

ASHG Board Emphasizes Communication and Involvement

At its 2007 spring meeting, the ASHG Board of Directors reviewed summary data from surveys of attendees of the New Orleans meeting in October 2006 and surveys sent to members, lapsed members, and trainee members in January 2007. The data led the leadership into discussions of strategic initiatives that would be responsive to the needs delineated and would capitalize on some of the suggestions provided by respondents. The profile of the respondents is outlined in table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Type of Member	No. Contacted	No. Who Responded	Response Rate
Regular	5,198	1,072	20.6%
Trainee	1,091	242	22.2%
Lapsed/Nonmember	4,869	375	7.7%

Of the 131 member respondents, over 95% were either satisfied or very satisfied with their ASHG membership. Members declared that they find value in membership benefits, including an *AJHG* subscription, reduced registration fees for the annual meeting, the opportunity to propose scientific sessions, application for continuing-education credits, reduced prices for other publications, representation in policy making, and student awards program. When asked the open-ended question of what they liked most, members responded as delineated in table 2.

Table 2. ASHG Membership Benefits

Rank among Responses	Regular Members	Trainee Members
1st	Annual meeting	Annual meeting
2nd	Journal (<i>AJHG</i>)	Journal (<i>AJHG</i>)
3rd	Networking opportunities	Education efforts
4th	Education efforts	Trainee programs at meeting
5th	Policy advocacy	Networking opportunities

These activities and efforts will continue to be emphasized as ASHG moves forward. Additionally, those elements found to be liked the least, listed in table 3, were also very informative for the Board's discussions.

Major Themes That Emerged

During the review and discussion of these lists and other data, three major themes emerged that will focus the efforts of the Board, committees, and staff of ASHG. These themes are: (1) there should be more communication about current activities (to members and the public), (2) inclusiveness should be enhanced (in terms of interests and locations), and (3) the benefits of membership should be increased (with a focus on trainees).

Table 3. ASHG Areas for Consideration

Rank among Responses	Regular Members	Trainee Members
1st	Too much basic science or too much clinical (equally represented)	Not enough focus on students
2nd	U.S. focused, too narrow	Not enough information on careers and jobs
3rd	Need to increase professional development; undergraduate education	Need to involve trainees in Society affairs/ leadership
4th	Lack of visibility in policy advocacy	Not enough recognition of Trainees
5th	Need to open leadership process	

Communication

The ASHG staff has already taken several steps to improve communication with our members. The Society News and Progress-IT (SNP-IT) is the new electronic newsletter that will be published quarterly on the ASHG Web site (and in your e-mailbox). We are also working on providing more opportunities for members to interact with each other through forums on the ASHG Web site.

Inclusiveness

ASHG is the leading society representing researchers, clinicians, and students investigating human genetics. Our annual meeting and our journal set the standards for the field. Research presented by our members at our meetings and in our journal cross both geographic and disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, the Board of Directors has approved changes to the by-laws that reflect the need for ASHG membership to be more inclusive, particularly for our international colleagues. We also continue to encourage more participation by our trainee members. The Professional Development Committee (previously the Ad Hoc Postdoctoral Committee) is currently focusing on improving trainee events at the annual meeting and on the Web site. If you are currently a postdoctoral fellow and are interested in participating in the work of the committee, please contact kshaw@ashg.org.

Improve Career and Professional Development Programs for Trainees and Members

Lastly, the survey results also suggest that our members would find increased value in their membership if the ASHG provided more opportunities for professional and career development, particularly for our more junior members. For this reason, we are exploring the possibility of working with other societies to provide more training and professional development workshops throughout the year for our trainees, additional opportunities for

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networking at the annual meeting, and more communication through the ASHG Web site about careers.

In conclusion, ASHG thanks all those who took the time to submit answers to the survey. We hope that, through this article, the newsletter, and the Web site, you will see a continued effort from ASHG staff, the Board of Directors, and ASHG committees

to improve services, benefits, and opportunities for our members. We encourage you to continue to challenge ASHG to strive to represent the apex of human genetics research.

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