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A READERSHIP SURVEY OF ANR, THE COLLEGE
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE

presented by

Laurie Wink

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A READERSHIP SURVEY OF ANR, THE COLLEGE
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE

By

Laurie Wink

A THESIS

Submitted to
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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

A READERSHIP SURVEY OF ANR, THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE

By

Laurie Wink

A mail questionnaire was used to survey a random sample of alumni magazine readers. A 76 percent response rate was achieved by incorporating successful techniques used in other mail surveys.

Results supported the hypothesis that ANR is generally well-received by its audience. Most respondents reported reading all or most of each issue. A majority gave favorable ratings on the magazine's appearance and writing quality and considered it a reliable information source.

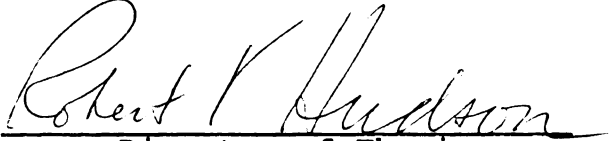
The survey also showed the editor's perceptions of reader interests were not entirely accurate. Findings suggested the content should provide a mixture of in-depth features and news items. Alumni profiles and class notes, content categories not previously included, received widespread support from respondents. Survey participants were also interested in opinion pieces on agriculture and

Laurie Wink

natural resources issues and letters to the editor.

Suggested editorial changes could enhance the magazine's purpose of facilitating communication between the College and alumni.

Accepted by the faculty of the School of
Journalism, College of Communication Arts and Sciences,
Michigan State University, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Arts degree.


Director of Thesis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A university maintains strength to discharge its educational responsibilities through public support. This public support is not automatic. It can come only from deep conviction, based upon real understanding and full confidence, engendered by sound public information.¹

The public is not one integrated body, but a mass of smaller publics. Alumni constitute one of the most important of these smaller publics to a university because they have a more intimate association with the institution than other segments of the public and, therefore, can appreciate its objectives, know its needs and interpret its requirements to those in a position to help. Consequently, an effective alumni magazine is a "must," according to Schoenfeld, because it is "the one constant, tangible link between the college and its rather amorphous body of alumni."²

While alumni magazines are considered one of the most effective means an institution has to promote alumni support and understanding, the success of any publication

¹Clarence A. Schoenfeld, The University and Its Publics (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), p. 170.

²Ibid., pp. 216-217.

depends to a large extent on how well the editor judges reader interests.³ Studying letters from readers is a common but unreliable method of determining reader interest. Few people write letters, Wolseley points out, and those that do are not likely to represent reader opinions in general.⁴ A study of one alumni publication found that, while letters were regularly requested from readers, few were received and they were largely the "we love you" type.⁵

A 1970 national survey of the information needs among daily newspaper publishers showed that about half of them had a "great need" for information in the category of "newspaper image," referring to how the newspaper is perceived by its audience. In the same survey, 42 percent of the publishers reported a "great need" for information in the category of "editing," referring to product improvement to satisfy current readers and to attract new readers.⁶

³Guido H. Stempel III, "A Factor Analytic Study of Reader Interest in News," Journalism Quarterly 44 (Summer 1967):326-330.

⁴Roland E. Wolseley, Understanding Magazines (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa University Press, 1965), p. 145.

⁵Hans-Harald Knoop, "A Readership Survey of carolinaType, Official Newspaper of the University of South Carolina" (Master's Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1977), p. 58.

⁶Jack B. Haskins, "Information Needs of Publishers: Basis for Newspaper Research," Journalism Quarterly 47 (Spring 1970):31-40.

Readership studies can be valuable tools in determining what has interested readers in the past and can provide insights to aid an editor in making judgments about future interests. An editor can apply the research results to maintain a balance between what the readers want and what he or she believes they should have.⁷

This study used a mail questionnaire survey to determine the opinions of the readership of ANR, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Alumni Association magazine at Michigan State University. The objective of the survey was to find out what alumni think of the information they have been receiving and to solicit comments on content for future issues. The responses will be used to improve the publication so that it can better achieve its purpose, which is to facilitate communication between the College and its alumni.

This survey was also used to generate demographic data on the readership to support a campaign for magazine advertisements. Part of the annual dues paid by alumni members is used for publication costs but the rest of the expenses have been paid by the College. Since publication costs continue to rise, the College administrators are interested in using advertising revenue to alleviate the financial burden.

⁷Robert Root, Modern Magazine Editing (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, 1966), p. 479.

The magazine has been a vehicle for informing alumni of significant events taking place in their College. Communication has been unilateral, with the editor deciding what would be of interest to the readers. No attempt has previously been made to survey the audience regarding demographic characteristics or opinions about the publication.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The use of survey research to determine magazine reader interests has become widespread in the past fifty years. Survey research is commonly used to provide potential advertisers with demographic data on magazine audiences. However, the use of survey research to plan and evaluate college and university public relations materials, such as alumni magazines, is not extensive judging by a review of the literature.⁸

University and college administrators want to know what alumni think about various programs and policies, but too often they rely on opinions obtained informally from a few influential graduates. Attempts to gather information from alumni in a systematic, scientific manner through survey research are rare.⁹

⁸ Similar observations were made by Knoop, p. 8, and Nicholas Warren Jankowski, "Perceptions of a Magazine: How Four Groups--Readers, Editors, University Administrators and Advisory Board Members--View Old Oregon, the University of Oregon Alumni Magazine" (Master's Thesis, University of Oregon, 1973), p. 5.

⁹ James H. Frey, "Make Your Survey Scientific," CASE Currents, December 1977, p. 18.

Robinson notes that because a public relations practitioner's goal is to change or maintain the attitudes and behavior of some public or group of publics, it is important to measure, evaluate and interpret the attitudes of the relevant publics through survey research. This research should be used to find out how the public reacted to decisions that were made and also to determine needs and interests prior to making decisions and developing programs.¹⁰ Knowledge of the demographic characteristics and the attitudes of the relevant publics enables a public relations practitioner to communicate more effectively with them. Yet, Robinson notes, "comparatively few practitioners" make use of descriptive studies in implementing their public relations programs.¹¹

Predicting reader interest is one of the main functions of an editor in selecting the content of a publication. These predictions have traditionally been made through a subjective process.¹² It is generally assumed that editors know their audiences, but a number of studies have

¹⁰Edward J. Robinson, Public Relations and Survey Research (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1969), pp. 6-8.

¹¹Ibid., p. 40.

¹²Jack B. Haskins, "Pre-testing Editorial Items and Ideas for Reader Interest," Journalism Quarterly 37 (Spring 1960):224-230.

shown that editors often lack a clear perception of what their readers want.¹³

Johnson's study on the communication of science news in newspapers found that editors, who mediated between scientists and readers by deciding which stories to run, made judgments unlike those of either scientists or readers. The editors emphasized "excitement" and "color" as key ingredients in selecting science news stories. Science writers, scientists, readers and nonreaders of science news considered "accuracy" and "significance" to be the most important factors in evaluating the articles.¹⁴

Using the Q-sort technique, Atwood found reporters and readers had similar story selection patterns, while the city editor was the poorest predictor of audience story preferences.¹⁵ Another study found that newspaper editors thought their viewpoints on issues corresponded with their readers' viewpoints more than they actually did and that editors were accurate in perceiving their publics on only some topics. Experienced editors were not likely to have

¹³Ralph K. Martin, Garrett J. O'Keefe and Oguz B. Nayman, "Opinion Agreement and Accuracy Between Editors and Their Readers," Journalism Quarterly 49 (Autumn 1972):460-468.

¹⁴Kenneth G. Johnson, "Dimensions of Judgment of Science News," Journalism Quarterly 40 (Summer 1963):315-322.

¹⁵L. Erwin Atwood, "How Newsmen and Readers Perceive Each Others' Story Preferences," Journalism Quarterly 47 (Summer 1970):296-302.

more accurate perceptions of their audiences than less experienced editors.¹⁶

Tannenbaum found that professional psychiatrists, psychologists and the public had similar conceptions of and opinions about mental illness. Mass media decision-makers presented a different picture in portrayals of mental illness, "featuring the more bizarre, sordid and frivolous aspects," in the belief that they were "giving the public what it wants."¹⁷

Lassahn used a Q-sort to compare the editorial judgments about agricultural science news of farmers, county newspaper editors, county extension directors, information service editors and scientists in a specific information system. The study found that county newspaper editors and information service editors were the best predictors of farmer preferences. Lassahn noted that the favorable position of the information service editors, although different from previous studies, might be due to the fact that they were both writers and editors.¹⁸

An obvious question is how well are alumni editors able to predict reader preferences. Few substantial studies

¹⁶Martin et al., p. 467.

