



Australian Political
Studies Association

Australian Political Studies Association Survey 2017

Report prepared for the APSA Executive

September 2017

Survey of the Australian Political Studies Association Membership 2017

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1. Introduction

In May and June of 2017, the APSA Executive Committee conducted a survey among political studies scholars in Australia. The primary goals of the survey were to:

- Receive feedback from APSA members on what APSA currently does well and what it could do better, or more of, in the future
- Receive feedback from non-APSA members on the factors that would make it worthwhile for them to join APSA
- Receive specific feedback from PhD students on how APSA can better serve their needs
- Collect background information on the composition of the APSA membership and political scientists working in Australia.

This survey was distributed to APSA members, Heads of Departments, and political scientists, public policy and international relations scholars in Australia through the online survey program Survey Monkey. Responses were collected in May and June 2017. Around 800 individuals were targeted, and the total number of respondents was 234, generating a response rate of about 30%.

The survey consisted of three parts. Part 1 asked general questions about APSA's activities, asking how important respondents considered the various activities that APSA currently undertakes, and what they would like to see APSA do (more of) in the future. Part 2 asked more specific questions about APSA's website, its communication strategy, membership rates and research groups. PhD students and non-members were presented with a set of specific questions. Finally, the survey concluded with a set of questions about respondents' socio-demographic and personal backgrounds, to allow APSA to get a better sense of the composition of its membership. It is important to note, however, that respondents self-selected to answer the survey, so we cannot be absolutely certain that it is a representative sample of the profession.

The survey was conducted by Dr Carolien van Ham (UNSW), Associate Professor Anika Gauja (The University of Sydney) and Dr Lisa MacKinney (The University of Melbourne).

2. Key findings

2.1. APSA membership, PhD respondents and non-members, reasons for non-membership

The survey had 234 respondents in total. Of these 234 respondents, 72% were APSA members, 23% were not. Of the 234 respondents, 21% were PhD students.

Members

Of the 167 APSA members who responded, 30% held a one-year membership, 33% a three-year membership. A significant proportion (25%) were student members, 4% were retired and 8% did not know which membership they held (Figure 1).

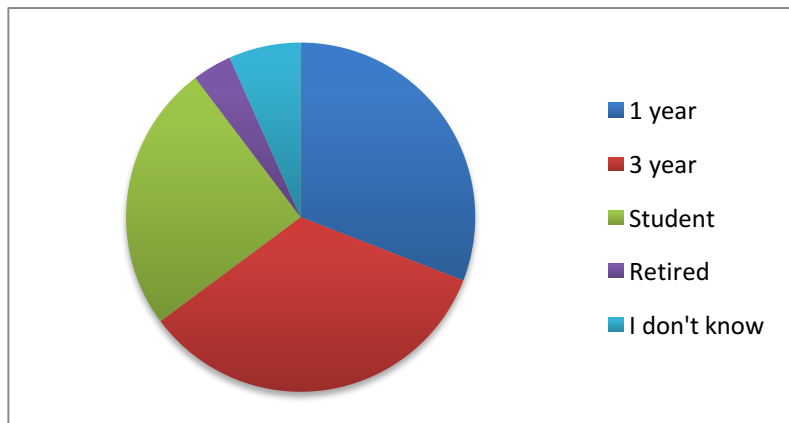


Figure 1: Types of APSA membership

Members indicated they had been APSA members for an average of 7.6 years, with large variation around that mean. As such, 50% of the APSA members in our survey reported having been a member for less than 4 years, while 25% reported having been an APSA member for longer than 10 years. In addition, respondents also reported having been a member 'on and off' for the past few years (5%). Of the 167 APSA members, 14 (8%) didn't know how long they had been a member for or did not answer the question on length of membership.

Non-members

Of the 234 respondents, 23% (54) were non-members. We were interested in finding out why these respondents were not members of APSA. The most common reasons given were:

- I am already a member of another association (26%)
- APSA doesn't provide value or services to members (11%)
- I don't know this association existed (11%)

A smaller number of respondents (9%) said they did not wish to attend conferences and 7% said membership was too expensive.

In addition, 16 (30%) non-members gave an open-ended answer as to why they were not currently APSA members. The mix of responses here included: only taking out membership when going to the APSA conference and/or negative experiences with a previous APSA conference (7 responses), being an IR/Public Policy/non-Political Scientist and hence not viewing APSA as relevant (3 responses), and stage of career/life with respondents citing retirement, not getting around to it, or just having returned to academia as reasons for not having joined (yet) (6 responses).

