ASSC-I11 Pre-Conference Student Survey

Patrick Wilken

The main aim of the survey was to give students of the association a chance to voice any issues that may be affecting them, and to suggest possible remedies. As our annual meeting is our main activity many of the questions focus specifically on this year’s meeting. However, many of the issues raised (e.g., need for affordable housing) are general ones that affect students on a yearly basis, and can be better addressed given a longer lead-time (e.g., Taipei in 2008).

All members for the ASSC currently classified as students were invited to take part in the survey. Of those invited (148) to fill out the survey 66 (45%) did so. Of these respondents 28 (42%) hope to attend this year’s meeting in ASSC-I11. The survey is divided into two parts: the first with more general questions and was answered by all respondents; the second section deals specifically with issues arising from this year’s meeting answered only by those likely to attend this year’s meeting.

The general sense that comes up again and again by comments made is that students appreciate ASSC meetings specifically because they are social and allow them to mix readily with more senior academics and other students interested in the study of consciousness, something that may be much harder to achieve in larger more discipline orientated events. Activities that help promote this (e.g., mentoring schemes, student social, cheap lunchtime meals where all attendees mix, etc) are to be encouraged. As many students are self-funding to a greater or lesser extent, barriers created by cost should be kept to a minimum, lest we lose those very students we want to encourage.

Some points of interest:

- Our students come from diverse academic background: 42% philosophy, 51% psychology/neuroscience, 5% computer science.

- Most students responding were European based (64%), probably because most joined to attend our last meeting in Oxford. This underlines the point that many of the students who wish to attend our meeting for a second time will have to pay relatively large airfares to do so. Given only 5% of respondents were based in Asia, this is particular issue for next year’s meeting in Taipei.

- Of those wishing to attend this year’s meeting 43% indicated they would do so without ANY financial support. Of those students with some funding most goes towards for travel (94%), with less than half (38%) with funding for accommodation. It is therefore not surprising that 50% of students indicated that were definitely interested in the student committee organizing cheap accommodation, and another 46% potentially interested (concerns raised were distance and quality). Only 6% of respondents indicated that they would have funding to attend the banquet.
There was strong interest in the possibility of the mentor program being repeated this year with 68% indicating definite interest.

Not surprisingly, as the main form of presentation at our meetings is by poster not talk, a number of concerns were raised about the perceived low quality of the poster sessions at recent meetings. The quality of the space and boards at Oxford was particularly bad. This must be improved in future meetings. A number of comments lamented the fact that more senior attendees apparently avoid poster sessions. Students (unsurprisingly and very reasonably) are keen to get useful feedback on their work, and steps should be taken to encourage people to attend the poster sessions (perhaps by avoiding placing poster sessions as the last item of the day so people are not encouraged to skip out for an early dinner (i.e., place a keynote or other session after the poster session), providing some fortifying food and drink, and most importantly provide decent boards and a space where people can move around comfortably).

A number of comments indicated that student prizes for work in previous years were good; they are an easy way of raising the status of presentations (and good on students resumes). The philosophy poster prize is particularly important in this regard as posters are a non-standard form of presentation in philosophy, and any encouragement given to students presenting in this “odd” medium is to be welcomed. It is important to realize that many philosophy departments don’t understand or value the poster medium, and student can have difficulty arguing for funding when presenting in this medium. It certainly doesn’t hurt for them to be able to point the existence of a philosophy prize with very senior philosophers as judges.

There were a number of negative comments made about last year’s student social, with many students indicating they would prefer a more social relaxed evening to mix.

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The following questions were asked of all students of the association (N=66, 45%, of students of the association responded).

1. What is your main field for research? Please select the response that is most relevant.

- Computer science 3 (5%)
- Medicine 1 (2%)
- Neuroscience 12 (18%)
- Philosophy 28 (42%)
- Psychology 16 (24%)
- Other, please specify 6 (9%)
  - 6 x Cognitive Neuroscience
Total 66 (100%)

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2. What type of degree are you currently studying?

- PhD (or equivalent) 50 (76%)
- Masters (or equivalent) 11 (17%)
- Undergraduate 0 (0%)
- I recently graduated, but am still classified as an ASSC student. 4 (6%)
- Other, please specify 3 (5%)  
  - Medical (MB BS)

Total 66 (100%)

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3. What region of the World are you located in? If you are a student studying abroad, please indicate the region you study in.