¹⁷Percy H. Tannenbaum, "Communication of Science Information," Science 140 (May 10, 1963):579-583.

¹⁸Pamela Henry Lassahn, "Comparison of Judgments About Agricultural Science News," Journalism Quarterly 44 (Winter 1967):702-707.

on the preferences of alumni publication readers have been conducted. No studies were found that pertain to a publication such as ANR, which is produced for alumni of a specific college or department within a university. Nevertheless, the existing literature provides insights and methods applicable to a study of any alumni publication.

When Jankowski conducted a study of Old Oregon, a quarterly magazine distributed without charge to University of Oregon alumni, he noted that there were no written goals for the publication and that no thorough readership study had previously been conducted. He found a significant difference between former and current editorial staff members' perceptions of alumni opinion and the opinions of alumni themselves. While the editorial staff thought alumni regarded the magazine's purpose as entertainment, most alumni respondents felt the magazine's purpose was objective reporting and public relations. The editorial staff overrated the readership of "Letters to the Editor" and "Class Notes" and underrated alumni interest in the "Theater" section.¹⁹

Two-thirds of the 135 alumni respondents surveyed by telephone said they read every issue of Old Oregon, but less than half knew how often it was published. Only about half of those surveyed were able to cite any of the visual changes that had taken place in the magazine's format within the past

¹⁹Jankowski, pp. 67-70.

year. Ninety percent were unable to name an article they disliked and, of the 60 percent who tried to describe articles they had enjoyed, half gave answers too vague to be considered accurate. Contrary to the expectations of the editorial staff, less than 18 percent of the respondents knew the editor's name.²⁰

Jankowski concluded that Old Oregon lacked the attention and perhaps the support of a large share of its audience and that further research on reader interests was needed to avoid editing the publication on the basis of incorrect "editorial hunches."²¹

In a study of land-grant university alumni magazines, Nelson found a need for further research on "the emerging role of the university magazine." He discovered a general lack of knowledge among alumni editors on the effect of alumni magazines in creating or changing reader opinion. The editors also had varied opinions on which types of content were most important for alumni publications. Although many alumni editors dislike class notes, readership surveys have found that most alumni enjoy them. About 44 percent of the 75 respondents in Nelson's telephone survey of Montana Collegian readers said they read the class notes first. Sixty-three percent also said they read each issue thoroughly and the majority wanted more coverage of

²⁰Ibid., pp. 42-49.

²¹Ibid., p. 70.

university programs. All 75 of the respondents had noticed by reading the publication that Montana State University had changed since they were enrolled, and all but one said their image of the university was favorable.²²

Knoop conducted a readership survey of carolinaType, a tabloid newspaper distributed free to alumni, students' parents and employees of the University of South Carolina. He found that more than 55 percent of the respondents usually or always read news about alumni but an even larger percentage usually or always read faculty professional news, stories on academic programs and stories about students. More than one-third of the 880 respondents in Knoop's mail questionnaire survey added comments in response to an open-ended question. About 55 percent of the comments were in the category of "praise and encouragement" and 33 percent were classified as "criticism/suggestions for improvement." Knoop found that, even though carolinaType is aimed at a diverse audience, it was generally regarded as a useful and reliable source of information. He concluded that the publication's appeal could be strengthened by adding more issue-oriented information and making other content and format changes.²³

²²Jeffrey B. Nelson, "A Study of Land-Grant University Alumni Magazines and of Reader Responses to the Montana Collegian of Montana State University" (Master's Thesis, South Dakota State University, 1969), pp. 70-77.

²³Knoop, pp. 107-173.

Schramm and White found that older, more highly-educated readers looked at a newspaper more for information and public affairs content than for entertainment news and the amount of time spent reading a newspaper tended to increase with age, education and economic status.²⁴ Therefore, it would seem that readers of an alumni publication probably constitute a more demanding audience than those of other publications because they are highly educated and often have high economic status. Consequently, an alumni magazine should be more than a public relations vehicle for the administration; it must also provide meaningful information.

John Marcham, editor of the Cornell Alumni News, believes an alumni magazine has to compete with commercial magazines for the interest of readers by matching them "in the significance of the material we run, in its objectivity and literary quality, and in the appearance of our periodicals."²⁵ According to Ron Parent, editor of Notre Dame Magazine, an alumni magazine is a reflection of the institution and should be a top-quality product:

I would argue that if a university cannot bring itself to produce a magazine it can point to with pride, it should not produce a magazine at all. I would argue

²⁴Wilbur Schramm and David M. White, "Age, Education, Economic Status: Factors in Newspaper Reading," Journalism Quarterly 26 (June 1949):149-159.

²⁵"Nine Alumni Editors Respond," CASE Currents, April 1976, p. 12.

that a magazine that has no editorial integrity, guts, or style is a waste of money--money that is urgently needed in various programs on most campuses today.²⁶

Since money is a scarce commodity on most campuses today and publication costs are constantly increasing, decisions often have to be made about quality versus quantity in alumni magazines. A number of studies have shown that alumni magazine readers prefer to sacrifice quantity rather than quality. Armbruster notes that most alumni recognize a quality alumni publication but generally don't know how often they receive the issues, so budgets should be spent to make these publications "an enjoyable but occasional treat."²⁷

Arthur Ciervo's readership survey of Georgetown Today, a bimonthly publication for Georgetown University alumni, found that most respondents did not think it should be published more frequently. He concluded that reader interest diminishes proportionately to the number of issues received.²⁸

Seventy-two percent of the Montana Collegian readers surveyed wanted the publication to remain a quarterly because they thought the quality would decline or their dues would increase.²⁹ Harvard Magazine editor John Bethell

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Robert J. Armbruster, "Quality or Quantity? Measuring Progress in Alumni Publishing," CASE Currents, April 1976, p. 15.

²⁸Knoop, p. 36.

²⁹Nelson, p. 63.

surveyed readers on the possibility of changing the publication from a monthly to a bimonthly schedule and increasing the size of each issue while holding down circulation costs. Sixty-five percent of the respondents said a bimonthly with more pages would be equally as appealing as the monthly magazine, providing quality remained the same.³⁰

Faced with the prospect of diminishing enrollments, institutions of higher education are finding that sound public relations campaigns are vital to their health. According to Carl Herrman, former director of publications at Syracuse University, "The survival of any college in the future is going to be based on its ability to communicate with its audience. Marketing skills, along with professionally written and designed publications, are the tools for survival."³¹

Few alumni editors would be likely to go as far as Verne Stadtman who, as editor of the University of California's California Monthly, told a conference of alumni editors: "I am convinced that some day alumni publications will have greater significance than any other publishing enterprise--with the possible exception of the daily

³⁰ John T. Bethell, "To Our Readers," Harvard Magazine, December 1976, p. 4.

³¹ Carl T. Herrman, "The Case for Marketing a University," d/a, 1977, p. 14.

newspaper."³² Nevertheless, alumni publications can be a valuable part of university public information programs if reader preferences are obtained in a systematic, scientific manner and if research results are applied to the editing process.

³²Dan Wakefield, "New Forage for the Old Grad," Mademoiselle, February 1962, p. 100.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND OF ANR SURVEY

An explanation of the purposes of this study would not be complete without a review of the events which led to the formation of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Alumni Association and the development of the alumni magazine.³³

David Armstrong, former assistant dean of academic and student affairs, was the prime mover behind the College alumni association. When Armstrong assumed his position in 1970, record numbers of nonfarm students were being attracted to the College's programs and enrollments had doubled. At the same time, budgets were being reduced. Armstrong felt alumni support would help maintain the College's vitality. Because of expanding enrollments, he felt it would become increasingly difficult for the College

³³Information in this chapter was obtained in interviews conducted in East Lansing, Michigan with David Armstrong, former College assistant dean of academic and student affairs, November 7, 1978; Robert LaPrad, College alumni liaison, November 6, 1978; and Dorothy Doane, MSU Alumni Association director of administrative services, November 13, 1978.

to identify its graduates unless a formal mechanism was developed to communicate with them.