We also asked non-members what it would take for them to become an APSA member. This open-ended question was answered by 81% (44) of non-member respondents. Answers can roughly be grouped in the following four categories:

(1) *Those seeking more benefits from membership*: for example, if APSA was more relevant to their work, the benefits of membership were clearer, if APSA undertook more advocacy and if it organised more tailored events (17 responses)

(2) *Those wanting a better quality APSA conference* (7 responses)

(3) *Those who face financial constraints*: these respondents would become an APSA member if it was cheaper, and/or if their job was less precarious (9 responses)

(4) *Miscellaneous/don't know* (13 responses).

PhD students

Of the 234 respondents, 21% were PhD students. Of the 48 PhD students in our sample, 77% are APSA members. PhD students were asked a set of specific questions about the availability of and their preferences for methods training.

Of the 48 PhD students in our sample, 31 (65%) said they are currently offered methods training at their university. For 25 of them (81%), this training was part of broader social science training. Only six respondents (19%) indicated having been offered methods training that is specifically focused on political science or international relations.

Students were asked to briefly outline what training is offered; most training refers to generic qualitative and quantitative research methods and writing courses.

Of the 48 PhD students, 12 (25%) said they had taken methods training outside their university. Five PhD students had paid for this themselves, while for another five the training was either fully or partly funded by the university (and in two cases the training was free).

Asked whether they thought a full day methods workshop (held in conjunction with the APSA conference in September) would be useful to them, 73% of PhD students (35 out of 48) answered that it would be useful or very useful.

2.2. APSA and its activities

Of all 234 respondents, 86% agreed that: “It is important to have a national professional association for the research and teaching of politics” (64% strongly agreed and 23% agreed respectively). In addition, 84% agreed that: “APSA membership should be open to all those teaching and researching politics, irrespective of subfield or discipline” (67% strongly agreed and 17% agreed respectively).

We asked respondents how important they considered current APSA activities to be (Figure 2).

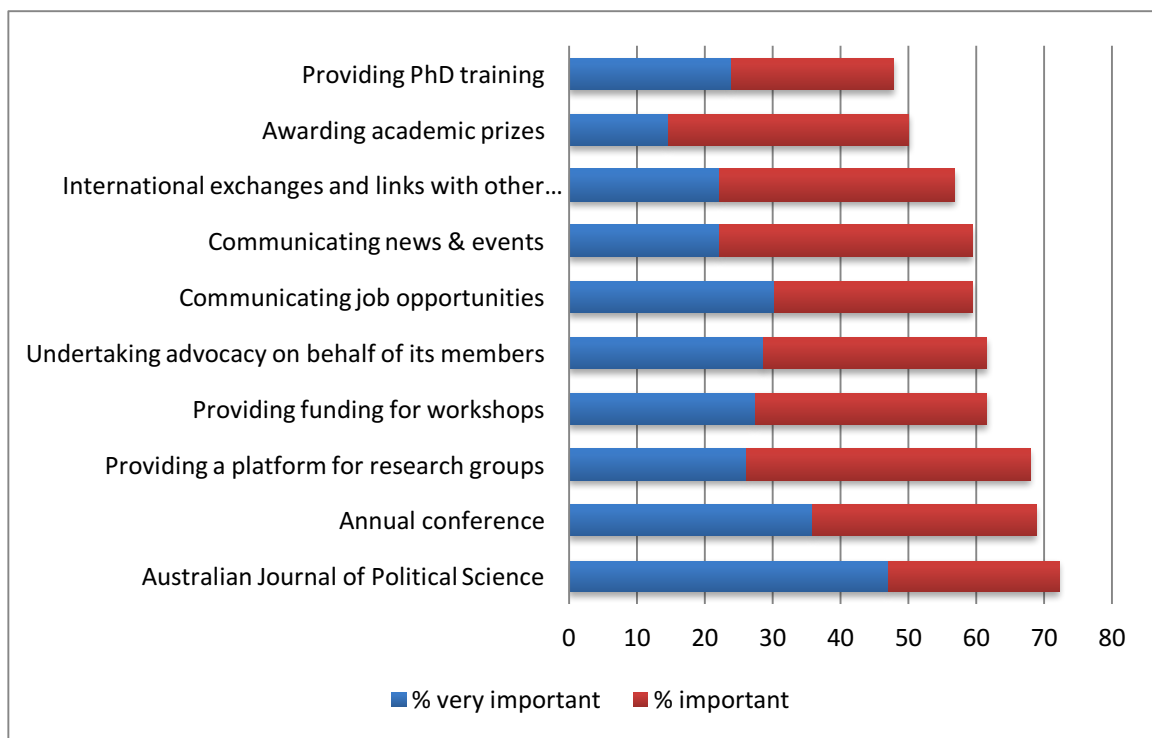


Figure 2: Importance current APSA activities

Sorting current activities by the percentage of respondents who marked an activity as “very important”, the most important are:

