



**REPORT FROM THE 2011 AFS MEMBER SURVEY
September 2012**

Approximately every five years, the American Folklore Society surveys its members to gather demographic and opinion data that index the state of the Society and field, and inform the Executive Board as it considers actions to support AFS members.

We administered the most recent survey in late 2011, and 410 members responded to it, a significant increase over the number who responded to our previous surveys in 2002 and 2006.

This report summarizes some of the basic demographic information from the 2011 survey, and compares it to what we received in 2002 and 2006. It also presents many of the suggestions members made for improvements in present AFS activities and for possible future AFS activities.

The Board would like to express its gratitude to all who responded for their support of our field and Society.

**2002-2006-2011 AFS Member Surveys:
Some Comparative Statistics**

	2002	2006	2011
# of respondents	257	315	410
% of AFS membership responding	25%	32%	40%
Age			
20-29	no data	10%	12%
30-39		18%	18%
40-49		23%	18%
50-59		26%	22%
60-69		16%	22%
70+		7%	8%
Gender			
Female	56%	57%	62%
Male	44%	43%	38%
Culture/Ethnicity/Race			
White	89%	86.3%	82.5%
African American or Black	1%	1.3%	2.5%
Asian	1%	1.6%	3%
Latino/a	1%	3.5%	3.5%
Native American	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%
Other	7%	6.7%	8%
Place of residence			
Top 10 US states	Pennsylvania	California	Indiana
	California	Indiana	California
	Indiana	New York	Pennsylvania
	New York	Pennsylvania	Ohio
	Maryland	Ohio	New York
	Ohio	Virginia	Kentucky
	Utah	Maryland	North Carolina
	Virginia	Utah	Texas
	DC	DC	Utah
	Florida	North Carolina	Oregon/Virginia
Canada	3%	6%	7%
Outside the US and Canada	6%	8%	9%

**2002-2006-2011 AFS Member Surveys:
Some Comparative Statistics**

Academic employment	56%	54%	55%
Public-sector employment	44%	46%	45%
	2002	2006	2011
Three most frequent departments of employment			
English	28%	27%	23%
Anthropology	15%	8%	12%
Folklore	7%	16%	
Area/language studies			13%
Do you identify yourself as a folklorist?			
Yes	38%	52%	46%
No	10%	8%	6%
Sometimes	49%	43%	33%
How long have you been an AFS member?			
>1 year	4%	7%	8%
1-5 years	20%	16%	23%
6-10 years	19%	15%	11%
10-20 years	27%	26%	18%
20+ years	30%	36%	40%
Top three reasons for belonging to AFS			
Keep abreast of research and methodology	1	1	1
Establish and sustain professional relationships	3	2	2
Express professional identity and responsibility	2	3	3

Suggestions for Improvements in Present AFS Activities, and for Possible Future AFS Activities

1. Annual Meeting

Should the annual meeting be larger, smaller, or about the same size as it is now?

Maintain Current Size	36%
Increase	24%
Decrease	10%
No Response	30%

121 participants (29.5% of all respondents) made recommendations for the changes they believe would most improve the quality of the annual meeting. We have grouped suggestions made by 10 or more people into the following categories:

Diversify Presentations: Program fewer traditional paper sessions/accept fewer individual papers; encourage more forums, roundtables, Diamond sessions, poster presentations, etc.: 22 (5.5% of total)

Consider Different Meeting Locations: Choose to meet in cities and hotels that are more accessible to members, both in terms of cost and travel; give members more say in where meetings are held: 13 (3%)

Fine-Tune Scheduling: Ensure that sessions are scheduled to avoid overlapping topics; avoid scheduling scholars from the same institutions in the same time slots; avoid scheduling major scholars in the same time slots: 12 (3%)

Make Presentation More Competitive: Use more rigorous criteria for selecting proposals/reject more proposals; accept fewer student submissions; shift focus of meeting to rigorous scholarly work: 11 (2.5%)

Increase Number of Sessions: Add more sessions to the days on which the meeting is currently held; begin holding sessions on Wednesday or start holding sessions on Sunday again: 10 (2.5%)

2. Journal of American Folklore

122 respondents (30% of all respondents) offered their suggestions for improving the Journal of American Folklore. We have grouped suggestions made by 10 people or more into the following categories:

Broaden Range of Topics: Include more articles dealing with specific topics (ex. music, region, etc.): 13 (3% of total)

Devote More Attention to Public and Applied Work: Create a better balance between articles that deal with academic research and those that deal with professional practice and public or applied folklore work: 13 (3%)

Encourage a Grounded Ethos: Emphasize the readability of articles; don't privilege contributions that rely on professional jargon and high theory; publish work that will be relevant and compelling to a wider range of readers 12 (3%)

Broaden Contributor Base: Encourage submissions by a wider range of authors, including graduate students, independent folklorists, community scholars, tradition bearers and artists, and professionals from other academic disciplines; offer more flexible formats for submission (ex. works-in-progress, collaborations, narrative essays, practice-oriented reports, profiles, etc.) 10 (2.5%)

Produce Timelier Reviews: Review books as they are coming out or soon after their publication; move reviews to a timelier online venue: 10 (2.5%)