Robert LaPrad, College placement coordinator, was able to identify many recent graduates who had obtained employment through his efforts and those of the University Placement Service. He surveyed 1972 College graduates in the fall of 1973 and found a majority of the 800 respondents supported the idea of a College alumni association. Armstrong viewed LaPrad as a potentially effective alumni liaison. As placement coordinator and director of the College academic internship program, LaPrad had considerable personal contact with students. It was felt that he could enhance the communication between the College and its graduates and promote the development of a strong alumni body. In subsequent meetings of College administrators, the concept of an organized alumni group gained support.

During 1974 Armstrong and LaPrad met with representatives of the Michigan State University Alumni Association to discuss the formation of a College constituent association. In 1971 the MSU association became a dues-paying organization, with partial financial support from the University. Under its aegis were a number of college and department constituent associations with primary responsibility for their own alumni. Alumni from the College's building construction, forestry and packaging programs had formed three of the fourteen constituent associations under the MSU alumni association in 1975.

In developing the concept of a College alumni association, Armstrong emphasized communication between the College and its graduates as one of the most important goals. He believed a publication aimed specifically at College alumni could effectively promote this communication. Armstrong proposed the MSU alumni association allow the College association to charge its members additional dues to cover publication expenses. He also asked to have the College publication inserted as a supplement to MSU, the University alumni magazine, and sent as a package to College alumni members. Armstrong felt that insertion in the award-winning MSU magazine would be an ideal way to launch the College publication. University alumni officials accepted the unprecedented proposal on a trial basis, providing the College publication met the bimonthly publishing schedule and quality standards of MSU.

Armstrong presented the idea of an alumni association to the College department chairmen, each of whom agreed to recommend a graduate to serve on an organizational committee. On January 16, 1975 the fourteen recommended individuals met on campus with College administrators and MSU alumni association representatives. The presidents of the previously-formed constituent groups representing three of the College's programs also attended the meeting. They decided to maintain the identities of their groups by not affiliating with the new College organization. The representatives of the fourteen other departments agreed to

serve three-year terms on a College alumni association board of directors. Three executive officers were elected and a committee to formulate bylaws was appointed.

The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Alumni Association was officially chartered on March 19, 1975, becoming the fifteenth MSU constituent association. The chartering took place at the President's Luncheon during Farmers' Week, an annual event sponsored by the College. As stated in the bylaws, the objective of the association is to provide a vehicle for communication among alumni and to promote the development of the College. One of the written goals in achieving that objective is to facilitate the exchange of information among alumni members.

By the end of its first year the College association had about 1,330 members. In the spring of 1976, the building construction association agreed to affiliate with the College alumni body, while the forestry and packaging alumni groups maintained their autonomy. A building construction representative was added to the Board of Directors, along with three at-large representatives and one Cooperative Extension Service representative. The at-large members enabled the Board to utilize the talents of leaders from any academic discipline within the College and to broaden its geographical representation within the state. The Extension representative allowed the Board to utilize the well-established county communication network to aid in the recruitment of new alumni members.

Since its second year, the Board of Directors has had nineteen members, each of whom is elected by the alumni members to a three-year term. The Board also includes as non-voting, ex-officio members the immediate past president of the Board, two students selected by the College Student Senate, the alumni liaison, the alumni editor, the College's director of academic and student affairs, and representatives of the forestry and packaging alumni groups. The Board meets several times annually to conduct official affairs of the association. One of the major events organized by the Board is the annual Autumnfest reunion on campus.

The College alumni magazine entered its fourth year of publication in March 1978. The concept of the 16-page magazine was originally developed by Armstrong and Roberta Yafie, an MSU journalism graduate hired by the College as a half-time editor in December 1974. Armstrong and Yafie did not draw up written goals for the magazine but agreed it should contain lively, human interest features on teaching, research and extension activities within the College. A logo incorporating the magazine's title, Agriculture and Natural Resources, was designed and the first issue was inserted in the 40-page March/April 1975 issue of the MSU magazine. This dual publication package was mailed to about 12,000 persons identified as alumni of the College in records maintained by the University Registrar's Office.

During the first year of publication, five 16-page magazines and a four-page tabloid were produced. Armstrong

served as publisher, discussing all content ideas and approving all copy written by Yafie. Due to the expense of the initial mass mailing and a lower than expected membership, the publishing arrangements were altered in the second year. One eight-page and four 16-page issues were produced. Three of the 16-page magazines were developed as special issues highlighting the College's Academic and Student Affairs, Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service units. Each director paid for the publication developed on his individual unit. The three special issues are still produced each year, with contents developed by the editor in conjunction with each unit director. The remaining two issues contain articles of general interest to readers.

In October 1976, Yafie left MSU and the author was hired to assume full-time editorial responsibilities, including production of Agriculture and Natural Resources. At that time, the College's alumni membership had grown to about 1,575 and the magazine continued to be sent to members as an insert in MSU. Although the magazine had been generally well-received by the College faculty, no written communication regarding the publication had been obtained from alumni. This researcher began running requests in the magazine for comments about the contents or ideas for future issues, but no letters were received from readers.

It became apparent to the author that the insertion arrangement was detracting from the identity of Agriculture and Natural Resources, which was often referred to as the

MSU supplement. The College was spending a considerable amount of money to produce attractive magazines with three- or four-color cover art designs that had no visibility because they were ensconced in the middle of another publication. It also had become difficult for the editors of the two publications to coordinate their production schedules. The magazines were rarely ready for mailing at the same time.

In September 1977, two different companies were awarded contracts to print MSU and Agriculture and Natural Resources. Since the College alumni association would have incurred additional expenses and logistical problems in continuing to insert its publication into MSU, the arrangement was discontinued. This researcher worked with the art department of the John Henry Company to design a new logo and format for the College alumni magazine, which currently bears the title of ANR. It was felt the simpler title and new look, along with the separate mailing arrangement, would allow College alumni to better identify ANR as their magazine.

Each issue of ANR contains in-depth feature articles with occasional news stories on College and alumni association activities. The magazine has been a one-way form of communication, rather than a vehicle to promote a dialogue between the alumni and the College. This study was undertaken to determine the degree to which the magazine has achieved its purpose and to uncover ways it might better

achieve its purpose. Since ANR has been published for three years, readers have had adequate time to form opinions about the magazine.

Based on the results of other alumni readership surveys, one can expect the magazine to be generally well-received and the overall editorial content of interest to most readers. Although it is difficult to determine the amount of reading required to achieve reader satisfaction, a high number of items read is generally considered indicative of reader approval.³⁴

The author also expected to find that, as in similar studies, the editor's perceptions of reader interest as reflected in the magazine's content have not been entirely accurate. The study was likely to uncover several content categories, such as class notes, that have not previously been included in the magazine but would have widespread reader interest. This expectation was based in part on verbal and written comments from members of the Board of Directors.

The author had no clear expectations regarding the demographic data but did expect an overwhelming majority of male respondents, based on previous College enrollments. The survey was expected to show that ANR readers have strong

³⁴Jack B. Haskins, "The Editorial Mix: One Solution to a Magazine Editor's Dilemma," Journalism Quarterly 42 (Autumn 1965):557-562.

ties to the College and have definite opinions on the role of the alumni association, which they voluntarily joined.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

A mail questionnaire was chosen as the vehicle for this survey, rather than personal or telephone interviews, because it offered the following advantages: lower cost, contact with a population spread across the United States and abroad, responses from people who might be too busy for personal interviews, and the avoidance of interviewer bias.³⁵

To reduce the expense of the study, the questionnaire was sent to a scientific random sample of the 1,843 alumni association members on the mailing list in May 1978. A sample size of 333 was selected to yield 250 completed questionnaires for data analysis at the 95 percent level of confidence with a sampling error of ± 5.4 percent.³⁶ A table of random numbers was used to select the name of the first sample respondent and subsequent respondents were

³⁵Arnold S. Linsky, "Stimulating Responses to Mailed Questionnaires: A Review," Public Opinion Quarterly 39 (Spring 1975):82-101.

³⁶Philip Meyer, Precision Journalism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 123.

systematically selected from the mailing list at regular intervals.³⁷ Since the magazine is sent by second-class mail, alumni members' addresses are continually updated when they complete change of address forms. Therefore, the number of incorrect addresses in the sample was expected to be small.

