

# CUR Focus on the Web

## Results from the 2008 CUR Quarterly Readership Survey

The Council on Undergraduate Research has grown significantly since it was formed in 1978 by chemistry faculty, and from the time the CUR newsletter was converted to the *CUR Quarterly* in 1993. In June of 2008, the editorial board of the *CUR Quarterly* discussed the status of the *CUR Quarterly*, particularly in response to the addition of the new Division of Arts and Humanities in 2008, and other recent division additions. The group, with representation from each division, felt it was necessary to determine if the breadth of articles presented in the *CUR Quarterly* was meeting the needs of CUR members. In addition, the divisional editors wanted feedback on whether or not the current distribution of materials in the journal was appropriate based on the needs of the readers. A survey was drafted by the editorial board and reviewed by the executive board of CUR prior to distribution in the Fall of 2008.

### Information on Survey Respondents

A link to the electronic survey was sent to all members in October 2008. The anonymous survey was available for two months, and a reminder was sent to all members three weeks after the initial email. Approximately 350 CUR members completed the survey, representing approximately 15% of the membership. Of the respondents, 27% have been members less than two years, and 75% have been members for less than 10 years. The majority of respondents (78%) have never served as a CUR councilor, and 15% are currently serving in that capacity. The distribution of survey respondents by division is represented in Figure 1. Only 52% of the survey respondents have ever attended a CUR National Meeting in the last 10 years, and 26% have only attended one in that time period. The primary job responsibility of the respondents is represented in Figure 2.

The majority of respondents (78%) have never published in the *CUR Quarterly*. Fourteen percent have previously published an article related to the theme, and 4% have published an article that was not related to the theme. Seven percent of respondents have published an undergraduate research highlight.

### Uses of the *CUR Quarterly* and Reading Habits of the CUR Membership

Fifty-two percent of the survey respondents regularly read the *CUR Quarterly* soon after they receive it. An additional 30% skim the journal soon after they receive it. Only six percent indicate that they rarely or never read the *CUR Quarterly*. Sixty-eight percent of respondents frequently or occasionally consult old issues of the *CUR Quarterly*, while 14% indicate they never consult old issues and discard them. Surprisingly, 82% of respondents never search the *CUR Quarterly* database on the CUR website for articles, and many individuals indicated that they did not know this feature existed. Member opinions on the use of online full-text articles versus paper copies are shown in Figure 3, with 42% of respondents indicating that they would

Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Division

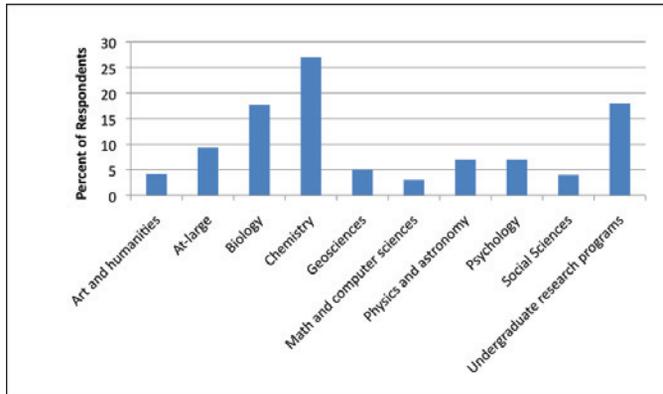
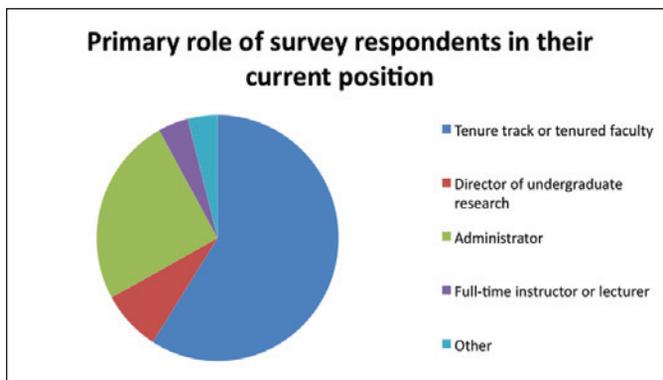
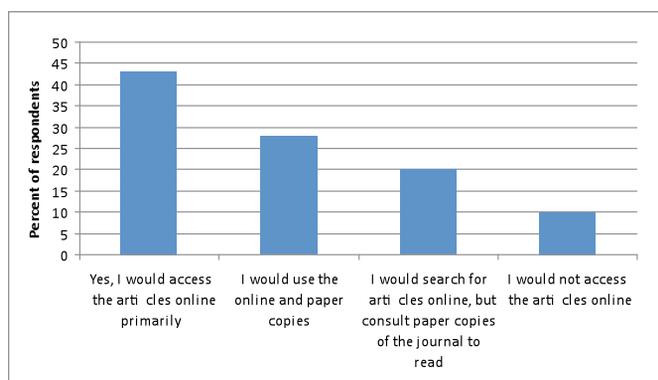


Figure 2: Title of Respondents that Best Represents the Majority of Their Job Responsibilities



primarily access the articles online. This varied significantly by division, with the majority of members of the psychology, geosciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities divisions indicating that they would primarily access the articles online, while slightly less than 40% of the respondents from biology, chemistry and undergraduate research programs indicated so.

