

Summary: SSAR Membership Diversity Survey 2021

This is a summary of major take-aways from the SSAR Membership Diversity Survey of 2021. A full report is available to those who would like more information, including tables and figures summarizing all responses to all questions.

About the survey

In April-May 2021, SSAR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) created and disseminated a membership diversity survey with several purposes:

- To establish a benchmark for future assessments of SSAR's efforts towards recruiting and retaining a diverse membership through initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- To recognize and welcome people of many identities who make up the current and future membership of SSAR.
- To help SSAR equitably serve the needs of all members.

In designing this survey, we endeavored to be welcoming and respectful to all subcommunities that make up our membership. We know that some topics are delicate, and we did our best to treat them with sensitivity. In case of participant suggestions for ways to improve our future efforts, we included a comment box at the end of the survey. SSAR members may also contact DEIC to provide feedback on the survey and/or this report by using the form on SSAR's website: <https://ssarherps.org/ssar-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-feedback-form/>

The survey had six sections, and we organized the report accordingly:

1. Basic information
2. Nationality, residence, and languages
3. Identities
4. Accommodations
5. Values and relationship with SSAR
6. Additional comments

Response rate

590 responses total

537 of 590 responses were from current members

- SSAR currently has 1156 members excluding institutional membership and subscriptions
- 46% of current members responded to survey

97 of 590 responses were from current student members

- SSAR currently has 239 student members
- 41% of current student members responded to survey

46 of 590 responses were from SSAR leadership (members of the Board of Directors, editors of SSAR publications, and SSAR committee chairs)

- 100% of current leaders responded to survey

General discussion and major take-aways

Many respondents conveyed support and/or appreciation of SSAR's efforts to make our community more equitable and inclusive to a diverse membership.

However, a small (but non-trivial) number of respondents seemed not to understand that not all herpetologists and potential herpetologists currently feel welcome in the community, and some conveyed a strong opposition against efforts to make the society more inclusive to all herpetologists and potential herpetologists. Such respondents often made strongly-worded comments indicating that the SSAR mission should focus exclusively on science and conservation. They expressed the opinion that DEI and social justice issues have no place in SSAR, and that DEI efforts diminish SSAR's scientific endeavor. These mindsets and hateful language towards DEI efforts, even when expressed in the form of an anonymous survey, negatively impact our community.

The Diversity Equity, and Inclusion Committee affirms the necessity of ensuring that anyone can find a welcoming home in SSAR. Our science, conservation, and education missions are only as strong as the community of people we have to carry them out. Thus, we cannot ignore the human element of our endeavor. Continuously working towards greater equity and inclusion in SSAR and in herpetology more generally will ensure the broadest possible pool of talented herpetologists to advance our scientific mission and to protect the animals we love.

Below, we address a few of the survey's findings. We encourage all SSAR leaders and committees to think deeply about the entire report, to consider how its findings might guide their current and future activities, and then to enact positive change on the institutional level. We encourage all SSAR members to learn from these findings and to consider that they as individuals can contribute a more inclusive environment in SSAR and in all their spheres of influence.

Basic information about respondents:

- The majority of SSAR leaders describe their institution as a research-intensive university (52.2%). However, approximately 2/3 of total respondents are not currently at research-intensive universities. Therefore, leadership may need to pay special attention to the needs of members from other types of institutions, especially those underrepresented in SSAR leadership. These include (but are not limited to) community colleges, high schools, government agencies, and industry.
- Nearly 1/3 of respondents were (or expect to be) a first-generation college student. First-generation college students often face particular challenges in navigating academia, so SSAR should consider ways of supporting them.

Nationality, residence, and languages:

- SSAR members reside in numerous countries on nearly every continent, except perhaps Antarctica.
- At least 7% of survey respondents are most comfortable communicating in a language other than English, and many respondents indicated that they would be willing to use a language other than English for a conference presentation (including 19.8% of respondents indicating comfort presenting in Spanish, a substantial portion.)

