

Findings From the 2009 Panel Chair Reporting System
Barbara Sims, ACJS Program Chair (2009; Boston)

For the 2009 Annual Meeting of ACJS (Boston , MA), the Executive Board, upon recommendation of the Program Chair, Barbara Sims, implemented a panel chair reporting system that would give the membership some information about the extent of the problem associated with so-called “no shows”, or those papers listed on the program for which there were no presenters. The form that was used by panel chairs also included questions about the quality of the presentations, whether any problems with technology were encountered as a result of moving to the use of LCD projectors, and the number of people (not counting the presenters) attending the panel session. A final question asked chairs to provide any additional comments about their overall perceptions of the program in general. The forms were sent electronically to the chairs ahead of the conference and hard copies were available in the breakout rooms. Chairs were asked to either complete the form on site and drop it off at the ACJS registration booth, to complete it electronically post-meeting and forward to the Program Chair, or to complete hard copies and send them to the Program Chair via snail mail.

There were approximately 380 published panel chairs (roundtable moderators were excluded from the process). A total of 119 completed forms were returned to the Program Chair or about one-third. No additional efforts were made to encourage chairs to participate in the process since the purpose was to merely get some basic, baseline information about these issues. Future chairs may wish to consider using multiple attempts to encourage participation, however, since the ACJS Executive Board has now implemented a policy that will require future program chairs to continue this chair reporting system.

A summary of the first effort to retrieve information from panel chairs about the overall nature and quality of ACJS paper presentations is presented here. Any questions about this process or these reported findings should be directed to Barb Sims at bas4@psu.edu.

Chairs were first asked two questions related to the issue of papers being listed on the panel for which no one was present to present those papers. The first question asked, “Was there at least one paper listed for your panel that was not presented?” A follow up question asked, “Was there a second paper that was not presented?” As shown in Figures 1 and 2 below, 43% of panel chairs reported at least one paper that was not presented. When it comes to a second paper on that same panel for which there was no presenter, 11% responded “yes” to that question.

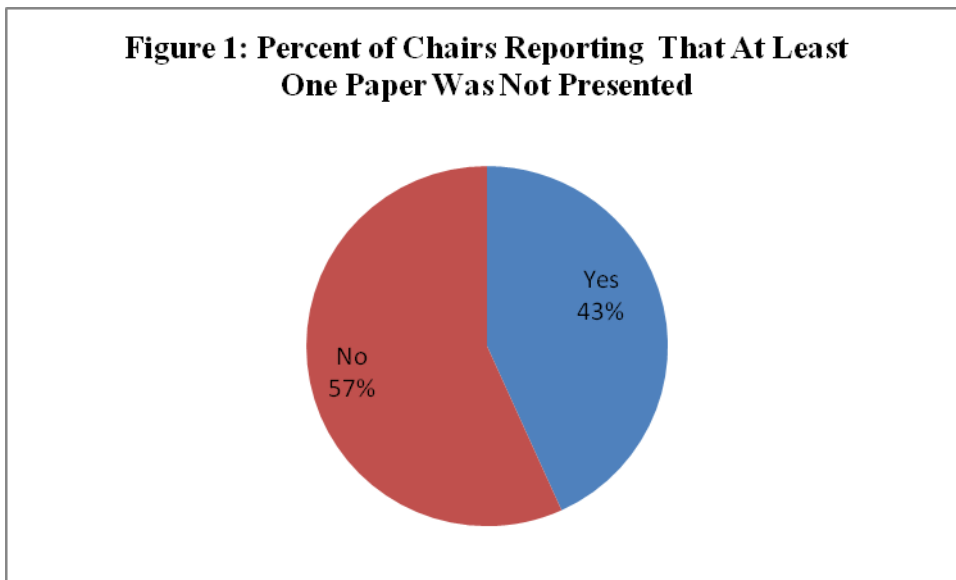
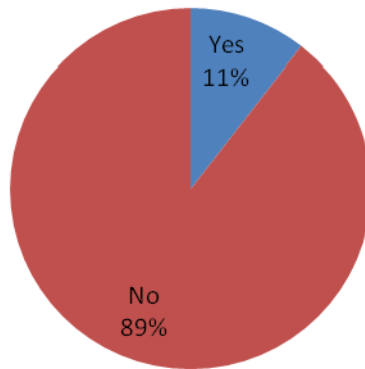