The ANR readership survey questionnaire was patterned after alumni readership surveys conducted at Baylor University³⁸ and the University of Maryland.³⁹ The ANR questionnaire was pretested by members of the ANR Alumni Association Board of Directors. There was some discussion about including a question on income, which had not been used in the previously cited surveys. The consensus of the directors was that most surveys today include income categories and that, if respondents felt the information was too personal, they had the option of not answering the question. The income question was placed near the end of the questionnaire to allow sufficient time for rapport to be

³⁷Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973), p. 130.

³⁸Sherry B. Castello, "Report on the Readership Survey of The Baylor Line," Baylor University Alumni Association, Waco, Texas, 1977.

³⁹"Maryland Readership Survey," Attitude and Opinion Research; Why You Need It/How to Do It (Washington, D.C.: Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, 1977), pp. 77-80.

established with the respondent.⁴⁰ The first income category was low for a survey of college graduates but was included so most respondents would not be embarrassed about falling into the lowest income range (a copy of the questionnaire has been included in Appendix A).⁴¹

Questions 1-3 and 5 were designed to find out whether the editorial content and overall quality of ANR appeal to readers. Question 2, "Does anyone, other than yourself, read your copy of ANR?" was used to determine whether the magazine has a more widespread readership than indicated by the mailing list.

Question 4 attempted to find out how extensively the respondents had read the May/June issue of the magazine. The headline of each article was listed and respondents were asked to indicate how much of each article they had read. The questionnaire was sent out three weeks after the magazine was mailed, giving respondents enough time to receive their issues.

The purpose of question 5 was to find out if, in general, readers regard the editorial content as balanced or unrealistically positive. If a majority perceived an

⁴⁰Mildred Parten, Surveys, Polls and Samples: Practical Procedures (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 215.

⁴¹Paul L. Erdos, Professional Mail Surveys (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), p. 65.

imbalance in coverage of the College, the publication's credibility was likely to be diminished.

The author designed question 6 to find out whether readers liked the present policy of producing a special issue each year on the College's teaching, research and extension branches or if this policy should be abandoned. Responses to this question would support or refute the hypothesis that the editor's perceptions of reader interests have not been completely accurate.

Question 7 attempted to determine how many respondents received alumni publications from institutions other than Michigan State University and question 8 asked for a comparison between ANR and other alumni publications received. Space was provided for the names of the other alumni publications in order to assess the types of materials competing for the attention of respondents.

Question 9 asked respondents to indicate what they would like to read in future issues. None of the listed categories had regularly been included in past issues of ANR, so the percentage of responses would help determine whether or not the editor had accurately assessed reader interest. Unfortunately, the researcher did not include an "other" category for Question 9, but the responses to the open-ended question 11 could possibly supply appropriate information.

Responses to question 10 were to determine if readers would object to the use of advertising in the

magazine. The editor planned to solicit advertising for future issues to help cover publication costs and wanted to know if the ads would have an adverse effect on readers.

Question 11 was left open-ended in order to uncover any feelings not anticipated by the researcher. Open-ended questions, although difficult to code for use in data analysis, allow for a free exchange of opinions not constrained by structured categories or wording.⁴² A half page was left open for responses to question 11 because, as Parten noted, there appears to be a relationship between the amount of comment received and the amount of space provided.⁴³

Questions 12-17 provided demographic data which will be used to give a profile of the readership to potential advertisers and to provide a basis of statistical comparison with responses to earlier questions.

Questions 18 and 19 were included to show the extent of member interest and participation in alumni association events and to serve as a basis for planning future alumni activities.

It is generally recognized that a high nonresponse rate is the biggest drawback in conducting a valid mail questionnaire survey. Because of the improvements in mail

⁴²David Krech and Richard S. Crutchfield, Theory and Problems of Social Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1948), p. 288.

⁴³Parten, p. 160.

survey techniques and standards in the past 30 years, Erdos notes, no professional researcher should be comfortable with response rates of less than 50 percent.⁴⁴

A literature review showed procedures that have increased response rates in previous mail questionnaire surveys. The body of research from 1935 to the present is filled with inconsistencies, but a number of guidelines have been generally supported and were incorporated in this study.⁴⁵

Contacting potential respondents by mail, telephone or in person prior to mailing the questionnaire has been shown to be effective with general populations. When the sample is taken from a fairly homogeneous group such as alumni, advance notice does not improve response rates.⁴⁶ To avoid additional expense, advance notice was not used in this study.

Mailing survey materials by special or certified mail is more effective than first-class mail, but first-class is more effective than third-class or postage permit

⁴⁴Erdos, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵Linsky, p. 82.

⁴⁶Robert J. Parsons and Thomas S. Medford, "The Effects of Advance Notice in Mail Surveys of Homogeneous Groups," Public Opinion Quarterly 36 (Summer 1972):258-259.

mailings.⁴⁷ A study by Hensley found that higher response rates were achieved when envelopes had stamps, preferably commemoratives, rather than meter franks.⁴⁸ Longworth noted that the high educational level of an alumni group is positively associated with response rate.⁴⁹ Therefore, the lower cost first-class mail seemed adequate for the survey of ANR readers and commemorative stamps were used on the envelopes.

Methods of personalizing mail survey materials have been shown to have a positive effect on response rates when used in certain combinations. Carpenter duplicated a mail questionnaire personalization method used by Dillman in 1972 that achieved a 75 percent response rate from a sample of the general public. Carpenter used Dillman's method as the control and used three other treatments with varying degrees of personalization in a survey of the general public. He found a significant difference in response rates between the least personalized method and the one that appeared most personalized. The latter method used a computer to type cover letters, postcards and envelopes to give the appearance that each piece had been individually typed. This method

⁴⁷Linsky, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁸Wayne E. Hensley, "Increasing Response Rate by Choice of Postage Stamps," Public Opinion Quarterly 38 (Summer 1974):280-283.

⁴⁹D. S. Longworth, "Use of a Mail Questionnaire," American Sociological Review 18 (June 1953):310-313.

drew a 72.2 percent response rate. Carpenter's replication of Dillman's personalized method in the control group drew a 71.3 percent response.⁵⁰

Dillman's personalization method used a cover letter typed on letterhead stationery and reproduced by a multilith process to give the appearance that each was individually typed. Names, addresses and personal salutations were individually placed on each letter with the same typewriter. The project director signed each letter in a contrasting blue ink to emphasize that it was a real signature. The follow-up postcards and second follow-up cover letters were produced in the same way. Dillman repeated his 1972 method with a group of university alumni and achieved a 92.1 percent response rate. This same study showed that the personalized methods must be used throughout the first mailing and subsequent mailings in order to have a positive effect on returns.⁵¹

Linsky noted that addressing the respondent by name and hand signing the cover letter increased response rates in nine out of sixteen studies. It also appears that higher response rates are achieved when the sponsor of the survey

⁵⁰ Edwin H. Carpenter, "Personalizing Mail Surveys: A Replication and Reassessment," Public Opinion Quarterly 38 (Winter 1975):614-620.

⁵¹ Don A. Dillman and James H. Frey, "Contribution of Personalization to a Mail Questionnaire Response as an Element of a Previously Tested Method," Journal of Applied Psychology 59 (June 1974):297-301.

is considered prestigious and pertinent to the topic. One study manipulated the title of the person signing the cover letter. No title was used for one-fourth of the sample and the fictitious title of "Director of Rehabilitation" was used on the remaining letters. The letters with titles drew an 81 percent return while the others brought in a 55 percent return.⁵² Therefore, this researcher used the signature of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources' dean on the cover letters. The letters were reproduced on the dean's stationery by magnetic card typewriter. Names, addresses and personal salutations were individually typed. The dean's signature was written in blue ink.

Linsky found that it is helpful if a cover letter explains how the respondent was chosen for the sample, the importance of returning the completed questionnaire and why the respondent is qualified to answer. He included such an explanation in half of the cover letters in a mail questionnaire survey of a state nursing association. Those receiving the explanation had a 42.5 percent response rate and those who did not had a 29.8 percent return. Other studies suggest that this type of appeal is effective when respondents have a positive attitude toward the surveying

⁵²Linsky, p. 95.

organization but is not effective when respondents are suspicious.⁵³

Erdos offers a comprehensive review of the points to highlight in a cover letter. In addition to the explanations suggested by Linsky, he recommends mentioning how the recipient will benefit from the survey and that the answers will be "confidential," a word which fits the personal nature of the letter better than the word "anonymous."⁵⁴ These recommendations were incorporated in the cover letter for the ANR survey (a copy is included in Appendix B).