- Asia 2 (3%)
- Australia, New Zealand, or other Pacific Islands 5 (8%)
- Europe 42 (64%)
- Latin America 1 (2%)
- Middle East 0 0%
- North America (USA or Canada) 16 (24%)

Total 66 (100%)

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4. Have you attended PAST meetings of the ASSC (e.g., Oxford in 2006 or Caltech in 2005)?

- Yes 48 (73%)
- No 18 (27%)

Total 66 (100%)

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5. Please indicate which ASSC meetings you have attended previously.

- ASSC1: Los Angeles (1997) 0 0%
- ASSC2: Bremen (1998) 0 0%
- ASSC3: London, Ontario (1999) 0 0%
- ASSC4: Brussels (2000) 2 4%
6. How would you OVERALL rate your personal experiences at previous ASSC meetings?

- Poor 0 0%
- Fair 2 4%
- Good 23 48%
- Excellent 23 48%

Total 48 100%

7. Do you have any thoughts about PREVIOUS ASSC meetings you have attended? What were your best and/or worse experiences at previous meetings? Any thoughts about how we might do things better next time?

- The student meeting in Antwerp. Discussions with people I admire. Make sure to have plenty of free drinks, that does promote interaction.

- Caltech: informal and communicative atmosphere at the student party. Oxford: student party compared to previous meeting rather disappointing

- I like the fact that the ASSC meetings are relatively small and have an extremely friendly atmosphere, so that one can easily approach people and get into contact with senior faculty as well as other students. This should definitely be kept up. What needs to be improved in my opinion are the poster sessions that at Caltech as well as in Oxford lacked space, time and atmosphere and gave poster presenters (and most of the students that are presenting are actually poster presenters) the feeling of being less appreciated than other presenters. The poster prize for philosophy was a good step towards improving this, but unfortunately had the rather negative consequence of giving the judges no time at all to actually talk to the presenters due to the large number of posters and lack of time. I realize that a lot of people will only get funding if they're presenting and that this is a reason against reducing the number of posters, but I still think that the number of posters needs to be either reduced or there needs to be more time and space to actually look at them. Another idea might be to set up posters so that topics/research areas that are related are located closer to each other. This way, it would be easier for people to find the posters they are interested in and they could stick around longer there instead of having to run back and forth and searching for
particular posters. It might also help people that are working on related topics to get into contact with each other. But there might be reasons against this as well, so just an idea... As far as the student social is concerned, this should be kept low key and informal (no discussions/presentations - or only very short ones), so that people can just relax, have fun and thus get to know each other. There is plenty of academic content during the day and people just need some time to relax and have fun as well. Offer some pizza, barbeque, or chips, some drinks and space to talk and even dance and things will be fine. I also think the mentoring program was a great idea that should be kept up, but needs to be better organized (see below).

- The banquet always was too expensive for me to attend. The quality of the lodging in Oxford was poor, yet very expensive.

- Negative points: Many interesting workshops were temporally overlapping; most controversial or famous workshops were "sold out" immediately; some posters were installed on acrobatically demanding locations positive: vegetarians were well respected! professors, researchers and students did not ALWAYS dine separately;

- Mostly v. good. Will you ask about this later: I thought that the Oxford idea of having a panel discussion during the student social was *not* as good as the Caltech model, in which various well-known individuals simply made themselves available to chat during a 'drinks and nibbles' reception for all student members.

- It would be very useful, if all the key researchers would attend the poster sessions, where students are giving presentations, and would give some feedback to them.

- Of the four I've attended, the Memphis meeting was the least successful, I believe, after that the Oxford meeting. In both cases what was disturbing was the organization rather than the content. The Memphis conference, I felt, was a real shame. It might not seem much, but they didn't even have enough coffee for the people in the early morning, and this is just a marker for the lack of organization that I felt was rampant in the meeting. Oxford, was much better organized except for the location of the lectures, which were in far apart buildings and made it very difficult to move about. Many have complained about it already, and if possible, I too think such a glitch should be avoided in the future. Another problem, which I found many people were bothered about, in the Oxford meeting, was the organization of the poster session. Too many posters inconveniently placed. There was not enough time to see them all, nor enough room to move about between them. As a presenter in that poster session, it was especially bothersome for me. In all these respects the meetings in Belgium, which I have attended were excellent. In terms of content, all of the meetings were excellent, though as a philosopher, I find that the input of philosophy on the issues covered is dwindling. Furthermore, it would be interesting if there could be panel meetings involving researchers from various domains getting together to discuss a topic in addition to the regular lectures. In that way we will be able to see prospects for real interdisciplinary interaction and progress. As it is, though there is much discussion going around between the domains (philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, etc), these usually happen during lunch etc, and much of it involves researchers from these different
domains talking past each other. The field of consciousness studies is not yet mature enough, I believe, for us to assume that interdisciplinary research is a viable possibility. Much more needs to be done to weld the domains together; indeed, to see whether these domains “can” be so welded (there’s too much wishful thinking going on, and not enough actual academic interaction).

