

Summary of ACC 2013 Post-Conference Survey Results

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1. Introduction

The operating committee of the 2013 American Control Conference (held in Washington, DC) conducted an online survey to obtain feedback regarding the conference. The survey was set up using Survey Monkey and requests to complete the survey were sent out by Alessandro Astolfi via Paperplaza to all 1475 conference registrants on July 8, 2013, about two-and-a-half weeks after the close of the conference (June 17 – 19, 2013). The registrants were told that the survey would close on July 24, 2013.

There were 504 responses to the survey (for a response rate of 34.2%), where a handful responded after July 24. The survey was in the end closed off on August 1. The response rates of the last two ACC surveys were 27% (ACC12) and 20% (ACC07).

All responses were anonymous and all questions were optional.

The survey consisted of 10 “questions.” Seven of the questions were multiple-choice or contained several parts that were multiple-choice; in some of these questions, respondents were also given the option of providing additional comments. The last three questions of the survey were more open-ended, and allowed additional free-form comments from the respondents. Following the same format that Tariq Samad (ACC 2012 General Chair) used in his summary of the ACC 2012 survey results, Section 2 lists the survey questions and provides the response statistics for the multiple-choice questions. Section 3 summarizes the text comments from the survey respondents.

A complete download of the survey results has also been distributed to leaders of the American Automatic Control Council (AACC) and the General Chairs of upcoming ACCs.

2. The Survey Questions and Multiple-choice Responses

Since many of the questions are the same as in the ACC12 post-conference survey, we provide comparison results in a side-by-side format where possible. We also include comparisons with the ACC07 survey results where possible, although the questions differ more with that survey.

Q1. Overall, ACC 2013 . . .

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Exceeded my expectations | 23.2% |
| Met my expectations | 69.3% |
| Did not live up to my expectations | 7.5% |

ACC 2012 results

| |
|-------|
| 31.5% |
| 65.6% |
| 2.9% |

The closest question in the ACC07 survey was the following: “Overall, the 2007 ACC was excellent.” The results were as follows: Strongly agree: 15.3%; Agree: 58.3%; Neutral: 16.5%; Disagree: 8.7%; Strongly disagree: 1.2%.

Q2. Tell us what you thought of ACC 2013

| | Agree | Disagree |
|--|-------|----------|
| The quality of the papers and presentations was high | 73% | 5% |
| The quality of the plenary, semi-plenary, and public lectures was high ¹ | 70% | 7% |
| The quality of the workshops was high | 66% | 2% |
| I enjoyed the new topics being brought into the ACC through the tutorial sessions ² | 75% | 2% |
| The quality of the industry-sponsored lunchtime sessions was high | 60% | 5% |
| The quality of the conference facilities was high | 81% | 7% |
| I enjoyed the opening and/or closing receptions | 81% | 4% |
| I enjoyed the evening banquet at the National Air and Space Museum ² | 91% | 4% |
| The exhibits are a valuable part of the conference | 71% | 5% |
| The ACC 2013 website was easy to use and informative | 83% | 4% |
| PaperPlaza (the submission and registration site) was easy to use | 87% | 4% |

ACC 2012 results

| Agree | Disagree |
|-------|----------|
| 75% | 6% |
| 73% | 5% |
| 64% | 10% |
| | |
| 65% | 5% |
| 84% | 5% |
| 90% | 3% |
| | |
| 71% | 5% |
| 82% | 4% |
| 81% | 5% |

¹In 2012, the statement “The quality of the plenary and semi-plenary lectures was high” was used in the survey.

²These statements were not included in the ACC 2012 survey.

The “Agree” percentage above combines the Strongly Agree and Agree answer options in the survey. The “Disagree” percentage similarly combines the Disagree and Strongly Disagree options. A Neutral option was also available, as was a “Not Applicable” option (e.g., in case the respondent did not attend a workshop, etc.). The statistics above are normalized after removing all “Not Applicable” responses (so that the percentages above represent the percentages of respondents who participated in that activity (e.g., workshops, or lunchtime sessions, etc.)).

Respondents also had the opportunity to provide text comments for this question. See Section 3 of this report for a summary of these.

Q3. Please give us some feedback for future ACCs

| | Agree | Disagree |
|--|-------|----------|
| I prefer the traditional hotel lunch banquet rather than an evening banquet held off-site ³ | 16% | 66% |
| ACCs should continue to hold public lecture ³ | 78% | 3% |
| I would like to see more introductory workshops on broad topics in control ³ | 64% | 4% |
| ACCs should include poster/interactive sessions | 42% | 25% |
| I would like to see ACCs held outside the US | 42% | 26% |
| ACCs should have “theme” topics (2013 themes were Societal Challenges, Smart Healthcare, and Sustainability) | 41% | 15% |

ACC 2012 results

| Agree | Disagree |
|-------|----------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| 42% | 23% |
| 64% | 12% |
| 39% | 22% |

³These statements were not included in the ACC 2012 survey.

