



ASRO - Academic Survey Research Organizations

An Ad Hoc Committee of Academic Survey Research Centers

To: ASRO Listserv and Future ASRA Members
From: Jim Wolf
RE: Outcome of the Berkeley Meeting
Date: March 27, 2008

Greetings all! As many of you know, several dozen academic survey center directors and/or their associates attended the second annual ASRO Winter Meeting in Berkeley, CA. Much happened and will be happening, including consideration of a name change. Here is a brief overview of the proceedings:

Thursday (March 6)

- The conference began with a panel discussion on the “Future of Survey Research” with opening remarks by Henry Brady, insights shared by Bob Groves, Ron Langley and Burke Grandjean followed by additional comments by Merrill Shanks. The well-attended event was also featured on-campus to celebrate 50 years of the SRC at U-C Berkeley.
- The ASRO attendees returned to the Durant Hotel and, after a great meal, we revisited the discussion of our own future and mission as an organization. We engaged in a round-robin brainstorming session to attempt a clearer definition of what we wanted the organization to be. Among some of the more important issues I was able to scribble down:
 - Let’s not bother incorporating (at least for now) since we do not need tax-exempt or charitable organization status
 - We are more of a self-help group than a service organization
 - We need to be more inclusive of academic survey centers (we are missing a lot of people) but we need to be selective so as not to drastically change the nature of the group.
 - We could be more proactive on our respective campuses providing leadership in survey research methods taught in research methods courses.
 - We should be more active in sharing problems and solutions with administrators.
 - Most of us have many clients who simply cannot afford to have us follow “best practices”
 - We should always have one eye on what will be the next big issue facing academic survey centers.
 - We should focus on helping each other evolve and advocate within our respective institutions.

Friday (March 7)

- Before dawn, Tom Guterbock was hit with a blast of jet lag-induced inspiration and wrote the first draft of our “Declaration of Interdependence” which was modified later in the day by an ad hoc committee of co-conspirators.
- After breakfast we reviewed the preliminary results of the initial web survey of academic survey centers developed by Nora Cate Schaefer and implemented by Rich Clark. (No pressure presenting to a room full of center directors!) The main conclusion reached was that we bit off more than we should have. The results were fascinating but too inconclusive for the level of detail we wanted. It was agreed that a committee would be formed to coordinate shorter, more topical surveys.
- The second morning session was generally centered on how best to promote higher standards. The conversation moved toward peer review and the need to come up with a list we could all live with that would constitute a fair set of standards for most academic survey centers. This conversation then moved toward how we can use such a set of standards to inform a statement of how academic survey centers add value to surveys in ways that non-academic shops do not. This would help us compete against lower-cost commercial shops. Such an argument could also be used to advocate our case within our respective institutions and with the faculty on our campuses who complain about our costs.
- At lunch we discussed the draft report by the AAPOR Cell Phone Task Force. We had been asked by the AAPOR Standards Committee to offer our thoughts on the recommendations. It was the general consensus that the report was an outstanding summary of where the profession is right now, but it is premature to try to promote “best practices” when there is so much to learn. We recommended releasing the report without the best practice recommendations.
- The session after lunch was devoted to human subjects’ rights issues. It was pointed out that Mary Losch has already compiled a great deal of this information for the IRB task force. The AAPOR web site has the task force statement recommendations. Most of us are called on to assist others with IRB applications. We would all do well to promote broader familiarity with the IRB resources on the AAPOR website. Interviewer certification is becoming quite common. Many institutions are using the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. Other institutions have developed their own.
- The final session of the day was devoted to membership criteria and benefits. Considerable time was spent trying to clarify what types of organizations would be considered eligible. The main concern was that we allow membership to be diverse enough to allow growth and flexibility but selective enough so that the nature of the organization did not substantially change. For example, it was agreed that university offices of institutional research would not be eligible due to the purely administrative nature of the work. Centers that share our common concerns would have many of the following characteristics:
 - A university research staff with a director that reports to a university official
 - Non-profit status
 - Would develop its own surveys
 - Have a sustained ongoing infrastructure

- Would be designed to advance generalizable knowledge
- Exist to support the research mission of the university

Saturday (March 8)