Figure 2: Percent of Chairs Reporting That A Second Paper Was Not Presented



The membership has long expressed some concerns about the overall quality of papers that are presented at the ACJS annual meeting. In order to get a sense of that issue from the chairs of panels at the ACJS meeting, a question was included that asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being the lowest rating and 10 being the highest rating, how would you rate the overall quality of the papers that were presented on your panel?” Very few chairs (about 1%) rated papers at below a six. Thirty-eight percent of chairs rated papers at eight or lower; 94%, however, rated papers presented on their panels at seven or higher. An argument can be made that, in light of these findings, those presenters who do show up and participate in the ACJS panels are doing a good job at preparing for those presentations.

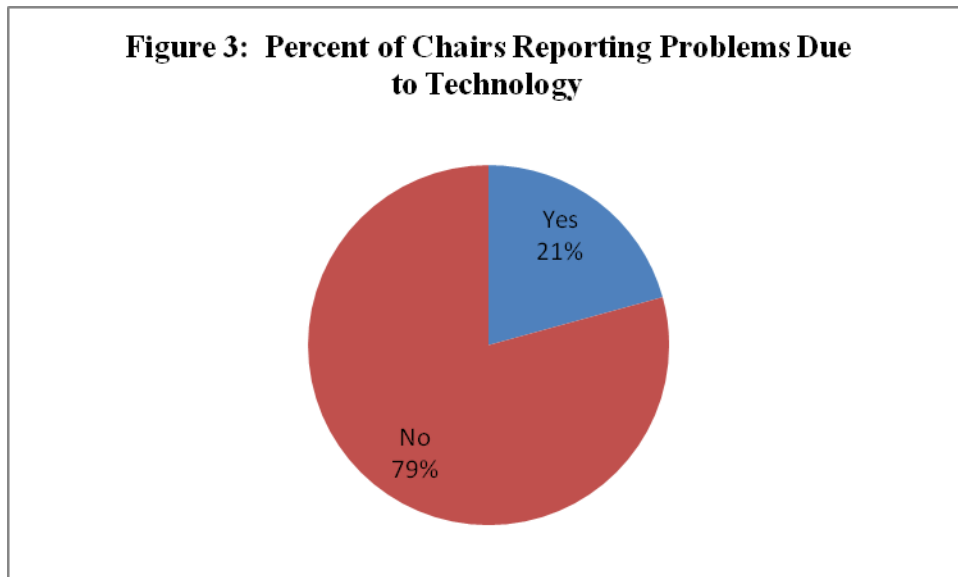
Problems Due To Technology

For the 2009 annual meeting, LCD projectors were used in the panel sessions and replaced the use of overhead projectors (complete with transparencies). A question was included in the chair reporting form that asked, “Did you encounter any problems or time delays within your panel due to problems with technology?” A clear majority of chairs (almost 80%; see

Figure 3) responded “no” to that question. An open-ended follow up question asked chairs who did report problems to comment on what those might be. Those comments are summarized here:

- Computer was not able to see the projector;
- Did not have a computer for a presenter;
- Time delays due to presenters switching out laptops, saving all to a single USB drive, etc.;
- Projector was not MAC compatible;
- No speakers to allow audio clips; and,
- No cord available for connecting the laptop to the projector.