- Publishing the *Australian Journal of Political Science* (47% very important)

- Holding the annual conference (36% very important)
- Communicating job opportunities (30% very important)

Taking both very important and important together, the three most important APSA activities are: the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, the annual conference, and providing a platform for research groups. Except providing PhD training and awarding academic prizes, all current APSA activities were considered to be important by the majority of respondents.

We subsequently asked respondents which activities they would like APSA to engage (more) in.

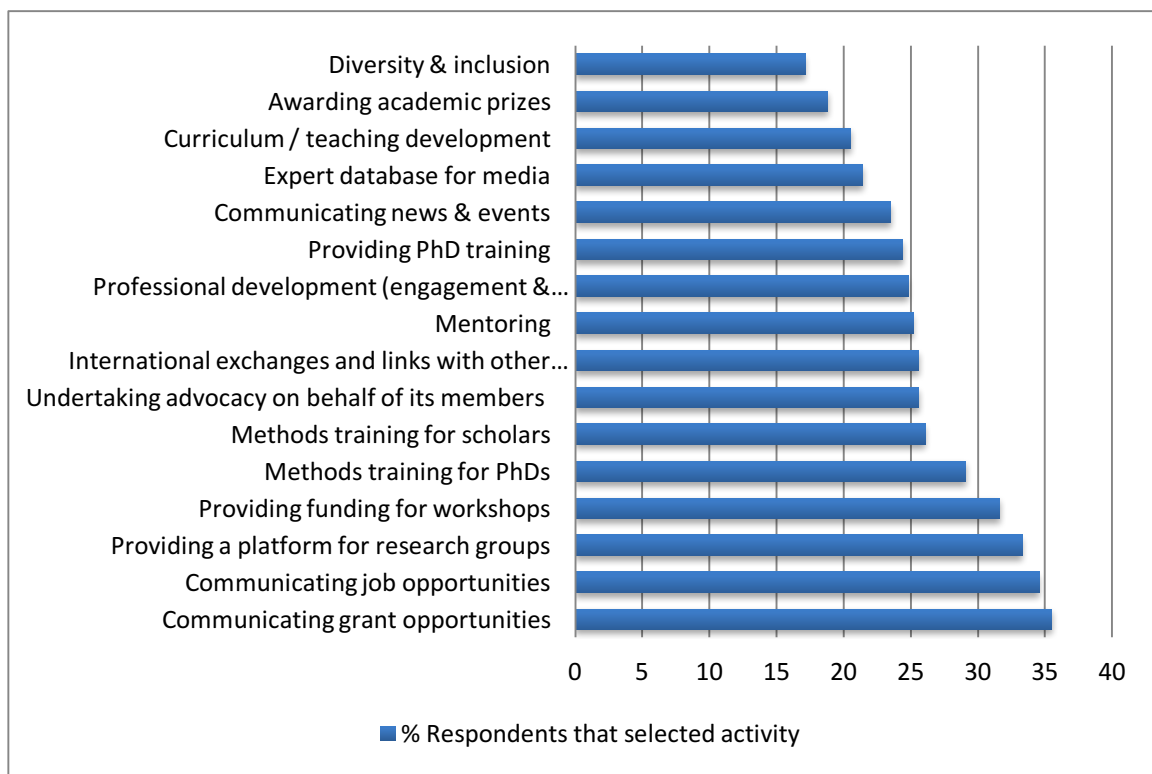


Figure 3: APSA activities respondents would like APSA to engage (more) in

The top three activities that respondents identified are:

- Communicating grant opportunities (35%)
- Communicating job opportunities (35%)
- Providing a platform for research groups (33%)

In the open-answer category, respondents suggested APSA should provide more support for publications and/or support for publications of monographs through collaboration with a scholarly press to support scholarship on Australian politics, as well as undertaking more advocacy on behalf of the discipline.