Respondent identities:

- Most respondents identified as white (83.6%), including the vast majority of SSAR elected officers, editors, and committee chairs (93.5%). Several racial and ethnic groups are severely underrepresented in SSAR, and some are completely unrepresented in SSAR leadership. SSAR leadership must therefore work particularly hard to understand and remove barriers to their participation.
- Of the respondents who responded to the question on gender identity, women are underrepresented relative to men (125 vs. 411 people, or 25.8% vs. 69.7% of total respondents). Women are also underrepresented, though to a somewhat lesser degree, among SSAR leadership (17 vs. 28 people, or 37% vs. 60.9% of total leaders). This result highlights that SSAR has not overcome herpetology's historical gender disparity.
- Several SSAR members identify as transgender, gender non-binary, agender, and/or genderqueer. Because trans, non-binary, agender, and genderqueer people often face

challenges or obstacles that are unfamiliar or surprising to cis-gender people, SSAR leadership should pay special attention to understanding the needs of these members.

- A substantial fraction of respondents identified as members of the neurodiversity community (e.g., autistic, ADHD, dyslexia; 9.2%). SSAR leadership should pay special attention to understanding the needs of these members.
- A substantial fraction of respondents indicated that religion is a part of their identity (14.9%). Anecdotally, many religious scientists report facing unfair stigma and even hostility for their beliefs.

Accommodations:

- Many SSAR members have conditions for which accommodations may help them participate more fully in events and meetings (e.g., deaf or hard of hearing, mobility impairment, learning different/disability, visual condition/impairment, etc.) Meeting and event organizers should learn about and implement accommodations whenever possible.
- A substantial portion of respondents are parents who have brought or have considered bringing their children to conferences (92 people, 15.6%), and about half of those have concerns about barriers to their child's participation (45 people, or 7.6%). Making childcare options more available, accessible, and affordable would facilitate participation of more SSAR members in the annual meetings.
- The cost of annual meetings represents a significant barrier to many members, especially people from lower income nations, students, retirees, and people from institutions that don't cover conference expenses. SSAR leadership and the Meeting Management and Planning Committee should continually look for new ways to make meetings more financially accessible.

Values and relationship to SSAR:

- Of the benefits of SSAR membership, the three most highly valued by respondents were: 1) journals, 2) sharing knowledge, and 3) SSAR's conservation mission. More than 75% of respondents ranked these as either "important" or "very important."
- When exploring whether different groups of people place different values on the potential benefits of SSAR membership, the following groups generally mirrored the patterns seen for all respondents pooled: 1) people who have been SSAR members for 11+ years; 2) students; 3) women; 4) people who identify their race/ethnicity/geographic origin as anything other than exclusively white; and 5) people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents. A major exception is that students placed much higher value on grant opportunities.
- Most respondents would like for SSAR to communicate with them via the monthly email newsletter (87.5%), with a large number also indicating that they like for SSAR to send emails outside the monthly newsletter (41.7%) and fewer people indicating that they like

SSAR to communicate via Facebook (12.5%), Twitter (11.7%), or other methods (e.g., TikTok or Herp Review, 0.7%).

- 33.7% of respondents indicated that they feel a sense of belonging in SSAR all or most of the time; 50.6% that they feel a sense of belonging sometimes, or in some ways but not others; and 12.6% that they do not feel a sense of belonging. However, several groups of people indicated lower rates of feeling a sense of belonging (as compared to the whole sample), including women, people who identify their race/ethnicity/geographic origin as anything other than exclusively white, people who identify as LGBTQ+, and people who identify as part of the neurodiversity community.
- Alienation represents a substantial barrier to sense of belonging, with 64 respondents reporting that they have felt alienated or excluded due to some aspect of their identity, their type of employment, etc. SSAR and conference planners should explore and implement a variety of approaches to eliminate alienating behaviors and other barriers, and to proactively facilitate integration into the community.
- A non-trivial proportion of respondents have experienced microaggressions, inequity, or unwelcoming treatment at SSAR-hosted events or professional activities (29 people, or 4.9% of all respondents). Rates were higher for people who indicated that they would benefit from accommodations for full participation in SSAR and/or annual meetings (11.3%); parents (9.9%), and people who identify their race/ethnicity/geographic origin as anything other than exclusively white (8.2%).

The 2021 SSAR membership survey and report were prepared by the SSAR Diversity Equity, and Inclusion Committee: Jennifer M. Deitloff (co-chair), Robert E. Espinoza (co-chair), Jessica L. Tingle (co-chair), Itzue W. Caviedes-Solis, Kate Jackson, Fausto Mendez de la Cruz, Ann V. Paterson, Evan S. H. Quah, Phillip Skipwith, and Gregory Watkins-Colwell.