- Antwerp was an excellent meeting in all sort of things. The general distribution of conferences was logical, the program was clear so I could make up my mind easily to choose those to follow up. The less well organised part was the social one but the "ambiance" was so nice that we could do it by ourselves. In general, Antwerp was a very nice experience academically and personally speaking.

- Loved it. Keep having gatherings where students can meet and hear the views of senior investigators in the field.

- There were a lot of lectures which I would have liked to attend - but they clashed with other interesting lectures. I know it’s probably a logistical nightmare, but perhaps a more cleverly organised schedule, to avoid clashes?

- poster prize was very good because it intensified the poster sessions

- I would like a bit more structure to the 'student' meetings. Particularly the debates such as those between Tim and Christof in Oxford. The accessibility of the philosophers and scientists is excellent and your attempt at pre-arranging meetings is a good idea which also needs more structure.

- I really like the fact that at ASSC I can talk to well known scientists and philosophers one on one!

- keynotes are excellent.

- Best: Excellent presentations by Zeki, Cotterill, Tononi and many others. Worst: hard to choose from parallel sessions.

- It was very inspiring and motivating to here about such a variety of research. The schedule was quite intense though which made it quite difficult to concentrate all the time!

- open, spontaneous and really interested communication - direct contact to newest research findings

- seemed pretty well organized. The location was very nice.

- The atmosphere and quality of talks / discussions was very good.

- It seemed that the philosophers and scientists often talked past each other, and made little effort to find common ground.
- Had a very intellectually stimulating experience. It was my first solo trip overseas, so there was a learning curve in terms of the travel requirements as well as the conference itself. The worst experience related to jet lag and the feeling that this affected my ability to express myself and ask questions clearly. The best experience was interacting with people in the field who are motivated and passionate about what they do (despite my mental fatigue and being tongue-tied).

- The organizers were very impolite

- Great response to my poster presentation. I enjoyed the cross discipline aspect of the conference but it would have been nice to have a session where people could provide their vision of what consciousness could be.

- The quality of the presentation were extremely high. I was slightly disappointed by the student social event where there was a debate between 2 speakers. It was in a large hall and difficult to hear and get involved, but prevented other smaller meetings and discussions from taking place

- to expensive and exclusive for students. little support with the accommodation and meals.

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22. Do you have any general comments of suggestions for the ASSC student committee? In the best of all possible worlds what would you like the ASSC student committee to do that it is not already doing? Questions here may be fed at a later date into a more general (non-conference) questionnaire to the student membership.

- in a 'perfect' world: Create a postdoc job search website, in which you can get 'inside' views from other postdocs or grad students from other labs

- I think the student committee could help providing a forum for launching some discussions (research topics, interesting papers, ethical questions, practical advice on how to find a good lab_supervisor, tips for finding accommodation for people moving to a new city/country, etc...). The website that is currently being set up would obviously be ideal for that. Ideally, there might be also things like job offers, summer school announcements, books reviews, ect. to be found on the website as well.

- creating mailing lists of narrowed down and specific student research topics can help international student to exchange perspectives. This in turns will result into a non-hierarchical progress in research through sharing novice perspectives next to the supervised research we all undertake. in short, it facilitates self-gained understanding and motivates further international academic exchange; and more importantly, a spirit of motivated international cooperation rather than competition.
- Would be good to organize separate summer schools on specific topics of consciousness studies, if that's not a too large thing to do.

- I think it's doing a good job.

- No, information is good and i have the feeling that when we need help or specific information, we know who ask for.

- That the student evening is more like at caltech and not like in oxford.

- I really appreciated the work of the student committee at the con I attended. Would love to see the development of more regional student activities, such as a second con held within specific areas (in my case Australasia) that emphasises student research presentations. This may also encourage membership from students who find it difficult to travel to the international conferences.

- A social gathering at the meetings . I don’t know whether this is already happening. If not it will be good to meet students with related interests.

