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# Chairperson's Corner

By Anders Larson

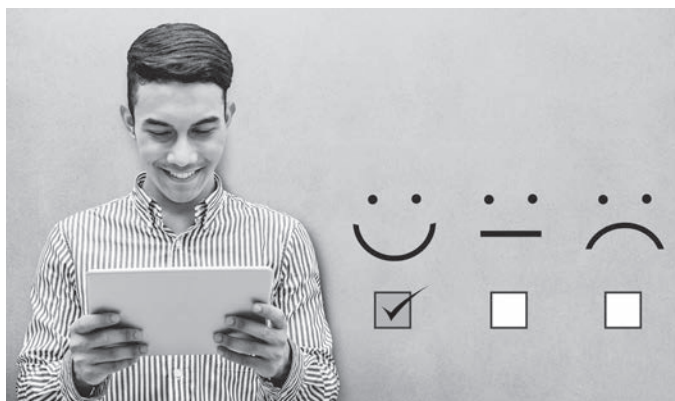
As you may be aware, the Predictive Analytics and Futurism (PAF) section membership has more than doubled in the past three years, faster than any other section in the SOA, and we want to be sure we are providing the value that our present-day membership is looking for. We had valuable information from a 2017 survey of SOA members who had recently left the section, but the sample size was relatively small and only represented the voices of the few members who were dropping their section membership. The section leadership felt an additional survey of current members was warranted, and in early 2018, we sent a voluntary questionnaire to all current PAF section members.

More than 250 of you responded, and in my opinion, you provided exactly the type of feedback we needed. In general, the feedback was positive, but we weren't just looking for a pat on the back. We wanted to understand what's working, what's not working, and what we can do to make the PAF section membership more valuable. After several months of review and discussion among the council members and friends of the council, we settled on two new initiatives that we are pursuing in response to your feedback, and I'm excited to unveil those initiatives to you here.

Asked why you joined the PAF section, 71 percent of you said it was to learn more about predictive analytics and futurism.

But before I get to the initiatives themselves, let's review some of the key points we took away from the survey results.

**PAF members want to learn.** Asked why you joined the PAF section, 71 percent of you said it was to learn more about predictive analytics and futurism, as opposed to staying up to date with SOA activities or networking. We believe we already have a strong focus on developing and providing educational content, and we intend to strengthen and expand our efforts in this area.



**The newsletter is still our crown jewel.** More than 45 percent of you were “very satisfied” with our newsletter, which was higher than any other specific area we polled. That's good to hear, because you'll be getting newsletters more often. Starting in 2018, we increased the frequency of newsletters to three times per year.

**Hands-on is better.** PAF members are interested more in the “how” than the “what.” The material we cover is highly technical, and we need to find better ways to help members apply what they're learning to their job. Many respondents noted specifically that they were looking to us for hands-on guidance, either in person or in some sort of interactive format.

**Networking and discounts to events are weak spots.** These are the two areas where we had more “not very satisfied” responses than “very satisfied” responses. Starting in 2018, section members have free access to PAF-sponsored webcasts that are at least one year old and will get a \$25 discount for all webcasts sponsored by the section during the year. We hope that these incentives at least partially address the concerns about discounts. Improvements to networking options, on the other hand, have not yet been addressed.

**We're doing a pretty good job right now, but there is room to improve.** Only 3 percent of members were not satisfied with their section membership, which is great news. However, 60 percent of you said you were “somewhat satisfied,” compared to just 37 percent who were “very satisfied.” Let's see if we can get those two numbers reversed in the next few years.

So, what are we doing in response to these findings? Well, first, let's be clear that we're going to continue doing much of what we have been: producing a newsletter, recording podcasts, sponsoring webcasts, planning the annual Predictive Analytics Symposium, and coordinating sessions at major SOA meetings. But we want to do more:

**Jupyter Notebook Contest.** We will be sponsoring a contest for section members to create a Jupyter Notebook document

showing how predictive analytics techniques can be applied to actuarial problems. The top entries will receive prizes and their winning Notebooks will be posted on the PAF section web site.

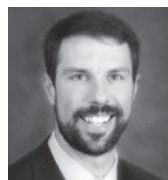
Jupyter Notebooks are documents that contain both computer code (in Python, R or other languages) and rich text elements (paragraphs, equations, figures, links, etc.). They are simultaneously human-readable documents and executable documents that can be run to perform data analysis. We believe they have tremendous value as learning tools for our membership—the document can be understood and executed even by readers who are not yet proficient in the underlying programming language. The rich-text elements can allow the Notebook creators to illustrate exactly how an actuarial problem can be addressed with predictive analytics techniques. This is why we’re posting the winning Notebooks on the PAF section website—not only do we want to celebrate the winning creators, but we want to use their work to help us all learn!

**Hack-a-thon.** At the conclusion or start of an SOA meeting (such as the Predictive Analytics Symposium), the PAF section will sponsor a multi-hour, free-form session (“Hack-a-thon”) where meeting attendees can code against sample data, work

collaboratively and receive guidance from predictive analytics experts. We believe the standard SOA meeting sessions are certainly valuable, but implementing these techniques takes practice. And that practice becomes much easier if you have others to help brainstorm and troubleshoot (as opposed to, say, Google-searching your error messages repeatedly).

We are in the preliminary planning stages right now, but we anticipate sponsoring our first Hack-a-thon sometime in 2019. Be on the look-out for more information over the coming months.

Again, thank you for making us the fastest-growing section in the SOA, and thank you for providing us with the feedback we need to continue adding value to your section membership. These new initiatives represent two more steps in our evolution, and we’re excited to get started! ■



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