

August 1995 Newsletter

DECISION ANALYSIS NEWSLETTER

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From the Chair, by Ward Edwards:

Each One Reach One

It has to be faced. Officers and Council have known for some time that the membership of this Section has been falling off. The following table, compiled by Bob Nau, gives the facts:

Year	# Members	(Loss)
1988	554	
1989	526	(28)
1990	533	(7)
1991	526	(7)
1992	504	(22)
1993	461	(43)
1994	421	(40)

We won't know till the end of the year, but it looks as though we are just about holding our own in 1995.

Why? Lots of explanations suggest themselves. Little has been done about recruiting new members since 1988. Recruitment is made difficult (=inconvenient) by lack of forms, lack of information, etc. Whatever we may see happening in industry, an academic depression has been going on, and this Section is overwhelmingly supported by academics. We have been working hard to change the focus of the Section away from academia and toward domains of application. But this effort is new, and hasn't gotten too many results yet. Just wait a year or two!

The previous paragraph is a good example of whistling in a graveyard. It makes absolutely no difference why we lose members; the consequences of that loss remain the same. They are: fewer people get the messages, fewer people label themselves as DAs, and with fewer resources we serve less well those whom we do serve. As byproduct, we have less clout within INFORMS.

Still, in order to do something about it, a bit of diagnosis may help. The most obvious reason why we don't recruit people is that we haven't been trying. A few months ago I realized that I didn't even know how to get the forms to sign up new members. For lack of those forms I have not followed up on any of my frequent suggestions to friends who are not members, but should be, that they join. After reflecting on these personal deficiencies, I concluded that a mite of effort could have a lot of result.

That effort, however, shouldn't be just by us elders to senior citizens of the DA establishment (if there is such a thing and there is). It should be by all of us all who have taken enough interest in DA and in the Section to join and continue as members. That means you. Not just you, Dr. Ramsey Award Winner; but you, Dr. New PhD Just Getting Started; and you, Mr. or Ms. or Dr. Journeyman in the Industrial Trenches; and you, Asian Member who has never Attended a Meeting (or European or South American or African; we have members from all over the globe, and want and hope to serve many, many more); and you, Mr. or Ms. Second Year Graduate Student who sees newer graduate students just arriving, or learns that the brilliant faculty researcher whose ideas look like a mine of thesis topics isn't a member. It means every one of you.

If each current member would recruit just one new member, our size would double. If each member did so each year, it would increase exponentially. That, I think, is how we should go about it. I ask each of you yes, including YOU to consider it a personal responsibility to recruit at least one new Member per year to the Section in each of the next 10 years.

How do you go about it? It's simple. This issue of the Newsletter contains, and each subsequent one will contain, a recruitment form. The form has all the information an applicant needs to join. It can be used to recruit members to the Section alone, or to the Section and to INFORMS. (I recommend that all who consider DA to be their profession should join INFORMS as well as the Section. Not only do you get journals and reduced registration fees at meetings, but also INFORMS has housed, served, and nurtured the Section from Day 1 to now, and it continues to arrange the only meetings I know about in which many nonDA sessions are interesting to DAs.) Your first step should be to cut that form out of the Newsletter and make at least 20 copies of it. Make sure that you store the original, plus any surplus copies, in a safe place; you will need more forms later. Also, if your supply or source of forms has been sitting in its file folder for 6 months or more, make sure that the information is still current. Section dues, having just gone up, are likely to be stable for a while. But my guess is that INFORMS will raise its dues soon. We will make sure that the information on the version of the form that will appear in each issue of the Newsletter from now on is always current.

Now, sit down and make a list of those you know who should be Section members but aren't. Make another list of those who should be Section members, but you aren't sure whether or not they are. Divide each list into local and remote people.

For the locals, pick up the phone or walk down the hall, form in hand, recruit, and then (if practical) stand over the new recruit to make sure the form is filled in and mailed. For the remotes, mail a copy of the form to each along with a personal note (or phone call, or email note, or all three) recommending that that person join, for reasons specific to him or her and known to you.