**Figure 3: Members were asked “If a full text version of the CUR Quarterly were available online, would you access the information in that format over the paper copies?”**



Survey respondents were also asked to rank which sections of the *CUR Quarterly* were the most and least valuable to them. A summary of the overall ranking of sections determined by the frequency of responses by members is presented in the table below:

**Table 1: Ranking of Sections of the CUR Quarterly**

Rank	Section of CUR
1- Most Valuable	Articles related to the theme of the issue (CUR Focus)
2	Articles unrelated to the theme of the issue (general articles)
3	Undergraduate research highlights
4	Grant updates
5	Information on new books/workshops/institutes
6	Other CUR National Office news
7	Letter from the Guest Editor
8	Letter from the President
9- Least Valuable	Letter from the Executive Officer

The value of thematic articles to the readers was demonstrated by asking how often they read each section of the *CUR Quarterly*. Sixty-six percent and 52% of respondents indicate that they “always” or “frequently” read the articles related to the theme of the issue or the general articles, respectively. Only 27% of respondents indicate that they read the letters

from the Executive Officer, the President, or the Guest Editor “always” or “frequently”.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents think that there is an appropriate balance between discipline-specific articles and general articles. The divisions with the strongest support for more general articles are psychology, undergraduate research programs and the social sciences. Overall, 76% of respondents indicated that there was an appropriate balance between theme/focus articles and general articles. When asked if any sections should be expanded in length, the common responses were: 1) more emphasis on peer reviewed articles to build the reputation of the journal (19%); 2) more articles on the arts and the humanities (16%); 3) more information on getting grant funding (15%); and 4) more updates on undergraduate research highlights (9%). There are strong opinions on both sides on the value of publishing the abstracts of undergraduate research highlights in the journal. Many survey respondents thought this information was more suitable for the website, or that we should only publish the title, journal and authors, but no abstract. Others, however, thought the undergraduate research highlights should be expanded in length with an effort to expand the quantity presented. When the responses were sorted by division, the physical and natural sciences rated the value of the undergraduate research highlights in the *CUR Quarterly* higher than the other divisions.

### Other General Comments About the *CUR Quarterly*

- What I do for most journals is to look at the table of contents that are emailed to me. Then I get articles of interest from there. I'd be happy to do the same with *CUR Quarterly*.
- I would like to see CURQ move away from the theme issues.
- Not enough content. Too much “general stuff” in most issues—letters/updates/research highlights. Focus more on the articles to build the reputation of the journal, and thus drive membership interest.
- I especially like the interdisciplinary approaches in the theme issues.
- I would love to see some student-authored or co-authored articles.
- It seems to me that articles are selected from only certain types of institutions. These institutions don't always repre-

sent me, my institution, or the needs I have as a member of CUR.

- All issues, including all back issues, should be available electronically and all issues should be abstracted by major journal aggregators.
- I would like to see more articles related to research assessment and to the scholarship of teaching.
- Don't be afraid to revisit old themes with new examples.
- Make the theme articles always interdisciplinary or general to all areas, and concentrate the discipline-specific articles in the general articles.

### Forthcoming Content Analysis

The 2008 survey of the CUR readership discovered that a majority of respondents regularly read the *Quarterly* soon after they receive it, and three-fourths of the readership thinks that there is an appropriate balance between discipline-specific and general articles as well as thematic and general articles. Furthermore, the thematic articles (CUR Focus) are ranked as the most valuable section of the *Quarterly* followed by the general articles, undergraduate research highlights and grant updates. In response to concerns about the focus of articles as well as the types of institutions and disciplines represented by the authors (some of which appear above under general comments from the survey), a content analysis is underway of the issues of the *CUR Quarterly* from 1994 to 1997 and 2004 to 2007. The content analysis provides an opportunity to explore the evolution of the *Quarterly* over a ten-year period before and after the addition of some of our newest divisions. The forthcoming content analysis will analyze the subject focus of the articles, the discipline and type of institution represented by the authors, the subject of the issue theme, and the research setting of the photos throughout the issue. The content analysis will appear in a 2010 issue of the *CUR Quarterly*.

Dear CUR Readers,

We are pleased to announce that URSSA, the Undergraduate Research Student Self-Assessment, is now online!

Please visit:

<http://spot.colorado.edu/~laursen/accessURSSA.html>

to learn more about URSSA and to find instructions for how to access and use it. We hope you will share this information with other colleagues interested in undergraduate research. We would value your feedback: [abhunter@colorado.edu](mailto:abhunter@colorado.edu)

Development and testing of URSSA has been supported by the National Science Foundation, Division of Chemistry, under grant #CHE-0548488.

Thank you for your interest, and best wishes for your summer research activities!

Anne-Barrie Hunter and the URSSA team