The effects of anonymity on response rates are debatable. In a study of beginning public school teachers, inquiries were made about personal items like age, salary, life goals and feelings of adequacy. There was no significant difference in response rates for those receiving questionnaires identifying respondents by name and code number and those identified by code number alone.⁵⁵ Code numbers were used on the ANR questionnaires to identify respondents in the event that initial returns were low enough to warrant a second mailing.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Erdos, p. 112.

⁵⁵Linsky, p. 92.

Precoding the entire questionnaire form facilitates data processing but the effects of precoding on response rate have not been thoroughly researched. Stevens used a precoded questionnaire in a mail survey pertaining to job-hunting experiences that was sent to graduates of a Southern university. The precoded questionnaire drew a 59 percent return and the uncoded form brought in 57 percent. Stevens concluded that the time-saving advantage of precoding questionnaires rather than hand-coding them as they are returned makes it a desirable procedure.⁵⁶

Since precoding the questionnaire adds to the amount of printing on a page, it makes the questionnaire look more difficult.⁵⁷ This researcher did not feel it was advantageous to precode the ANR questionnaire since it was relatively brief and the layout was easy for coders to follow.

The effectiveness of placing a deadline on responses has not been extensively researched.⁵⁸ Henley attempted to determine the effect of a deadline in a mail survey of 1,000 residents of Fort Worth, Texas. Half of the sample received questionnaires with a stapled slip requesting return in one week. After two weeks, all nonrespondents received telephone reminders. By the deadline, 25.6 percent of those given the

⁵⁶Robert E. Stevens, "Does Precoding Mail Questionnaires Affect Response Rates?" Public Opinion Quarterly 38 (Winter 1974-75):621-622.

⁵⁷Erdos, p. 71.

⁵⁸Linsky, p. 96.

deadline had responded, while 18 percent of those not given a deadline had responded. Although the deadline increased early responses, this advantage diminished as more non-deadline questionnaires came in after the deadline and those from the deadline group virtually stopped coming in.⁵⁹ This researcher decided not to use a deadline for the ANR survey, which was mailed during the summer, because a deadline could possibly reduce the percentage of returns from people who were busy or had been on vacation.⁶⁰

Cash or gift rewards have been shown to effectively increase response rates in a number of studies. Enclosing the reward rather than promising one is more effective in inducing response. The reward should be of enough interest to gain the attention of the respondent and serve as a token of appreciation but should not be valuable enough to be considered as a payment for response.⁶¹ A variety of premiums have been enclosed with positive results. Although rewards add expense to the survey, they can be helpful in reducing the expense of additional follow-ups for non-response.⁶² This researcher decided to enclose a

⁵⁹James R. Henley, Jr., "Response Rate to Mail Questionnaire With a Return Deadline," Public Opinion Quarterly 40 (Fall 1976):374-375.

⁶⁰Erdos, p. 113.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 95.

⁶²Linsky, p. 99.

University football schedule in the initial questionnaire package since it was an item many alumni would be interested in and it was easy to mail.

The initial package sent to the ANR survey sample included a cover letter signed by the dean, the questionnaire, a football schedule and a self-addressed return envelope with commemorative stamps for return by first-class mail. The outer envelopes were also stamped with commemoratives and were addressed to respondents with labels that were individually typed.

Inevitably, some follow-up reminders are needed to obtain sufficient response rates. All methods of follow-up appear to increase responses. Sletto found postcard follow-ups were as effective as letters in stimulating response and postcards offer the advantage of being less expensive.⁶³ It is recommended that postcards be mailed from three days to one week after the first questionnaire is mailed. They can be worded in such a way that nonrespondents are encouraged to complete the survey and respondents are thanked for participating. This researcher used a message suggested by Erdos on thank you/reminder postcards printed for the entire sample (a copy of the postcard has been included in Appendix C).⁶⁴ The dean's signature was written on the postcards in blue ink and the names and addresses of

⁶³Linsky, p. 85.

⁶⁴Erdos, p. 131.

respondents were individually typed. The postcards were sent one week after the questionnaire was mailed.

Nonresponse is a potential threat to the validity of all survey research. To reduce the possibility of bias caused by nonresponse, a researcher must strive to achieve the highest response rate possible within the constraints of time and budget. As previously noted, surveys with response rates of less than 50 percent are generally not considered reliable.⁶⁵

A follow-up mailing containing a second questionnaire, cover letter and return envelope is frequently used to increase survey response rates. Erdos⁶⁶ and Parten⁶⁷ recommend waiting three to four weeks, or until returns from the initial mailing dwindle, before sending a second questionnaire to nonrespondents. This timing procedure reduce the number, and consequently the expense, of follow-up packages and increases the possibility of response from people who have been busy or on a trip.

This survey was conducted during the summer vacation period and the researcher decided to wait three and a half weeks before mailing a second questionnaire package to nonrespondents. At that time, 235 of the 333 initial ANR readership questionnaires had been returned. Of that

⁶⁵Erdos, p. 149.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 131

⁶⁷Parten, p. 399.

number, one package was undeliverable due to an incorrect address and 24 questionnaires were unusable.⁶⁸ The result of the first mailing was 210 usable questionnaires (63 percent of the total mailed).

Although a 63 percent response rate would be considered high in some surveys, Erdos notes that the researcher must judge the acceptability of response in each individual survey.⁶⁹ In anticipation of a high return rate, this researcher had selected the relatively small sample size of 333 and was unable to meet the goal of 250 completed forms necessary for reliable data analysis. Therefore, a second questionnaire package was prepared.

Ninety-nine nonrespondents were identified through code numbers printed on the back of the ANR readership questionnaire. Three of the 99 nonrespondents had foreign addresses and were eliminated from the second mailing; the researcher felt their replies may have been delayed by the overseas mailing process.⁷⁰

⁶⁸The 24 unusable questionnaires were discarded for the following reasons: eight respondents did not supply demographic data on the last page of the questionnaire, seven indicated they did not receive ANR, five said they didn't read the magazine and failed to fill out the form, two respondents cited poor health as a reason for noncompletion, one respondent was a graduate of another college and had been incorrectly coded in the alumni records and one potential respondent's spouse indicated he was out of the country for the summer.

⁶⁹Erdos, p. 145.

⁷⁰Eventually, responses from the five sample respondents with foreign addresses were received, but one arrived after the final response deadline.

A second cover letter was prepared, emphasizing the importance of the respondent's answers to the accuracy of the survey and reiterating the confidential nature of responses.⁷¹ A magnetic card typewriter was again used to prepare the cover letter on the dean's stationery and the dean's signature was written on the letter in blue ink (Appendix D). The cover letter, a second questionnaire and a reply envelope with commemorative stamps for reply by first-class mail were sent to nonrespondents in envelopes also bearing commemorative stamps for first-class delivery. The second wave of questionnaires was sent to 96 nonrespondents 25 days after the initial questionnaires had been mailed.

Responses from the second wave of questionnaires began to dwindle in three weeks, at which time the researcher terminated the survey. A total of 56 initial nonrespondents had returned the second questionnaire at that time. The researcher determined that 11 of the 56 forms were unusable.⁷² The 45 acceptable forms combined with the 210 forms from the initial mailing brought the total number

⁷¹Erdos, p. 132.

⁷²The 11 unusable questionnaires from the second wave were discarded for the following reasons: three respondents did not supply demographic data on the back page, five respondents indicated they did not receive the magazine, two respondents had only received one issue and did not feel qualified to respond, and one respondent cited poor health as the reason for noncompletion.

of usable forms to 255. The overall response rate for the ANR mail questionnaire survey was 76.6 percent.

As completed questionnaires were returned, the researcher divided them into two groups: those with responses to the open-ended question 11, which requested further comments or suggestions about the ANR magazine, and those without comments. Using the latter group, the researcher formed categories for answers to question 16 on present occupation. A total of 28 occupation classes were used in coding the questionnaires in order to give a fair assessment of the range present in the sample; these occupation classes were eventually combined into four categories for data analysis.⁷³

The researcher kept a handwritten list of comments on question 11. These comments were classified into four categories: (1) praise and encouragement, (2) criticisms/suggestions for improvement, (3) comments on the survey/methods, (4) comments on the college/university.⁷⁴

The researcher transferred the responses from the 255 completed questionnaires onto mark-sense sheets, which were used by the Michigan State University Scoring Office to produce keypunched cards. The cards were processed by the

⁷³Parten, p. 448.