APSA Statement on US President's Travel Ban

Respondents were asked how they felt about the APSA Executive's statement issued on President Trump's travel ban. Most respondents (68%) supported this (44% strongly supported and 24% supported).

APSA Preferred Journal List

Respondents were also asked how they felt about the APSA 'preferred journal rankings' list, issued in 2013 and updated in 2016. Half of respondents felt APSA should have such a list, 25% of respondents felt APSA should *not* have such a list, and the remaining 25% had no preference, did not know, or didn't answer this question.

Finally, all respondents were asked the open-ended question "in what areas do you think APSA could improve its services to members?" An answer to this question was provided by 99 respondents (42%).¹ To organise these responses, answers were (roughly) classified in several categories. Overall, respondents identified the following areas in which APSA could improve its services to members:

- Better communication, better newsletter, events, job opportunities, etc. (17/99)
- APSA is doing a good job and/or don't know what can be improved (16/99)
- Journal list comments (15/99)
- Mentoring/support for PhDs/ECRs (12/99)
- Supporting research groups/promoting research collaboration (11/99)
- Greater lobbying/advocacy (11/99)
- Conference (10/99)
- Better website and social media presence (6/99)
- Promote diversity / commitment to disciplinary and methodological pluralism (6/99)
- Better membership administration (4/99)
- More active, look at alternative models such as UK/US PSA (3/99)
- Variation in membership fees (3/99)
- Methods training and other workshops (3/99)
- APSA more inclusive organisation/more representative of sub-disciplines (3/99)
- Showcasing research of members/reflect on developments in the discipline (3/99)

¹ In addition, 9 respondents answered referring to answers given to previous questions and/or by non-responses (n.a. or xx), hence these are not included here.

2.3. Research groups, conference and membership, website and communication

APSA Research Groups

Of the 167 APSA members, a total of 59 respondents (35%) indicated that they were a member of one or multiple research groups. Among the respondents in the survey, 16% indicated they were a member of the Policy Studies Research Group, 13% a member of the Political Organisations and Participation research group, 9% of the Environmental Politics and Policy Research Group and 7% of the Quantitative Methods Research Group. It was noted by one of the respondents that we unfortunately omitted to include the recently created Political Theory research group.

Among all respondents, 22% indicated they had attended an APSA research group workshop. Of these 52 respondents, 56% rated the workshop as very useful and 35% as somewhat useful. Among all respondents, 38% indicated that they were aware of the funding opportunities available for APSA research group workshops, and 51% indicated they were *not* aware of funding opportunities.

Membership and Conference

Among all respondents, 60% indicated that they thought APSA membership rates are about right. About 29% of respondents indicated membership rates are too low, and 15% indicated membership rates are too high. About 25 (11%) respondents indicated as a response “other” and are specified as follows: 16 respondents indicated that they either didn’t know, didn’t remember what the membership rates are, or that the question wasn’t relevant because they were not a member, and one respondent commented that: “There isn't very much information readily available about funds received and how they're spent so it's hard to judge value for money”. In addition, eight respondents indicated that the membership rates were too high for PhDs, for ECRs, and for members on sessional/casual contracts. One respondent commented: “APSA could consider making a category of ‘casual worker’ and fractional membership rates and independent scholar (without institutional assistance) rates to permit those outside the job market or in precarious academic employment to continue their professional development.” Counting these eight respondents together with the 36 respondents that had already indicated fees were too high, results in 19% of respondents indicating that fees are too high.

Among all respondents, 55% (129 out of 234) agreed that membership rates should be tied to ones’ income level, and among APSA members this was 60% (100 out of 167).

Regarding the APSA conference, 23% of all respondents indicated they had not gone to the conference in the past 5 years. Another 23% indicated they had gone once, 16% indicated they had gone twice, and 13% indicated they had gone three times in the past five years.

With respect to conference fees, 44% of respondents consider APSA conference fees to be about right, while 27% indicated they thought conference fees were too high. About 16% of respondents (37) indicated another response, of which 22 were 'don't knows' and 15 were substantive comments. Six respondents indicated that whether conference fees were too high depended on the quality of the conference, making conferences value for money in some years but not in other years. Nine respondents indicated that conference fees were too high for PhDs, for ECRs, and for members on sessional/casual contracts.

In line with this, 44% of respondents indicated that conference attendance fees should be tied to one's income level, while 34% indicated they did not think conference attendance fees should be tied to income level. When asked whether respondents had ever been unable to attend an APSA conference because of financial constraints, 60% indicated this was not the case, while 28% answered yes.