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23. As an ASSC student do you have any ideas or thoughts about how the organization could best meet your needs? Ideally, what would you like to gain from the organization?

- basically, the organization should help people getting into contact with each other (senior faculty as well as other students) and promote research by supporting students (psychologically as well as financially). Much of this is already being done and should be continued (Eprints, Psyche, mentoring program, student website, travel funds, student social and student prize are all great ideas), some things could be improved (see comments above). As far as Psyche is concerned, it would be a nice idea to involve some students, for instance as review editors, etc.

- getting to know "trends" of research; encouragement and humane motivation to continue academic work by visiting "persons" rather than published names; identify well worked out, but perhaps taken for granted, perspectives to which less biased student perspectives could contribute in the future; assessment of the standing and potentials of own and fellow students' works; a chance to revise and reactivate already read and sometimes forgotten or taken for granted material and gain new perspectives on problems; locate the inferential relevance of research in various fields for further multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary progress

- Re Relaunch "Psyche": A place (blind refereed, or - if possible? - with referees' / editors' help) for students to publish their work. Of course, this should be a place where quality matters, and not a circus of half-baked ideas!

- Ideally? That you’d require a monograph. Humour aside, I would like to be able to subscribe to an even more discounted print version of ASSC's journal.
- More interdisciplinary interaction - formal interaction rather than during lunch etc. What I would like to gain from the organization is the ability to learn from peers in other fields, who are thinking about consciousness.

- Do not too much segregate students from rest of program. Advanced students should be able to participate at ALL levels.

- an archive of abstracts, events and photos. a forum of discussion for better community building.

- They could organize more summer schools etc.

- May be some reserved time for brainstorming about "the phenomenon of consciousness" beyond the "daily science".

- I see the organisation as a network that can best suit my needs in terms of information dissemination, facilitating contacts, and encouraging growth in my understanding of theory/conceptualisation as well as practical application. What I would like to gain- an increase in my depth of understanding and ability to formulate meaningful research paradigms. In this way I can achieve more from my work on a personal level as well as contribute meaningfully to the field.

- More information about employment opportunities would be fine. Most messages I receive through the lists are kind of self-referential.

- regular news letters

- Definitely, a student gains a lot from organization. The annual meeting creates a platform for meeting faculty with related interests and share the ideas and also to seek mentorship.

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8. Do you intend to attend the ASSC-11 meeting in Las Vegas in June 2007? For the purposes of this question please assume that you will be able to present a paper/poster if you submit one, and/or obtain external funding if necessary.

- Yes 28 42%
- No 38 58%

Total 66 100%

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The remaining questions were only asked of students who indicated that they were intending to attend the ASSC-11 meeting (28 respondents)

9. Do you WISH to present academic material at the forthcoming meeting in Las Vegas?
   - YES - I will submit an abstract for a paper/poster presentation.  22 79%
   - NO - I am attending the meeting as an observer this year.  6 21%

Total 28 100%

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10. Do you expect to have external funding for this year's meeting?
   - YES I have external funding, but only if I give a talk (a poster isn’t enough for funding) 4 14%
   - YES I have external funding, but only if I give a talk/poster (paper/poster presentation = funds).  10 36%
   - YES I have external funding, and funding is not tied to giving presentation at the meeting.  2 7%
   - NO I am self funding.  12 43%

Total 28 100%

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11. If you have external funding for the meeting, what do you expect it to cover? Please select all that apply.
   - I expect to have external funding for travel 15 94%
   - I expect to have external funding for accommodation 6 38%
   - I expect to have external funding for social activities (e.g., banquet) 1 6%
   - I expect to have external funding for daily living expenses 3 19%
   - I have funding for other expenses (please specify) 1 6%

Total 28 100%

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12. Do you have any comments about funding issues at this year's conference that the student committee or organizers should be aware of?
   
   - Yes I would like to know about all the funds and scholarships available for students who want to attend ASSC11 and present their research there.
The funding i am eligible for will cover less then half of the cost of travel

in order to be a fully international conference, some awareness of the extra costs incurred to travel from the southern hemisphere

The housing situation was very bleak. I wish there were affordable places for students at these places. I know there was an attempt by Tristan to set this up, but I ended up paying quite a bit for my accommodation at St. Anne's any way.

no-but of course it is difficult to afford...

I will only be able to attend if I can get funding. I currently have no income.

I don't have external funding, but probably can't come unless I manage to obtain some.