⁷⁴The first two categories were also used by Knoop in his readership survey of carolinaType, p. 167.

campus Computer Center. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

In addition to frequency distributions for answers to each of the 39 possible information categories in the questionnaire, a number of cross-tabulations were used. The age, major field of study, occupation and income of each respondent, when available, was correlated with the responses to questions on general extent of readership (#1), the quality of magazine elements (#3), readership of individual articles (#4), the magazine's presentation of the College (#5), interest in items for future issues (#9), open-ended comments (#11) and frequency of campus visits (#18). Respondent opinions of the magazine's presentation of the College (#14) were correlated with responses on general extent of readership (#1). Responses on the question of separate issues on the College's three branches (#6) were also correlated with question 1.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Respondent Characteristics

Questions 12-17 in the readership questionnaire were used to obtain demographic data on respondents. The data were variously correlated with responses to readership questions. The results of these statistical analyses are reported in the following tables.

Table 1 shows the ages of respondents were fairly evenly distributed. While 34.1 percent are 34 years of age or younger, 35.3 percent are 55 or older. As expected, the sample included an overwhelming majority of males (91.8 percent of the total).

Table 3 shows that those who attended or graduated from the College 1-10 years ago represent a fairly large segment (almost 33 percent) of the sample. Since they were most recently involved with the College, these respondents are more likely to be interested in current activities than those who were students several decades ago. However, about one-fifth of the respondents graduated or attended more than 40 years ago, indicating that older alumni have a surprisingly strong attachment to the College.

Table 1
Response Frequency by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-24	23	9.0
25-34	64	25.1
35-44	37	14.5
45-54	41	16.1
55-64	35	13.7
65- +	55	21.6
Total	255	100.0

Table 2
Response Frequency by Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	234	91.8
Female	21	8.2
Total	255	100.0

Table 3
Response Frequency by Years Since
Graduation/Last Attendance

Years	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	62	24.3
6-10	22	8.6
11-15	21	8.2
16-20	25	9.8
21-25	20	7.8
26-30	32	12.5
31-35	4	1.6
36-40	13	5.1
41- +	50	19.6
No response	<u>6</u>	<u>2.4</u>
Total	255	100.0

Every department within the College, with the exception of the School of Packaging, is represented among the respondents indicating a major (Table 4). Since both packaging and forestry alumni have formed their own alumni associations, the sample was not expected to include many of these majors; only one forestry major was in the sample. Horticulture led the majors with 44 respondents (17.3 percent). More than 10 percent were in the nebulous category of agriculture; based on observations during coding, those indicating agriculture as a major were older alumni who attended college before the present range of majors was offered. Five veterinary medicine majors, two landscape architecture, one human ecology and one educational guidance

Table 4
Response Frequency by Major

Major	Freq.	Pct.	Major	Freq.	Pct.
horticulture	44	17.3	vet. medicine	5	2.0
agriculture	26	10.2	park/recreation	4	1.6
animal husbandry	21	8.2	poultry science	4	1.6
ag. economics	20	7.8	resource devel.	4	1.6
ag. education	18	7.1	landscape arch.	2	0.8
crop/soil science	16	6.3	biochemistry	1	0.4
dairy science	15	5.9	botany/plant pth.	1	0.4
building constrc.	15	5.9	educ./guidance	1	0.4
ag. engineering	11	4.3	forestry	1	0.4
fisheries/wildlife	11	4.3	human ecology	1	0.4
food science	11	4.3	non alumnus	1	0.4
ag. technology	5	2.0	No response	17	6.7
			Total	255	100.0

major were in the sample although these programs are not offered through the College. One respondent was not a Michigan State University alumnus, but anyone who pays the annual dues may join the alumni association.

Table 5 shows that, of the four occupation classifications used, the management/professional services group was the largest, representing 36.5 percent of the total. This category included the occupations of sales representative or manager, engineer, banker, building supplier or contractor, economist, nurse, housewife, executive, foreman, plant manager, technician (laboratory, electrical), minister, personnel manager and self-employed.

Table 5
Response Frequency by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
ag. and natural resources production/development	56	22.0
management/ professional services	93	36.5
education/research	44	17.3
retired/unemployed	59	23.1
No response	<u>3</u>	<u>1.1</u>
Total	255	100.0

As would be expected from the age distributions, almost one-fifth of the respondents are retired, with only one respondent reportedly unemployed. The respondents in the agriculture and natural resources production/development category were in positions as farmers, veterinarians, landscape architects, florists, park/cemetery supervisors, golf course managers and employees of state and federal agencies. Those classified as having education/research occupations included faculty members, educational administrators, high school teachers, cooperative extension employees, graduate students and researchers.

Table 6 shows that, of the 239 persons indicating a household income, more than 55 percent earn \$10,000-29,999. As would be expected in a survey of college-educated people, only 9 respondents (3.5 percent) fell in the lowest income category of \$5,000-9,999. Almost 20 percent of the alumni have household incomes of \$40,000 and over.

Information on alumni support for and participation in campus events is provided in Tables 7 and 8. This data can be used by the alumni association in planning future activities. More than 95 percent of those surveyed have visited the campus since they were enrolled as students. Well over one-third visit campus several times a year. While the frequency of campus visits is not an exact indicator of participation in alumni events, the willingness of alumni to come to campus may be linked to their support for these events.

Table 6
Response Frequency by Income

Income	Frequency	Percentage
\$5,000-9,999	9	3.5
\$10,000-19,999	76	29.8
\$20,000-29,999	68	26.7
\$30,000-39,999	37	14.5
\$40,000-49,999	24	9.4
\$50,000-over	25	9.8
No response	16	6.3
Total	255	100.0

Table 7
Response Frequency by Campus Visits

Campus Visits	Frequency	Percentage
several times annually	95	37.3
at least once a year	63	24.7
less than once a year	86	33.7
never	9	3.5
No response	2	0.8
Total	255	100.0

Table 8
Response Frequency by Support for Alumni Activities

Alumni Activity	Frequency*	Percentage*
Autumnfest reunion	129	50.6
Farmers' Week alumni event	130	51.4
scholarships for students	165	64.7
alumni placement service	154	60.4
ANR travel tours	99	38.8
ANR county alumni clubs	64	25.1

*Frequencies and percentages for each activity are based on a possible total of 255 responses, since those surveyed could check more than one category.

Table 8 shows that about 50 percent think the College's annual Autumnfest reunion should be continued and about the same number approve of an alumni event during the Farmers' Week program held each March. The College has its own alumni coordinator who handles job placement for alumni and more than 60 percent of those surveyed support the continuation of this service. The College's alumni association recently formed one county-level chapter but the board of directors may want to reconsider plans to expand the concept, since only about one-fourth of the alumni support it. There was a surprising amount of support (38.8 percent) for sponsoring College alumni travel tours, considering the University alumni association regularly offers travel tours. The greatest support (almost 65 percent) was indicated for student scholarships, which the alumni association does not presently offer but may want to consider.

Relationships Between Perceptions of the Magazine and Respondent Characteristics

This section reports readers' opinions on the content and quality of the ANR alumni magazine and analyzes these opinions according to respondent characteristics when a statistically significant relationship has been determined.

The first two survey questions measured the extent of general readership for each issue of ANR. As shown in Table 9, 60 percent of the respondents report reading all or most of each issue and about half of those responding

Table 9
Response Frequency by Amount of Each Issue Read

	Frequency	Percentage
all of it	44	17.3
most of it	109	42.7
some of it	97	38.0
none of it	4	1.6
no response	<u>1</u>	<u>0.4</u>
Total	255	100.0

indicated that someone, other than themselves, read the issues (Table 10). These data indicate that the editor has done a fairly good job of judging reader interests and that the readership of ANR is about 50 percent greater than indicated by the list of subscribers. However, the fact that 38 percent report reading only some of each issue shows that, as hypothesized, the editor's perceptions of reader interests have not been entirely accurate.