As above, the “Agree” and “Disagree” percentages each combine two answer options in the survey and a Neutral option was available. A “Not Applicable” option was not offered here. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide text comments for this question. See the next section of this report for a summary of these.

Q4. How many ACCs had you attended before this one?

ACC 2012 results

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| ACC 2013 was my first | 49.0% |
| 2 – 4 | 24.8% |
| 5+ | 26.2% |

| |
|-------|
| 51.7% |
| 26.8% |
| 21.5% |

First-time attendance was reported as 41% in the ACC 2007 survey.

Q5. What is your primary affiliation?

ACC 2013 results

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| University faculty/staff | 44.7% |
| University student | 40.8% |
| Industry | 11.3% |
| Government | 1.2% |
| Other (please specify) | 2.0% |

ACC 2012 results

| |
|-------|
| 46.9% |
| 42.1% |
| 8.9% |
| 1.3% |
| 0.8% |

ACC 2007 results

| |
|-------|
| 65.5% |
| 18.8% |
| 9.8% |
| 3.5% |
| 2.4% |

In our ACC 2013 survey, those who answered “Other” specified that they were science publishers or worked at research centers or institutes.

Note the higher student participation in ACC12 and ACC13 compared to ACC07. (ACC07 was held in New York City).

Q6. Which ACC sponsor societies are you a member of?

ACC 2013 results

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| AIAA | 14.2% |
| AICHE | 4.7% |
| ASCE | 0.3% |
| ASME | 18.1% |
| IEEE | 82.8% |
| ISA | 2.7% |
| SCS | 0 |
| SIAM | 10.7% |
| Other ⁴ | 5.6% |

ACC 2012 results

| |
|-------|
| 11.5% |
| 5.0% |
| 1.4% |
| 19.8% |
| 84.2% |
| 1.4% |
| 0 |
| 8.3% |

⁴This option was not included in the ACC 2012 survey.

Many attendees are members of multiple societies.

Q7. What is your current geographical affiliation?

ACC 2013 results

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Africa | 0.7% |
| Asia | 11.7% |
| Australia/New Zealand | 1.0% |
| Canada | 4.9% |
| Central/South America | 4.7% |
| Europe | 21.0% |
| United States | 54.0% |
| Other ⁵ | 2.0% |

ACC 2012 results

| |
|-------|
| 0.0% |
| 7.4% |
| 0.8% |
| 15.6% |
| 2.1% |
| 33.4% |
| 40.6% |

⁵This option was not included in the ACC 2012 survey.

We used the same categories as the 2012 survey, but added an “Other” option. ACC12 was in Montreal, Canada. In the 2013 survey, those who answered “Other” mostly specified “Mexico”, “North America”, or “Middle East”.

Q8. What did you like best about ACC 2013?

Q9. What did you like least about ACC 2013?

Q10. Any other comments that could help us improve future ACCs?

Text fields were provided for answers to Q8 – Q10. Responses are summarized in the next section.

3. Comments by Survey Respondents

A total of 570 free-form comments (which amazingly is the exact same number of comments entered by respondents to ACC12's survey the previous year) were entered by survey respondents in Questions 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10. In many cases, comments related to the same topic appeared in answers to different questions. The major findings are summarized below under multiple headings.

Following a similar format as the ACC12 survey summary, while we point out a number of issues raised in the comments, we do note that overall the feedback was extremely positive and a pleasure to read through (see the last heading below).

Technical program

David Mindell's public lecture received a number of positive comments. There were some recommendations on more broadly advertising the public lecture. We did advertise the talk through the local universities and local professional society branches (like IEEE, etc.). The Operating Committee decided against putting an ad in the Washington Post after learning that it would cost approximately \$10,000 to do so. We recommend experimenting with other methods of advertising for future public lectures.

While there were both positive and negative comments on the quality of the presentations and papers, the positive statements noticeably outnumber the critical ones. A useful recommendation for improving the quality of presentations is to have some links available on the conference website where guidelines for talk preparation are given. Of course the final burden is on the authors to seek out and follow these guidelines to produce high quality talks.

