Get out the hair dye….we really are getting old!

Denise M. Davis
Director, Office for Research and Statistics

Survey results of a study planned in 2002 and announced in the December 2003 issue of *American Libraries* – "Association, Know Thyself: ALA embarks on a mission to document its demographics," by Mary Jo Lynch.

Believe it or not, we know very little about you except what you tell us when you become or renew membership. After more than a year of haggling over the questions , we only started collecting member demographic information in May 2005 through a voluntary online survey. ALA will use the information reported to plan improved programs and services, present ALA statistics to policymakers and potential funding groups, and respond to questions from the press and members themselves. The survey is located at http://www.ala.org/memberdemog   and we will make periodic updates to this report to keep you informed about member demographics.

By November 14th 3,289 eligible responses had been reported (we had to secure the website to member-only login as a result of some spam responses from members). Not surprising, ALA members are predominantly women, white, and born between 1940-1959. I'm sure you're saying, "Just look around at a conference and you would know that." Absolutely – but now we have data to support what we could see …. squinting, with our glasses on!

So, what are our demographics?

Sidebar text box for this:

With about 5% of members responding, we are seeing some interesting patterns:

- Women outnumber men nearly 4-to-1

- 87% of our membership is white; 4% Black/African American

- 2.5% of our membership is Hispanic or Latino

- 58% were born between 1940-1959; 36% between 1960-1979

- 85% have an ALA-MLS
- 31% have a Master's degree in addition to the ALA-MLS
- 6.8% have a PhD

Members were sufficiently suspicious of some of the questions:

- Why is the first choice Latin/Hispanic vs non-Hispanic? Is there something going on behind this survey that the members are not being informed about?"
 [Response: No, this is a Census category of Ethnicity that ALA members wanted to know about.]

- What about members with a J.D.? [Response: Good point; perhaps "Doctorate" would have been a better label for this advanced degree category. BTW, no member has reported an M.D. yet!]

- "...a third of the questions had to do with the color of our skin. How much more meaningful and truly useful the questions could have been!"   [Response: This survey is the first for our association. We had to begin somewhere!]

- "I didn't check a box for gender because I identify as transgendered. I would have happily checked a box for "other" or "choose not to answer" if one had been available. I don't think that "transgendered" should have been a category separate from "male" or "female", since most transgendered people do identify as one or the other, but I'm not far enough in my transition to align myself with my new gender yet. That said, I would have checked the box for my chosen gender if there had been a follow-up question about whether I identify as transgendered or not." [Response: Leaving the response blank is a legitimate answer. Only .43% of respondents left this question blank.]

- "I am very well-known and I can run circles around many of the "ALA certified" candidates that I have worked with in various organizations and many different libraries. There is a glass ceiling for those of us who went to non "ALA" certified schools. I get tired of the snobbery I receive from people who have ALA certified schools." [Response: The data reported by members indicate that the ALA-MLS is the predominant MLS conferred. Only 2% of respondents have indicated a non-ALA MLS.]

- "I can not believe that you have not included multiracial as an option. Yes, I am a lesbian, and I have been reading all of this outrage over the fact that you didn't query re: GLBT, when I understand that the GLBT-RT asked you not to for confidentiality. But not to include multi-racial? How many "OTHERS" did you end with? What kind [of] "others"? I am not OTHER I am multi-racial. Welcome to the new millenium!" [Response: GLBT-RT was very active in the determination of the questions on this survey. The race categories were assigned to match those used by the Census Bureau. Census only recently announced a multi-racial category in addition to the 30+ race categories used in previous decennial studies of Americans (announced late November 2005).]

How we compare with other professions:

Looking at all workers in the US was challenging, as employment categories and analysis don't easily parallel our profession. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) *Women in the Workforce: A Databook* (May 2005) estimates 217,000 librarians in the workforce – making our membership representative of only about 30% of the librarian workforce. The BLS study estimates 83% of librarians reported gender as female – more than the 78.7% reported by out members to date (http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-table11-2005.pdf).

It is difficult to compare our profession even when looking at national figures for management and professional employment. The most notable parallel in overall workforce data is the aging of the baby-boomers and their continued presence in the workforce (http://www.bls.gov/cps/#charemp). Our members are more highly educated than the average worker and are highly skewed to females, but our member ratio of white and Black/African American is similar to national figures (*Household Data Annual Averages. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and over by educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.* http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat7.pdf).

Looking at non-profit sector data found few similarities (*Characteristics of workers in nonprofit organizations*. Denis Johnston and Gabriel Rudney, Bureau of Labor Statistics. http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1987/07/art4full.pdf). We continue to be more highly educated and a more female-based profession. The only parallel with the non-profit sector was in the race and ethnicity of professionals – 85% white, 9% Black, and 4% Hispanic.

Closing quote:

"I think that this is a good start but I am concerned about geographic region, the glass ceiling, etc. We might ask questions about the individual's position - or do we rely on the information they provide for us on the membership form, which may or may not be accurate. We might ask when the individual got their degree (to see perhaps, if they were recent grads or longtime professionals). Are they currently working in their field of choice? Have they migrated to other areas? Maybe I'm mixing up ideas for other surveys, but since you asked about level of education.... Just a few thoughts. Thanks for listening." [Response: Thanks for taking the time to complete the survey and to offer comments! I'll see what we can do about analyzing the data by geographic region…that will take some work to complete.]