Table 10
Response Frequency by Other Readers

	Frequency	Percentage
yes	126	49.4
no	126	49.4
no response	<u>3</u>	<u>1.2</u>
Total	255	100.0

As shown in Table 11, there is a significant relationship between the age of readers and the extent of readership. Only 44 percent of those 25-34 years old and about half of those 35-54 years old read all or most of each issue. On the other hand, more than 80 percent of those 55-64 and about 75 percent of those 65 and older read all or most of each issue. Almost 70 percent of those in the 20-24 age group also read all or most of each issue. These figures indicate that the youngest readers probably have a higher readership because of their recent connection with the College. Interest in College affairs erodes during the years following graduation but picks up again in later years, probably as a result of nostalgia.

Table 11
Readership by Age Group

	Read All	Read Most	Read Some	Read None	
20-24	17.4	52.2	30.4	0.0	N=23
25-34	6.3	37.5	53.1	3.1	N=64
35-44	13.5	37.8	48.6	0.0	N=37
45-54	14.6	36.6	46.3	2.4	N=41
55-64	41.2	41.2	14.7	2.9	N=34
65- +	20.0	54.5	25.5	0.0	N=55

$$\chi^2 = 36.17, df = 15, p < .01$$

A significant relationship between occupation and readership is indicated in Table 12. As expected from the high readership among older alumni, about 78 percent of those who are retired read all or most of each issue. This group is likely to have more time to read the magazine thoroughly than those who are employed. About 70 percent of those in education/research occupations read all or most of each issue, which is understandable since the content is geared to subjects associated with their professional interests. Surprisingly, about half of those in agriculture and natural resources production/development fields read only some of each issue, although developments within the College have a relationship to their career areas. Almost half of those in the management/professional services occupation group also read only some of each issue.

Respondents were asked to give opinions on five content and quality aspects of the magazine in order to measure its overall impact. The publication received overwhelming support for its general appearance, with almost 85 percent considering it excellent or good (Table 13). An even larger percentage (91) rated the writing quality as excellent or good. Although 73 percent of the respondents rated the range of subjects covered in the magazine as excellent or good, more than one-fourth thought the coverage of alumni events has been fair or poor. Responses to Question 9 indicated support for items that could be included in future issues to enhance alumni coverage.

Table 12
Readership by Occupation

	Read All	Read Most	Read Some	Read None	
ag. and nat. resources production/development	10.9	36.4	49.1	3.6	N=55
management/ professional services	16.1	35.5	47.3	1.1	N=93
education/research	22.7	50.0	25.0	2.3	N=44
retired/unemployed	22.0	55.9	22.0	0.0	N=59
$\chi^2 = 19.94, df = 9, p < .05$					

Table 13
Response Frequencies by Content/Quality Elements

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
	N (%)				
quality of writing	57 (22.4)	167 (65.5)	17 (6.7)	-----	6 (2.4) N=247
range of subjects covered	41 (16.1)	139 (54.5)	56 (22.0)	5 (2.0)	5 (2.0) N=246
quality of photos/illustrations	73 (28.6)	131 (51.4)	42 (16.5)	1 (0.4)	4 (1.6) N=251
general appearance of magazine	69 (27.1)	147 (57.6)	33 (12.9)	3 (1.2)	1 (0.4) N=253
coverage of alumni events	31 (12.2)	136 (53.3)	59 (23.1)	8 (3.1)	17 (6.7) N=251

In analyzing the relationship between respondents' opinions about the five elements of the magazine and their characteristics, the relatively few no opinion responses were excluded. As shown in Tables 14 and 15, the length of time since graduation or last attendance and respondents' occupations were significant factors in the evaluation of writing quality. Of those who left school within the past 10 years, fewer considered the writing quality to be excellent. Of those who graduated 40 or more years ago, close to 40 percent judged the writing as excellent. Similarly, the highest percentage of excellent ratings of the writing (40.4 percent) were found among the retired/unemployed occupation category. Thirty percent of those in education/research occupations also considered the writing to be excellent.

The number of years since graduation or last attendance was also a significant factor in the evaluation of the range of subjects and the quality of photos and illustrations in the magazine. Again, those who were enrolled fairly recently were the most critical and those who had been out of school the longest were the most supportive (Tables 16 and 17). The range of subjects covered was considered fair by more than one-third of those in school 1-10 years ago but by only 10 percent of those who attended 40 or more years ago. Although somewhat less critical of the photos and illustrations, more than one-fourth of those in school 1-10 years ago rated them

Table 14

Quality of Writing by Years Since Graduation/Last Attendance

Years	Excellent	Good	Fair	
1-5	6.0	86.0	8.0	N=50
6-10	15.0	80.0	5.0	N=20
11-15	25.0	68.8	6.3	N=16
16-20	28.6	71.4	0.0	N=21
21-25	27.8	50.0	22.2	N=18
26-30	27.6	72.4	0.0	N=29
31-35	25.0	50.0	25.0	N=4
36-40	30.8	69.2	0.0	N=13
40- +	39.5	58.1	2.3	N=43

$$\chi^2 = 33.20, df = 16, p < .01$$

Table 15

Quality of Writing by Occupation

Occupation	Excellent	Good	Fair	
ag. & nat. resources production/development	17.0	76.6	6.4	N=47
management/ professional services	15.2	75.9	8.9	N=79
education/research	30.0	67.5	2.5	N=40
retired/unemployed	40.4	55.8	3.8	N=52

$$\chi^2 = 14.35, df = 6, p < .05$$

Table 16
Range of Subjects by Years Since
Graduation/Last Attendance

Years	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	
1-5	4.0	54.0	38.0	4.0	N=50
6-10	10.0	55.0	35.0		N=20
11-15	29.4	58.8	11.8		N=17
16-20	14.3	76.2	9.5		N=21
21-25	11.1	55.6	27.8	5.6	N=18
26-30	27.6	51.7	20.7		N=29
31-35	50.0	50.0			N=4
36-40	7.7	69.2	23.1		N=13
41- +	31.0	19.4	10.2		N=42
$\chi^2 = 37.47, df = 24, p < .05$					

Table 17
Quality of Photos/Illustrations by
Years Since Graduation

Years	Excellent	Good	Fair	
1-5	17.6	56.9	25.5	N=51
6-10	5.0	65.0	30.0	N=20
11-15	29.4	64.7	5.9	N=17
16-20	40.9	54.5	4.5	N=22
21-25	36.8	42.1	21.1	N=19
26-30	23.3	60.0	16.7	N=30
31-35	25.0	50.0	25.0	N=4
36-40	46.2	30.8	23.1	N=13
41- +	45.2	47.6	7.1	N=42
$\chi^2 = 26.70, df = 16, p < .05$				

as fair. On the other hand, only about 7 percent of those who attended 40 or more years ago considered the photos and illustrations fair. In other words, although ANR received high ratings from readers on the five overall elements, further analysis revealed that younger readers tended to be more critical of the material they had received than older readers.

Under Question 4, the headlines of the major articles in the May/June 1978 issue of ANR were listed and respondents were asked to indicate how much of each article they had read. Eleven persons indicated they had not read the issue and, therefore, could not respond because they had either not received the issue, were on vacation or were in the process of moving. As shown in Table 18, the cover story about the student cabin had the highest readership, with about 65 percent indicating they read all or part of the article. Almost the same percentage (61.2) read all or part of the alumni news reports. More than half of the respondents read all or part of every article except "Treats Galore in Store," a one-page article on the campus dairy store and plant, and "A Few Lines From Lein," a one-page message from the ANR Alumni Association president. The Lein article also drew the highest percentage (almost 30) of didn't see or don't remember responses, which can be interpreted as expressions of no interest. Since the other articles drew fairly low percentages of didn't see or don't

Table 18
Response Frequencies by Articles Read

	Read All	Read Part	Looked At	Didn't See/Remember	
	N (%)				
Skillful Staffers Steal Spotlight	67 (26.3)	72 (28.2)	58 (22.7)	42 (16.5)	N=239
Students Saw Away At Cabin Problems	110 (43.1)	57 (22.4)	44 (17.3)	24 (9.4)	N=235
Diet Issues Yield Food for Thought	77 (30.2)	67 (26.3)	52 (20.4)	39 (15.3)	N=235
Treats Galore in Store	62 (24.3)	53 (20.8)	62 (24.3)	53 (20.8)	N=230
Alumni News Reports	76 (29.8)	80 (31.4)	52 (20.4)	31 (12.2)	N=239
A Few Lines From Lein	57 (22.4)	38 (14.9)	65 (25.5)	76 (29.8)	N=236

remember responses, it would appear the editor perceived reader interests fairly accurately.