Website and communication

Among all respondents, 77% said they had visited the APSA website. With respect to social media use, 61% of respondents indicated that they used Facebook, and 22% (31) of those indicated that they followed an APSA research group on Facebook. Of these 31 respondents, 16 follow the Political Organisation and Participation research group, seven follow the Policy Studies Research Group, four follow the APSA Women's Caucus, two follow the Postgrad network, one Environmental Politics, and one Political Theory.

In addition, 51% of all respondents use Twitter, and 43% (51) of those follow APSA or an APSA research group on Twitter. Of these 51 respondents, 34 follow APSA on Twitter, 12 follow the Political Organisation and Participation research group, six follow the Women's Caucus, and one follows the Policy research group and one the Australian Journal of Political Science.

Asked how useful it would be to have certain types of information available on the APSA website, respondents answered that it would be very useful to have annual APSA conference information, calls for papers / conference announcements, and grant opportunities. In addition, having information on job opportunities and research groups ranked highly as well. When asked which of these items should be given priority on the website, 133 respondents gave open-ended answers. The top-3 mentioned items to be given priority on the website were: information on job opportunities, grant opportunities and news and events; closely followed by information about the annual APSA conference, and calls for papers / conference announcements. A number of respondents gave more detailed suggestions for the website, such as the need for keeping the website up-to-date and that "the website could be used for reasonably static/long-term information, with email/FB/Twitter used for more time sensitive communication".

Finally, respondents were asked if they thought APSA should publish and email a member newsletter, and if yes, how frequently they would like to receive the APSA email newsletter. Among all

respondents, 71% of respondents indicated they would like APSA to publish a newsletter, with 43% expressing a preference for a quarterly newsletter, 12% every 2 months, and 16% monthly.

2.4. Demographic information

With respect to the demographics of respondents, excluding missing responses (N = 199), 41% of our sample was female, 52% was male, and 7% either identified differently or preferred not to disclose their gender identification.² 97% of our sample was not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, and 3% preferred not to disclose. In terms of age, our respondents distributed over several age categories as follows: 7% were under 30, 33% were between 30-40, 27% between 40 and 50, 18% between 50 and 60 and 12% over 60.

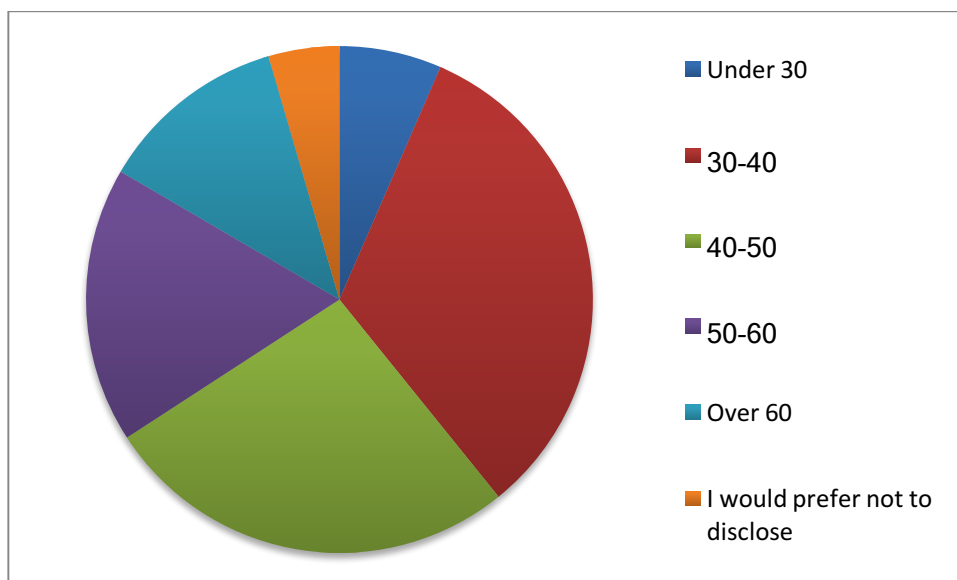


Figure 4: Age distribution respondents

As regards employment status (n = 192), 53% of respondents indicated that they were tenured / on a continuing contract, 16% were on a contract, and 6% were in casual employment. In addition, 15% indicated being students (PhD or Masters) and 5% were retired. In terms of the academic level of respondents (n = 169), 15% were at Tutor / Associate Lecturer level, 25% at Lecturer level, 20% at Senior Lecturer level, 14% at Associate Professor level, 16% at Professor level, and 4% were Emeriti.