The expenses are so high. It is not so likely students to be able to attend ASSC11. So, they should get financial support from somewhere.

13. The costs of accommodation has been particular issue for some students at previous meetings. Please indicate the MAXIMUM amount of money you could afford to pay for accommodation at this year's meeting IF NECESSARY (i.e., in this question we want to know how much you can AFFORD given your granting level etc, in the next question you will have an opportunity to say how much you prefer to pay).

- < $20 per night  5 18%
- $21 - $40 per night  8 29%
- $41 - $60 per night  6 21%
- $61 - $80 per night  8 29%
- $81 - $100 per night  5 18%
- >$101 per night 0 0%

Total 28 100%

14. What is the PREFERRED amount of money you would be willing to pay for accommodation at this year's meeting (on the assumption that you get what you pay for)?

- < $20 per night  8 29%
- $21 - $40 per night  8 29%
- $41 - $60 per night  5 18%
- $61 - $80 per night  5 18%
15. The ASSC student committee is hoping to book a block of rooms in a cheap hotel or hostel at this year’s conference. Would you be interested in staying there given it is cheap (and perhaps not pretty, but functional), and some distance from the main conference site (though readily accessible via public transportation)?

- YES please, this sounds like a great idea. 14 50%
- NO thanks, but I will stay closer to (or at) the main conference venue. 1 4%
- MAYBE, it would depend on the exact deal on offer. 13 46%

Total 28 100%

16. Do you have any suggestions or comments regarding accommodation at this year’s meeting?

- I don't need much. A place that is quiet to sleep. No TV, living room etc is needed.
- booking online myself at the conference venue at this point in time appears to be cheaper than the blocks of rooms that have been booked
- no-cheap is better
- please not too far so we could enjoy the stay with others.
- Last year’s at Oxford Backpackers was quite terrible.
- I would only be interested in staying somewhere if a large number of students were also staying there and if transport was easily available between the hotel and the conference venue

17. Last year at Oxford the student committee organized a mentoring program. The idea was to bring ASSC students together with more senior members of the association throughout the conference. This was an opportunity for students to have informal access to established researchers, discuss topics, exchange ideas, and get some tips that will guide them in their first steps in their academic careers. Would you be interested in participating in such a program at ASSC-11?
YES, this sounds very interesting. 19 68%

NO, it sounds like a great idea, but I am going to be very busy already. 4 14%

MAYBE, I really have no idea (please only chose this choice if you really are completely ambivalent about this) 5 18%

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18. Do you have suggestions or comments about the mentoring program, and how it might be improved this year? If you participated last year please highlight any problems or benefits you found with the program.

  - I participated last year and thought the idea was great, but unfortunately, there was no organized time/place for meeting you mentor, so unless you had previously arranged something with him/her (which I luckily did) you didn’t actually get into contact much at all (let alone with the other students that had the same mentor, which I actually never met). If you decide to do the mentoring program again, you should set at least one date and place for a first meeting of the students with their mentor in order to make sure that the mentors will definitely be available for talking without getting distracted by other things. Otherwise you risk that they get so busy/distracted with meeting other people (which obviously is also very important) that they might not actually talk to their mentees much at all.

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19. As at previous conferences there will be a student party held on the Saturday night of the meeting. This will be a chance to meet other young researchers, start future collaborations, and most importantly spend some fun time together. Do you have any suggestions about where we might host this event in Las Vegas? Please let us know if you have any thoughts about what you would like to see at this year's student social, and what (if any) could be improved on previous year's events.

  - As stated above I think the student social should be as low key and informal as possible (Caltech was quite good that way, Oxford much less so), so that people can just relax and get to know each other. A barbeque outside might be fun, but as this is rather unlikely to be possible, a friendly bar with some food and cheap drinks might be the best option.

  - maybe hire out a bar?

  - keep it cheap.

  - Music & food!

  - just the obvious, not too loud, good wine (my favourite is kabminye 2005 semillion).
- I always liked how eager academics turned up to talk to us as well as other students. The venue should be relaxed but not too night-cluby - we want to be able to talk.

- More structure.

- Keep it mellow and 'studenty' as a break from the other conference activities.

- See earlier comments. I think an event that allowed students to be more involved and not focused on just another debate between senior researchers.

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21. Do you have any comments or suggestions for this year's meeting that have not already been covered in previous questions? Are there any issues or events you would like the ASSC student committee to deal with/organize for the Las Vegas meeting?

- Multiple prizes for student work.