- Some members had to leave for the airport, so the group decided to begin the final session by reviewing the revised version of the “Declaration of Interdependence” Tom had drafted the day before and others had revised since then. It is primarily a statement indicating that we all agreed to work together to form an association that would not only serve to help us help each other but would also facilitate the nurturing of new academic center directors as well as future generations of professional survey researchers. The document was accepted by unanimous declaration. Tom will be distributing the text of the declaration, a list of those who were there at the signing and a photo to prevent anyone from denying they were there!
- There was discussion at this time of what the most appropriate name would be for this new organization. The “Academic Survey Research Association (ASRA)” resonated more than others, so for the time being this seems to be the likely name.
- After the signing we began the time-honored tradition of any new association: committee creation. (Following another time-honored tradition, the first people to be assigned to committees were, of course, those who had already left the meeting early to get to the airport!) The committees, chairs and members appear later in this memo. The immediate goal of the committees is to prepare a plan of action to present at the AAPOR conference meeting in May. The main work of the Steering Committee will be to draft a set of By-laws to be voted on then. Assuming we will be able to agree on these by-laws and a slate of officers, this will be the birth of our new association.

In short, it was an amazingly productive and enjoyable time! Many thanks go to Bob Lee and his staff for handling the local arrangements that made it all possible. Also, thanks go to all who agreed to start doing the work of our fledgling organization.

The following pages list the committee assignments and the purpose of each. Some are likely to become standing committees of the association while others will be temporary. If you are interested in serving on any of these committees, please contact the chair directly.

There will be more information coming between now and the AAPOR conference, so please keep your eye on your email.

Best regards,

Jim Wolf
ASRO Coordinator

Interim Steering Committee

Purpose: develop preliminary membership criteria, by-laws and a slate of officers for a vote by charter members at the May 2008 AAPOR Conference

Members:

1. Mary Ellen Colton
2. Bob Groves
3. Tom Guterbock
4. John Kennedy
5. Ron Langley
6. Bob Lee
7. Mary Losch
8. Gene Lutz
9. Martha Van Haitzma
10. Jim Wolf (Chair)

Membership Committee

Purpose: Create as comprehensive list of potential member organizations as possible and begin outreach to those organizations (membership criteria yet to be finalized by ASRA).

Members:

1. Tom Guterbock (Chair)
2. Tim Johnson
3. Rita Koontz

Mentoring and Peer Review Committee

Purpose: develop and maintain a set of criteria to be used for evaluating an academic survey research center; recruit evaluators to conduct peer reviews; develop a mentoring program to assist new directors.

Members:

1. Cathy Cirina
2. Burke Gandjean
3. Yasamin Miller
4. Martha Van Haitzma (Chair)

Education and Advocacy Committee

Purpose: develop ways to promote the importance of academic survey research centers to clients, university administrators and faculty; facilitate the training of the next generation of survey research professionals.

Members:

1. Henry Brady
2. Mary Ellen Colton
3. Bob Groves (Chair)

Human Subjects and Research Compliance Committee

Purpose: identify issues with regard to human subjects, compliance and NIH interviewer 'certification' in order to keep all member organizations apprised of current regulations and upcoming changes that may require changes to standard operating procedures.

Members:

1. Dianne Anderson
2. Mary Ellen Colten
3. Kurt Johnson
4. Ron Langley
5. Mary Losch
6. Beth-Ellen Pennell (Chair)
7. John Rogers

Survey Committee

Purpose: develop a series of focused surveys of the member organizations to collect information on current activities, challenges, solutions and areas for further research.

Members:

1. Jim Bason
2. Ron Langley
3. Sarah Nusser
4. Lorayn Olson
5. Paul Ruggiere
6. John Stevenson (Chair)
7. Mary Stutzman
8. John Tarnai

Website Committee

Purpose: to develop and maintain ASRA's presence on the web.

Members:

1. Nancy Bannister
2. Tom Guterbock
3. Sarah Nusser
4. Jim Wolf (Chair)

Conference Committee (a.k.a. "The Bob Committee")

Purpose: make all local arrangements for the annual director's meeting.

Members:

1. Bob Groves
2. Bob Lee
3. Bob Oldendick (Chair)