Why should they join? If they plan or are engaged in professional careers as DAs, the reason is obvious: no other organization exists to speak for the profession as a whole. True, the Section has only recently committed itself to that conception of its responsibilities. It is just starting to think about such matters as providing a job service for potential employers and employees, for example. But who else is doing even that much? If the Section does not serve you as you need to be served, you can and should hold our feet to the fire if you are a member, but not otherwise.

We already serve the academic DA community well; I don't think I need say much about that. I am amazed, every time I attend an INFORMS meeting, at the consistently high quality and interest of the Section's sessions. I attend almost all of them; it is the best postdoctoral education I get anywhere (except at the Bayesian Conference that I organize myself).

I'm biased, of course. But in my opinion it is rather easy to argue, I think convincingly, for the proposition that anyone who takes DA seriously should belong to the Section. So my concern is, not with convincing potential recruits, but with convincing you that you should do the recruiting. But the bottom line is fairly obvious; if you don't, who will?

Now, let's all of us get on with it. I'll keep you informed about how well we are doing. My guess: the results of this effort will be spectacular; at least 150 new members by January 1, 1996. Going out on that limb, I risk having my Behavioral Decision Theory colleagues deride me for succumbing to overconfidence; that and conservatism are the two most consistently found cognitive illusions. But you can rescue me from that ignominious fate, simply by making me right (or even conservative?).

DA Goes Digital, by Robert F. Nau and James E. Smith

We are pleased to announce two new electronic services for the section:

- an electronic mailing list -- "DAList"; and
- a world wide web home page -- "DAWeb".

These two services are being hosted by Bob Nau and Jim Smith at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University. These new services will not replace the newsletter: all section members will continue to receive the newsletter.

DAList

DAList is an electronic mailing list that will allow people from around the world to make announcements of interest to members of the Section and to hold free-ranging discussions of Decision Analysis issues. Subscriptions are limited to members of the section. We expect to have a wide variety of participants (academics, consultants, practitioners, etc.), and may have discussions on theoretical, methodological, practical, pedagogical, psychological, and other issues relating to decision making.

The mailing list is managed by an automated mailing list management program called Majordomo. To submit something to the list, you (or anybody else) should simply e-mail your submission to

DAList@fuqua.duke.edu.

On most e-mail systems you can also submit something by simply replying to a message from the DAList. Submissions by subscribers will be distributed immediately to all other subscribers. Submissions by non-subscribers will be reviewed by the list owners (Bob Nau and Jim Smith) and will be distributed if approved.

There are two ways to subscribe to the list, a plain form and a digest form. The digest form will gather all DAList messages and send out a digest, including a table of contents, once a day (at approximately 2AM EST). The plain form will send messages out as they are received. To be added to the list, simply send a message with a body consisting of:

subscribe DAList

or

subscribe DAList-digest

by e-mail to

majordomo@Fuqua.Duke.Edu.

The mailing list program will then read your e-mail address from your message, and send a confirmation note to this address. The list owners will verify your membership in the Section and approve your subscription. You will then receive a welcome message describing the system in more detail (including guidelines for submissions) and all other messages posted thereafter. If, at some later date, you decide you no longer want to receive DAList mailings, it is easy to unsubscribe; instructions for "unsubscribing" are included in the welcome message.

DAWeb

The "World Wide Web" on the internet is rapidly becoming the vehicle of choice for institutions and individuals to make their services available electronically to a global community. The advantage of the Web (compared to listserve or "gopher" technology) is that it allows information to be presented in hypermedia form (hypertext, graphics, sound, etc.) Many persons already have access to the Web through their institution's computing services, and it can also be accessed at home by anyone with a 9600bps or faster modem via commercial internet service providers. For those of you who are already plugged into the Web, and those who aren't should consider doing so, the Section on Decision Analysis now has a web site whose home page address is:

<http://www.duke.edu/~rnau/dahome.htm>

This web site provides, among other things, background information on the Section, an online membership directory with links to members' individual home pages, programs for the decision analysis tracks at upcoming INFORMS meetings, archives of DA newsletters and working paper abstracts, and links to other web sites that provide decision analysis resources or services. The web site is a "living document" that will be continually updated and expanded we invite your contributions and suggestions.

If you have any questions or comments about DAList or DAWeb, please contact Bob Nau (at rnau@mail.duke.edu or 9196607763) or Jim Smith (at jes9@mail.duke.edu or 9196607770).
