# Summary of ACC 2012 Survey Results

*Compiled by Tariq Samad, ACC 2012 General Chair (samad@ieee.org)*

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## 1. Introduction

The operating committee of the 2012 American Control Conference conducted an online survey of all conference registrants. The survey was distributed on July 11, 12 days after the close of the conference (June 27 – 29). The registrants had 10 days to complete the survey. All responses were anonymous and all questions were optional.

The following section lists the survey questions and includes the responses to the multiple-choice questions. Section 3 summarizes the text comments from survey respondents.

382 registrants submitted their feedback, for a very respectable 27% response rate (the response rate for the last ACC survey, after the 2007 conference, was 20%).

A more detailed compilation of the survey results has also been prepared and distributed to leaders of the American Automatic Control Council and chairs of upcoming ACCs.

## 2. The Survey Questions and Multiple-choice Responses

The survey consisted of 14 "questions," listed below. Answers to multiple-choice questions are also included.

**Q 1. Overall, ACC 2012 . . .**

| | |
|---|---|
| Exceeded my expectations | 31.5% |
| Met my expectations | 65.6% |
| Did not live up to my expectations | 2.9% |

The corresponding, but not directly comparable, question in the 2007 survey was the following: "Overall, the 2007 ACC was excellent." Respondents were also asked to rate using the same labels. The results were as follows: Strongly agree: 15.3%; Agree: 58.3%; Neutral: 16.5%; Disagree: 8.7%; Strongly disagree: 1.2%.

**Q 2. Tell us what you thought of ACC 2012**

| | Agree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|
| The quality of the papers and presentations was high | 75% | 6% |
| The quality of the plenary and semi-plenary lectures was high | 73% | 5% |
| The quality of the workshops was high | 64% | 10% |
| The quality of the industry-sponsored lunchtime sessions was high | 65% | 5% |
| The quality of the evening special sessions was high | 80% | 3% |
| The quality of the conference facilities was high | 84% | 5% |
| I enjoyed the opening and/or closing receptions | 90% | 3% |
| The exhibits are a valuable part of the conference | 71% | 5% |
| The ACC 2012 website was easy to use and informative | 82% | 4% |
| PaperPlaza (the submission and registration site) was easy to use | 81% | 5% |

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

**Q 3. Please give us some feedback for future ACCs**

|  | Agree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|
| I would like to see more ACCs held outside the US | 64% | 12% |
| ACCs should include poster/interactive sessions | 42% | 23% |
| I prefer opening and closing receptions in the conference hotel, not off-site | 41% | 19% |
| ACCs should have "theme" topics (2012 themes were aerospace systems and power systems) | 39% | 22% |

As above, the "Agree" and "Disagree" percentages each combine two answer options in the survey and a Neutral option was available. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide text comments for this question. See the next section of this report for a summary of these.

**Q 4. Would you prefer to receive proceedings on . . .**

| USB flash drive only | 58.0% |
|---|---|
| CD only | 3.7% |
| Both USB flash drive and CD | 38.3% |

USBs are generally preferred. However, some employers restrict their use on their equipment.

**Q 5. Are there topics you would like to see covered in ACC workshops?**

A text field was provided for suggestions. See the next section of this report for a summary.

**Q 6. Are there topics you would like to see covered in evening/special sessions at ACC?**

A text field was provided for suggestions. See the next section of this report for a summary.

**Q 7. How many ACCs had you attended before this one?**

| ACC 2012 was my first | 51.7% |
|---|---|
| 2 – 4 | 26.8% |
| 5+ | 21.5% |

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

**Q 8. What is the likelihood you will attend ACC 2013?**

| Highly likely to attend | 43.7% |
|---|---|
| Somewhat likely to attend | 37.9% |
| Somewhat unlikely to attend | 12.1% |
| Highly unlikely to attend | 6.3% |

**Q 9.  What is your primary affiliation?**

| University faculty/staff | 46.9% |
|---|---|
| University student | 42.1% |
| Industry | 8.9% |
| Government | 1.3% |
| Other | 0.8% |

2007 responses:  65.5%, 18.8%, 9.8%, 3.5%, and 2.4% respectively.  Note the increase in student participation.

**Q 10.  What is your current geographical affiliation?**

| Africa | 0 |
|---|---|
| Asia | 7.4% |
| Australia/New Zealand | 0.8% |
| Canada | 15.6% |
| Central/South America | 2.1% |
| Europe | 33.4% |
| United States | 40.6% |

**Q 11.  Which ACC sponsor societies are you a member of?**

| AIAA | 11.5% |
|---|---|
| AIChE | 5.0% |
| ASCE | 1.4% |
| ASME | 19.8% |
| IEEE | 84.2% |
| ISA | 1.4% |
| SCS | 0 |
| SIAM | 8.3% |

104 respondents skipped this question; the percentages above are based on the 278 respondents who answered the question.  We did not have a separate answer option for "none of the above" but it may be a reasonable assumption that 104/382 (37%) of the respondents do not belong to any of the ACC societies.

**Q 12.  What did you like best about ACC 2012?**

**Q 13.  What did you like least about ACC 2012?**

**Q 14.  Any other comments that could help us improve future ACCs?**

Text fields were provided for answers to Q 12 – 14.  Responses are summarized in the next section.


