	5 (35.7%)	3 (21.4%)
Deadlines conducive to schedule	0 (0.0%)	6 (40.0%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)
Clarity of awards criteria	0 (0.0%)	5 (33.3%)	7 (46.7%)	3 (20.0%)
Clarity of application process	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)
Feedback about submission	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	9 (60.0%)	2 (13.3%)

Table 3: Respondents Evaluation of the Awards Process

An additional 60 respondents described why they did not apply. The most common responses were that they were not aware of the awards (N=27, 45.0%) or were not eligible (N=25, 41.7%). Others conceded that the awards deadlines were problematic (N=7, 11.7%), or that the award criteria (N=3; 5.0%) or process (N=2; 3.3%) was unclear.

Interest in Continuing Education

Almost three quarters of respondents (N=55, 70.5%) indicated that they would be interested in SIGUSE organizing professional development opportunities beyond the SIGUSE Symposium held annually at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting. Many of the 55 people who responded to this question wanted to see these opportunities offered in webinars (N=50; 90.9%) or panels at the ASIS&T AM (N=28; 50.9%). Five people checked “other,” and offered suggestions for online learning courses or MOOCs, Twitter discussions, and regional workshops throughout the year. One person underscored, “anything that can be done by distance/virtually.”

We proposed some topics for professional development opportunities and asked respondents to “check all that applied” (Table 4). The majority of the 55 respondents

favoured professional development related to conceptual frameworks ($N=43$; 78.2%) and emerging issues in information behaviour ($N=41$; 74.5%), but many also selected qualitative methods ($N=38$; 69.1%), information behaviour and the library and information science professions ($N=35$; 63.6%), and quantitative methods ($N=30$; 54.5%). Other suggestions may fit within these categories, but were specific to domains, devices, or types of skills: consumer health information, health data analytics, mobile/ubiquitous access, information ecology, information science thought experiments, and soft skills in conducting usability analysis.

Survey Suggested Topics	Number of responses ($N=55$)
Theoretical or conceptual approaches/frameworks	43 (78.2%)
Emerging issues in information behavior	41 (74.5%)
Methodological approaches: qualitative	38 (69.1%)
Information behavior and the library and information science professions	35 (63.6%)
Methodological approaches: quantitative	30 (54.5%)

Table 4: Topics for Professional Development Opportunities

SIGUSE Website, Social Media, and Email Listserv Usage

The majority of respondents ($N=45/77$, 58.4%) had visited the SIGUSE website in the past; 19 (24.7%) had not and 13 (16.9%) were not sure. Of those who had not visited the website and who had shared why they had not done so ($N=18$), 13 (72.2%) said they were not aware there was a website and 5 (27.8%) did not have a need to visit the website. Of those who had visited the website, 42 (93.3%) people evaluated it on its usability, usefulness, and aesthetic appeal (Table 5).

	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Usability	1 (2.4%)	3 (7.1%)	16 (38.1%)	19 (45.2%)	3 (7.1%)
Usefulness	0 (0.0%)	5 (11.9%)	17 (40.5%)	14 (33.3%)	6 (14.3%)
Aesthetics	2 (4.8%)	10 (23.8%)	15 (35.7%)	12 (28.6%)	3 (7.1%)

Table 5: Evaluation of the SIGUSE Website

Some of the comments indicated that people felt the website could be brought more up-to-date, both in terms of the currency of its content and its overall design. However, most thought it was usable and they could find what they needed.

Most respondents did not follow SIGUSE on Twitter ($N=48$, 64.9%) or Facebook ($N=55$, 74.3%), while other people said they did follow SIGUSE on Twitter ($N=24$, 32.4%) or Facebook ($N=17$, 23%). Two people were not sure if they were connected to SIGUSE via either social media channel or did not respond. However, 64.9% ($N=48$) subscribed to the SIGUSE email listserv, while 14 (18.9%) did not and 12 (16.2%) were not sure.

Respondents shared some insights about how SIGUSE could better communicate with its members. People suggested that communication, e.g., social media posts, could be more consistent and active, and that people may not be aware of the various communication channels. Other ideas included forming a Google group, webinars, quarterly newsletters, and organizing social events at the Annual Meeting or regionally during the year.