Refocus on American Folklore: Include more articles dealing with US topics and fewer articles with international foci; limit interdisciplinary contributions and contributions from scholars outside of the field; focus on folklore-specific work by acknowledged folklorists: 10 (2.5%)

** Several respondents asked that we create an online audio and video supplement to the print journal. The JAF online multimedia supplement debuted in April 2012.*

3. AFS Web Site

74 respondents (18% of all respondents) suggested how the AFS website might be improved. We have grouped suggestions made by 10 or more people into the following categories:

Increase User-Friendliness: Organize information more intuitively to ease navigation; decrease the amount of text and make better use of graphic elements; improve readability and reduce clutter; add video and audio: 19 (4.5% of total)

Improve and Promote Directory: Make member directory more accessible and easier to use; make directory available to non-AFS members 10 (2.5%)

**A number of respondents made suggestions for making improvements to the website that already exist, suggesting that they are simply unaware of these features and/or that the Society needs to do a better job of communicating about them.*

4. Communications

When participants were asked what kinds of conversations are taking place in the field but are not being supported by AFS communication venues, responses were varied and largely inconsistent with the question. However, a small number of responses indicated that members feel that the following conversations are not being well supported:

Those Regarding the State of the Public Sphere	4
Those Regarding Policy and Politics	3
Those Between the Academic and Public Spheres	2
Those Regarding the Character of the Field at Large	2

When participants were asked what important tool or resource is not currently available to them, responses were varied and largely inconsistent with the question. However, a small number of responses indicated that members would find the following resources useful:

Teaching Resources Database	5*
Digital Access to Minor Folklore Journals	3*
Grant/Funding Opportunity Database	2

** We already provide the first two of these through Open Folklore, suggesting that members are simply unaware of these features and/or that the Society needs to do a better job of communicating about Open Folklore.*

5. Diversity

95 respondents offered suggestions for how AFS might increase the presence of women and minorities in its membership and leadership. We have grouped suggestions made by 10 or more people into the following categories:

Increase Financial Support: Provide more stipends and travel grants for scholars from targeted groups to attend annual meetings; provide scholarships to students from underrepresented groups; make awards to more minority and women scholars; provide membership discounts: 18 (4.5% of total)

** AFS already provides several of these forms of support.*

Increase Student Base: Engage in outreach to undergraduate and graduate students to draw more diverse students to the field; increase and diversify folklore course offerings; better publicize the field to students; actively recruit students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, community colleges, and other institutions that serve the groups in question: 15 (3.5%)

Create Mentoring Opportunities: Encourage one-on-one relationships between senior scholars and young women and minority folklorists; offer support to mid-career folklorists of targeted groups to help them advance their careers; provide arenas for supported publication by non-native speakers: 13 (3%)

Increase Engagement with Communities: Reach out to community members/scholars and increase their involvement/invite their participation in AFS leadership; hold meetings in communities that will be attractive and accessible to targeted groups: 10 (2.5%)

Partner with Organizations that Serve Targeted Groups: Hold joint meetings with academic societies devoted to corresponding fields; undertake initiatives in collaboration with these groups: 10 (2.5%)

Strengthen Career Opportunities: Advocate for the health of the field in general in order to provide more (and more attractive) career opportunities for underrepresented folklorists; promote diversity hires: 10 (2.5%)

** 10 respondents (10.5% of those who responded to this question) found that the activities of the Society are acceptable or encouraging in regards to the presence of women and minorities in its membership and leadership, at least in part or in comparison with other academic societies or fields.*

** 4 respondents (4% of those who responded to this question) felt that any initiatives to increase the presence of women and minorities in the AFS membership and leadership are inherently counterproductive because they single out and reinforce the “other” status of these groups.*

6. Possible New AFS Activities

67 respondents made suggestions for additional activities that AFS should take on. We have grouped suggestions made by 5 people or more into the following categories:

Advocate Folklore in the Academic Sphere: Work to improve the status of the field within the academy; promote the importance of the field to administrators; strengthen the appeal of the field to undergraduates: 9 (2% of total)

Increase International Engagement: Invite and fund more participation by international scholars in the Society; strengthen existing international partnerships and develop new ones: 9 (2%)

Advocate Folklore to the General Public: Increase the presence of AFS and the field in the public; produce new media projects for general audiences (publications, radio/film series, etc.): 8 (2%)

Engage in Activism: Issue policy statements on and participate in issues related to human rights, cultural heritage, etc.; undertake community service: 6 (1.5%)

** 8 respondents (12% of those responding to this question) felt that AFS is already involved in enough or too many activities, and therefore should not take on any new ones.*

7. Existing AFS Activities to Eliminate?

We noted in the survey that the AFS staff is working at full capacity, and that taking on new activities might require eliminating existing ones. 39 respondents made suggestions for current activities that AFS should consider eliminating. We have grouped suggestions made by more than 1 person into the following categories:

Prizes	6	1.5% (of total)
Position statements	4	1%
Inactive sections	3	<1%
International engagements	3	<1%
Involvement with ACLS	3	<1%
Extraneous committees	2	<1%
Public policy working groups	2	<1%
Website	2	<1%