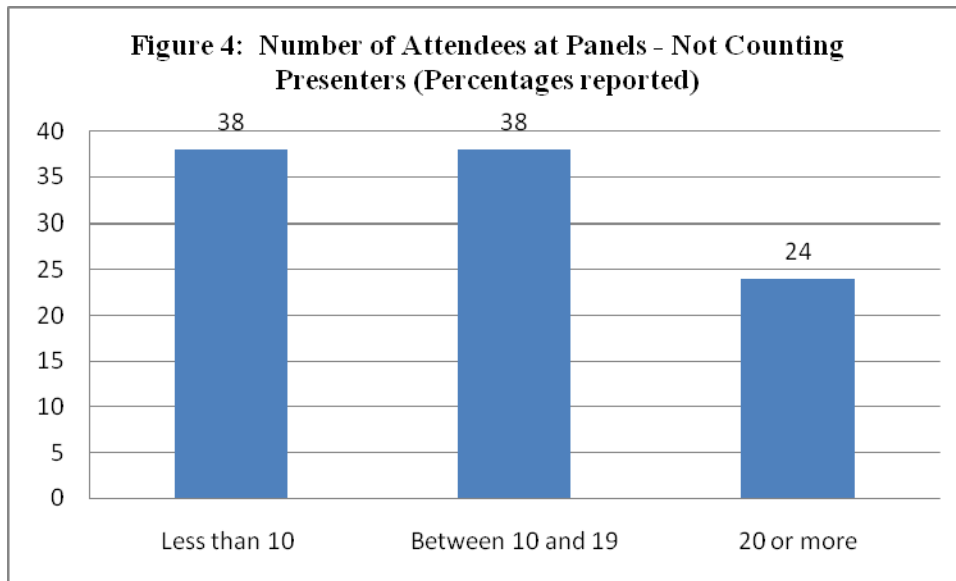
Other comments, however, indicated that most chairs were able to get immediate support from the technical staff that were on site to trouble shoot these types of problems.



Number of Attendees Present at Panels

Another issue of importance to the ACJS membership and the Executive Board is low attendance at panel sessions. The chair reporting form included a question about this and asked, “How many people attended your panel session, not counting those who presented?” As shown

in Figure 4 below, 38% reported attendance at less than 10; another 38% reported between 10 and 19 people in attendance; and 24% reported attendance as 20 or more. It should be pointed out, however, that two chairs reported zero attendance beyond those presenting and that another 18 chairs reported attendance at less than five.



Closing Comments

Panel chairs were given a final opportunity to provide feedback to the program chair regarding the overall quality of the 2009 Annual Meeting. Much can be learned from those comments and perhaps utilized by future program chairs. There was a sense from a couple of chairs that the panel title did not match up with the papers that were actually presented on it. One chair asked the question, “Might we have too many panels scheduled at the same time; that could be one reason why attendance is down in some of them.” Both of these issues are important and, based on my experience having now gone through the program planning process, are related to the sheer number of abstracts received. Sometimes it is difficult to group papers in such a way that the title is absolutely appropriate. At the same time, we want to avoid having a

one- or two-paper panel. This is not to say that future chairs cannot be more diligent in this regard.

Most comments were positive or offered insightful suggestions. One panel chair, for example, noted that his/her Saturday morning panel was nicely attended. At least three chairs suggested that future program chairs have panel chairs contact presenters in advance of the meeting and ask them to send him/her e-copy of the papers. The panel chairs could then be responsible for loading all papers on to a USB drive or on his/her laptop. Or, the panel chair could ask one person within the panel to take on that responsibility. This will not work for everyone, but for those presenters and/or panel chairs who would be willing to take this responsibility, the panel sessions could be much improved and not be faced with delays due to technology.

It should be pointed out here that hard copies of instructions for how to use the technology are left at the speaker's table or next to the LCD projector in all of the breakout rooms. Perhaps a reminder of this could go into one of the many "messages to annual meeting attendees" that commonly circulate in the time leading up to the meeting.

As for the issue of "no shows," some chairs commented that people did contact them ahead of time while some chairs expressed outrage because they were not contacted. It is recommended that future reporting forms include a question about this. Emergencies happen; institutions pull funding at the last minute; and problems occur with data collection, etc. These are all legitimate reasons for not being able to show up and present a scheduled paper. Other than dire circumstances befalling a person, however, there really is no reason not to be courteous enough to alert the panel chair that circumstances will now not allow a paper to be presented.

Or, if the chair him/herself cannot attend, that person should contact someone on the panel and ask him/her to step into that role.

Perhaps with the implementation of the chair reporting system for all ACJS annual meetings, these issues will become of less importance. For now, however, the membership continues to express some concerns and efforts are underway to collect meaningful data about those concerns.