## 3.  Comments by Survey Respondents

A total of 570 comments were entered by survey respondents in the space for text input provided in questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, and 14.  In many cases comments related to the same topic appeared in answers to different questions.  Salient findings are summarized below under several headings.

Although we point out several issues raised in the comments, the feedback overall was very positive and gratifying for the organizers (see the last heading below).

**Technical program**

Positive comments on the quality of papers and plenary-session presentations outnumbered complaints substantially.  The plenary lecture by Karl Astrom was noted as a highlight.  This plenary lecture, a perspective covering the history, accomplishments, and prospects of the field, was a departure from the usual formula for plenary and semi-plenary lectures at control conferences, which discuss the speaker's research work.

The low ceiling in one of the semi-plenary rooms limited the visibility of the screen for most of the audience.

Tutorial and invited sessions also received positive feedback, although a couple of respondents were disappointed that few of the tutorial presentations had accompanying papers.

We had significant numbers of both positive and negative comments about the quality of presentations.  It's clear that the variability of presentations in ACC and similar conferences is high, with many presentations providing little value to the audience.

Some respondents thought that ACC 2012 had a good balance of theory and application papers, but a few felt that theory was de-emphasized.

The number of parallel sessions was a plus to some respondents but a negative to about as many others.  A couple of respondents suggested extending the conference to four or five days, others suggested raising the acceptance bar (we note that the acceptance rate for ACC 2012 was as low or lower than any ACC for which we have records).

We received a few comments regarding the best-presentation-in-session awards—viz., these should be better advertised and the awardee list should be available through the end of the conference (and online afterwards).

Opinions on conference themes as well as poster/interactive sessions were mixed—both pros and cons were mentioned.

**Workshops**

We received dozens of suggestions for workshop topics.  The following each received multiple votes:

- Systems biology and biomedical/healthcare technologies
- Smart grid, power systems, and renewable generation
- Distributed parameter systems and partial differential equations
- Cooperative and decentralized control; multi-agent systems
- Control education
- Topics that encourage interactions between control and other fields—social sciences, for example

The relatively high price of ACC workshops compared to some other control-related conferences was noted.

**Special sessions**

The evening sessions received particularly favorable reviews.  The sessions on job hunting, education, industry-academic collaboration, and flocking/dance were especially popular.

Additional suggestions for future ACCs included special sessions on the history and future directions of control and more tutorial-oriented sessions for nonexperts in emerging areas.

**Receptions, the conference lunch, and coffee breaks**

The opening (especially) and closing receptions got high marks.  A number of respondents remarked about the quantity and quality of food and the open bar!

According to one respondent, "This year's ACC receptions were the best I have ever seen, and I have been attending JACC and ACC meetings since 1970."

The lunch banquet was crowded and rushed.  The room was filled to capacity, the time allotted was too short, and the presentations during the banquet were hard to hear in some parts of the room with the food service ongoing.

In a similar vein, there were complaints about the coffee breaks between sessions, which were also crowded. The lack of seating space was also remarked upon.

**The conference country, city, and hotel**

We received overwhelmingly positive remarks about Montréal. Many respondents enjoyed the city and took advantage of the Jazz Festival.

Respondents expressed strong interest in future outside-US ACCs, especially repeat trips to Canada. A few concerns were also raised, such as difficulties faced by foreign students in the US and possible additional expenses.

A number of respondents liked the fact that virtually all the session rooms were in the same area on the same floor, facilitating networking.

**Other topics**

We received several comments regarding PaperPlaza, related both to paper submissions and registration. These comments have been forwarded to the supplier of the software.

The first-ever ACC mobile "app" was a big hit with participants.

Some respondents felt that the exhibits should not be held in a separate room. More industrial companies and demonstrations were also suggested.

Based on the feedback, the first-ever ACC music jam was a success.

Some respondents remarked favorably on the Internet access and the availability of laptops in session rooms.

**At the risk of self-promotion . . . a few of our favorite comments!**

"Conference was awesome, …Was really nice to see other interesting talks and network with others working on similar and different research projects."

"My congratulations to the organizers for a job well done. Organizing a conference is a big job, and you made sure that everything was done first class. …. I enjoyed myself tremendously in all regards."

"Congratulations. It is the first time in over 40 years of attending control conferences that I receive a survey on the quality of the conference. Hope the feedback is valuable and put to work on a permanent basis."

"Overall a very enjoyable and well-organized conference! All of the little details were appreciated – all day coffee, easy Wi-Fi access, good choice of venue (close to Jazz festival and other sightseeing), the crossword in the book, etc. "

"Overall, one of the (if not the) best ACCs I've attended. Kudos to the organizers."

"The logistics management was the best this time when I look back at the last 4 ACCs I've attended."

"This was an extremely well put together conference, which ran like clockwork and had good resources available in times of need. Thank you for all the organization and effort put into the event."

"Congratulations. This was a memorable conference. Excellent organization."

"Keep up the tradition of excellence."

"For me, it was the best large IEEE conference (ACCs and CDCs) in the last three years."

"Best ACC I have ever attended."