There were approximately an equal number of positive and negative comments regarding the number of papers and parallel tracks at ACC13. Some feel that the conference is too overwhelming and difficult to navigate with that many parallel sessions, while others enjoy the choices and diversity of papers offered with this format. Future General Chairs should weigh these decisions carefully with respect to the number of submissions and the size of the hotel.

Several respondents indicated that they enjoyed various invited and tutorial sessions. Though, a few respondents commented that they would like to see more complete tutorial session papers rather than just a short abstract of the paper in the proceedings. Since some tutorial papers are from industry, and due to intellectual property issues which may preclude an industry author from submitting and presenting their work, ACC allows tutorial session authors to have the choice of submitting only an abstract for their final-form paper; this is done in order to promote more industry participation at ACCs.

Several commented positively that they liked the sessions and presentations that showcased applications and industrial research.

A few of the workshops also received special mention in the comments, where some respondents indicated that they especially liked the workshops (such as the one on active disturbance rejection) that allowed for plenty of open discussion on the subject matter.

Some of the special sessions held over the lunch break also received commendations, in particular the ones on Massive Open Online Courses and Cyberphysical Systems.

Similar to last year, ACC13 survey respondents had mixed opinions on whether ACCs should have theme topics or poster/interactive sessions. A few respondents did say that they liked the themes (especially the Sustainability theme) and enjoyed attending more sessions than were available in recent past ACCs on these theme-related topic areas.

Several attendees requested more programming or activities geared for young scholars and graduate students.

Receptions, the conference banquet, and coffee breaks

The evening banquet at the National Air and Space Museum received a remarkably large number (over 100) of enthusiastic reviews. Attendees also generally enjoyed the opening and closing receptions, though there were a few comments requesting that more vegetarian options be provided at future ACCs.

The coffee breaks were overcrowded, and the food ran out at some stations. A couple respondents stated that there were not enough seats in the conference areas where attendees could hold informal discussions.

The conference country, city, and hotel

Many attendees commented positively about the great downtown Washington, DC location. They enjoyed the city and took advantage of the opportunity to visit numerous nearby museums and monuments.

In contrast to attendees of ACC12 (which was held in Montreal, Canada), ACC13 attendees were less enthusiastic on holding future ACCs outside of the US. While there were several recommendations for more ACCs outside of the US, there were as many against the idea, largely due to affordability issues.

There were also mixed reviews of the hotel. Some enjoyed the facilities, while others found some presentation rooms too hot and others too cold. Due to (unexpected) record registration numbers, sleeping rooms at the conference hotel were very quickly booked up and some attendees had to stay at other hotels. We have already recommended to future ACC General Chairs that they negotiate larger hotel room blocks or include more flexibility in their hotel contracts to increase their room blocks as the date of the conference gets closer. (For those unfamiliar with conference organization, ACC hotel contracts are typically negotiated and signed 4 years in advance, and there usually is a large financial penalty if ACC does not 'meet' the indicated room block requirement.)

Several respondents were annoyed (as were the members of the ACC13 Operating Committee) that the hotel had to move some of the ACC presentation sessions to different rooms at the last minute due to multiple hotel overbooking errors.

Conference App

There were mixed reviews on the conference mobile app. As the number of options and competition for these apps increase, it is recommended that future operating committees compare and evaluate new options as they become available for potential adoption at future ACCs.

There were a few comments criticizing the conference bag.

Selected favorite comments!

We thank all respondents for taking the time to complete the ACC13 survey. Organizers of future ACCs will be working to address the mentioned issues as best they can, though we do hope that respondents realize that there

is a spectrum of opinions among all attendees, and that organizers who volunteer their time do their best to make ACCs enjoyable and technically rich conferences.

We definitely appreciate the outpouring of positive comments in the survey! Here are a few selected favorites:

“Outstanding organization team. Great venue. Excellent conference.”

“I really enjoyed the evening at the NASM; having the opportunity to walk around the exhibits with colleagues was a great event during the week in DC.”

“It is the best conference!”

“Evening banquet at NASM was a brilliant and stimulating place to relax and network, thank you.”

“The evening at the Air & Space Museum was the best conference ‘banquet’ EVER!!”

“The best things about ACC13 were the city and the off-site event. This was the best off-site event of any conference that I have ever attended.”

“The Banquet night was definitely a great idea!! I hope that it will be the same concept for the next conferences.”

“Well organized, smooth running, congratulations!”

“If an evening banquet could be always held at a museum or something along those lines, that would be great.”

“I felt that this conference was better organized than other ACCs that I attended.”

“Great conference! Quality papers and well-organized event with excellent networking/social opportunities.”

“You've set a high bar...”

“Really enjoyed the conference. Good job. Keep it up.”