A quarter of respondents (n = 199) identified as early career researchers. More than half of our respondents indicated that they had regular caring responsibilities (60%).

² In this section on demographic information, missing responses were excluded to better gauge the representativeness of our sample. Full responses including missing responses can be found in the Appendix.

The survey asked respondents to indicate the percentage of their role dedicated to the following activities: research, teaching and administration.

The majority of respondents (n = 189) worked in an institution located in Victoria (25%), followed by NSW (23%), Queensland (17%), the ACT (12%), South Australia (7%), Western Australia (2%), Tasmania (2%) and the Northern Territory (1%). Seven per cent of respondents to this question preferred not to disclose their location and 4% worked for an overseas institution.

3. Recommendations based on findings

Increasing membership

Our survey results showed a high degree of variation in the average length of APSA membership, indicating that the Association has a group of longer-term members but also a significant number of individuals who have only recently joined or have joined 'on and off'. It is noteworthy that a relatively high percentage of APSA members (25%) are students. While continuing to cater for the needs of our longer-term members, APSA's recruitment and retention strategies could focus more specifically on building a 'community' amongst younger scholars and better supporting the needs of those just entering the profession by utilising the leadership and experience of our diverse base of members.

APSA's recruitment and retention strategy should be focused on responding to the core reasons why political science and international relations scholars have not joined the Association. The most common reasons that our survey highlighted were: membership of another professional association, lack of value and/or services, and a lack of awareness that the association existed.

These findings suggest that APSA could concentrate on improvement in three main areas:

1. Reviewing, consolidating and expanding its activities (within resource constraints) to meet the identified priorities of the Australian political science community (see below)
2. Better communication to publicise the existence of APSA, its role in the scholarly community and the services it provides to members
3. Better communication to differentiate APSA from the range of other professional and scholarly associations that members and potential members belong to

APSA activities: Priority areas

Our survey identified several activities and areas of most importance to APSA members, which could usefully serve as a set of 'priority areas' for the Association.

The three most important current activities identified by survey respondents were:

- The publication of the *Australian Journal of Political Science*
- The APSA Annual Conference
- Communicating job opportunities

Survey respondents also identified three main activities they would like APSA to engage more in:

- Communicating grant opportunities
- Communicating job opportunities
- Providing a platform for research groups

In addition to continuing to facilitate the publication of the *AJPS* and the hosting of the annual conference, APSA should work towards increasing the profile of its research groups and better communicating the support provided to them. APSA now has five such groups: Environmental Politics and Policy, Policy Studies, Political Organisations and Participation, Political Theory and Quantitative Methods. Together these groups provide significant sub-disciplinary coverage, yet only 35% of APSA members are members of one, or more, of these groups. The majority of members were not aware of the funding opportunities available to the groups.

The Association may also want to consider expanding its advocacy work, which was viewed positively by most survey respondents.

PhD students

Almost 80% of PhD respondents to our survey were APSA members.

While most PhD respondents indicated that methods training was available at their University, this training was largely generic. Almost three quarters indicated that a full day methods workshop (held in conjunction with the APSA Conference) would be useful or very useful.

Based on the positive response from PhD students, a full day methods workshop (held in conjunction with the conference) is an event that APSA should consider supporting.

Membership Fees

Although the majority of members felt that membership fees 'were about right', APSA may want to consider linking dues to income level, or at least consider providing special rates to members in precarious employment. This was a proposal supported by most respondents and might also incorporate a relative reduction of rates for scholars in precarious employment.

Website and communication

As the most widely accessed communication platform (visited by almost three quarters of survey respondents), updating, maintaining and making the site more responsive to members' needs should be priorities for the Association. Interestingly, the top suggestions for what should be included on the site (APSA conference information, calls for paper, grants, research group information and job opportunities) are already there.

This suggests that rather than radically alter the content of the site, APSA should focus on publicising it as a resource for scholars, soliciting content and keeping the site as current as possible.

APSA's website might also be usefully paired with a Facebook page, given the relatively high percentage of respondents who use Facebook (61%). Establishing this page would not be resource intensive, and once it is set up it could largely act as a discussion board, a place for researchers to post

information on current events and opportunities, and a vehicle for the dissemination of time-sensitive information.

In addition to the website and Facebook page, APSA should return to the publication of an email newsletter, quarterly, which might usefully be constructed around updates and publicising information listed in more detail on the APSA website.