A statistically significant relationship was found between age and readership of the alumni news reports. As shown in Table 19, the percentage of respondents who read all of the news items increased steadily through the age categories. While less than 10 percent of those 20-24 years of age read all of the alumni news reports, almost half of those 65 years and older read all of the alumni articles.

Responses to Question 5 (Table 20) indicated an overwhelming majority (71.4 percent) considered the magazine's presentation of the College to be fair and accurate. Fifteen people thought the magazine was either objectionably biased or overly sentimental, while 13 respondents thought its coverage of the College had been outstanding.

There was a significant relationship between the amount of each issue read and respondent opinion on the magazine's presentation of the College. Table 21 shows that more than 84 percent of those who thought ANR's presentation of the College was outstanding read all or most of each issue. Of those who said the magazine gave a fair and accurate presentation, about 67 percent read all or most of each issue. On the other hand, half of those who considered ANR's presentation biased and almost half (45.5 percent) who regarded the publication as overly sentimental only read some of each issue. An even greater number (almost

Table 19
Alumni News Readership by Age

	Read All	Read Part	Looked At	Didn/t See/Remember	
20-24	9.1	31.8	31.8	27.3	N=22
25-34	16.4	39.3	31.1	13.1	N=61
35-44	25.0	34.4	21.9	18.8	N=32
45-54	38.5	23.1	23.1	15.4	N=39
55-64	47.1	29.4	14.7	8.8	N=34
65- +	49.0	37.3	9.8	3.9	N=51
$\chi^2 = 34.47, df = 15, p < .01$					

Table 20

Response Frequencies by ANR's Presentation of College

	Frequency	Percentage
outstanding	13	5.1
fair and accurate	182	71.4
overly sentimental	11	4.3
objectionably biased	4	1.6
no opinion	36	14.1
no response	<u>9</u>	<u>3.5</u>
Total	255	100.0

64 percent) of those who did not express an opinion on ANR's presentation of the College only read some of each issue. Therefore, those who read the magazine more thoroughly also have a higher opinion of its credibility than those who are not as interested in the magazine.

Further analysis showed that, when the 36 no opinion responses were excluded, respondents' occupations were significant factors in their opinions on Question 5. As shown in Table 22, all of those in the education/research category regarded ANR's presentation of the College as either outstanding or fair and accurate, as did 98.1 percent of those in the retired/unemployed category. More than 11 percent of the respondents in the agriculture and natural resources production/development occupations and 12.5 percent in the management/professional services fields thought ANR had presented an overly sentimental or objectionably biased view of the College. The number of negative opinions was

Table 21
ANR's Presentation of College by Readership

	Read All	Read Most	Read Some	Read None	
outstanding	23.1	61.5	15.4	0.0	N=13
fair and accurate	19.9	47.5	32.0	0.6	N=181
overly sentimental	18.2	36.4	45.5	0.0	N=11
objectionably biased	25.0	25.0	50.0	0.0	N=4
no opinion	5.6	25.0	63.9	5.6	N=36
$\chi^2 = 25.46, df = 12, p < .05$					

Table 22

ANR's Presentation of College by Occupation

	Outstng.	Fair/Accurate	Overly Sent.	Objectionably Biased	
ag. and nat. resources	13.6	75.0	4.5	6.8	N=44
production/development					
management/	4.2	83.3	11.1	1.4	N=72
professional services					
education/research	7.7	92.3	0.0	0.0	N=39
retired/unemployed	1.9	96.2	1.9	0.0	N=53
$\chi^2 = 22.81, df = 9, p < .01$					

small, however, and it would appear that ANR is generally regarded as a credible publication.

Responses to Question 6 showed that, although nearly 20 percent had no opinion, more than half of the respondents thought the separate issues on teaching, research and extension should be dropped (Table 23). The majority preferred to have articles pertaining to all three College branches included in each issue, as timely events occurred, rather than an annual report on each unit. Disregarding the no opinion responses, occupation proved to have a significant relationship to viewpoints on the separate issues. As shown in Table 24, those in the agriculture and natural resources production/development occupations and in education/research professions were more closely divided in their opinions. The respondents in these two occupation categories are likely to be more directly affected by developments in research and extension than those who are retired or in management/professional services fields. Therefore, they might be concerned that the amount of information on research and extension would diminish if the policy of separate issues were discontinued.

In response to Question 7, 87 persons or 34.1 percent of the total indicated they received alumni publications from institutions other than Michigan State. As shown in Table 25, about 38 percent of the 84 persons responding to Question 8 thought ANR was better than the other alumni publications they received. Only seven persons considered ANR to be not

Table 23

Response Frequencies by Separate Issues

	Frequency	Percentage
prefer separate issues on teaching, research, extension	63	24.7
prefer combination of three areas in each issue	137	53.7
no opinion	48	18.8
no response	<u>7</u>	<u>2.7</u>
Total	255	100.0

Table 24

Preference for Separate Issues by Occupation

	Prefer Separate Issues on T,R,E	Prefer Combina- tion in Each Issue	
ag. and nat. resources production/development	42.9	57.1	N=42
management/ professional services	26.8	73.2	N=71
education/research	43.2	56.8	N=37
retired/unemployed	20.8	79.2	N=48

$$\chi^2 = 8.09, df = 3, p < .05$$

Table 25

Response Frequencies by Comparison of ANR

How do you think ANR compares to other alumni publications you receive?

	Frequency	Percentage
<u>ANR</u> is better	32	38.1
About the same	45	53.6
Other is better	<u>7</u>	<u>8.3</u>
Total	84	100.0

as good as the other publications. Since more than one-third of the ANR readers receive alumni publications from other colleges and universities, the importance of producing a quality magazine that captures reader attention is underscored. When asked to specify other alumni publications received, the majority wrote in the names of colleges and universities. It would appear that, although ANR is produced for alumni of one college within a major university, the magazine is able to compete successfully with alumni publications produced for other institutions' entire body of graduates. The list of publications cited is too lengthy for this report, but the ANR Alumni Association should be gratified that its magazine compared favorably with publications from institutions such as Harvard, Cornell, William and Mary, George Washington University and the University of Michigan. Perhaps ANR's favorable rating is

due to its more specialized audience. As institutions become larger, students tend to associate themselves more closely with academic units within university frameworks.

Question 9 was used to find out what information categories alumni would like to read in future ANR issues. None of the five categories listed had regularly been included in previous issues. Responses showed that, as hypothesized, there were a number of items that had widespread appeal among readers (Table 26). Profiles of outstanding alumni garnered the most support, with almost 85 percent indicating they were interested or very interested in this type of information. Letters to the editor drew the second highest percentage (79.6) of interested or very interested responses, followed closely by alumni class notes (78.1 percent) and faculty news (77.2 percent). While 67 percent expressed interest in student news, this category drew the highest percentage (28.2) of not interested or no opinion responses.

There was a relationship between interest in student news and respondent age. As shown in Table 27, more than 43 percent of those 20-24 years old were very interested in student news. The percentage of those very interested dropped to 22.6 in the next age category (25-34) and declined still further in older age categories. Respondents in the youngest age category are likely to be recent graduates who know currently enrolled students and, therefore, have a

Table 26

Response Frequencies by Items for Future Issues

	Very Interested	Interested	Not Interested	Opinion
	N (%)			
Outstanding Alumni Profiles	86 (33.7)	130 (51.0)	17 (6.7)	15 (5.9) N=248
Alumni News (class notes)	67 (26.3)	132 (51.8)	37 (14.5)	9 (3.5) N=245
Faculty News (grants, awards)	48 (18.8)	149 (58.4)	27 (10.6)	22 (8.6) N=246
Student News (honors, clubs)	37 (14.5)	134 (52.5)	47 (18.4)	25 (9.8) N=243
Letters to the Editor	78 (30.6)	125 (49.0)	27 (10.6)	18 (7.1) N=248

Table 27
Interest in Student News by Age

	Very Interested	Interested	Not Interested	No Opinion	
20-24	43.5	39.1	8.7	8.7	N=23
25-34	22.6	45.2	21.0	11.3	N=62
35-44	5.7	62.9	25.7	5.7	N=35
45-54	7.7	61.5	17.9	12.8	N=39
55-64	9.1	54.5	24.2	12.1	N=33
65- +	9.8	64.7	15.7	9.8	N=51
$\chi^2 = 27.46, df = 15, p < .05$					

greater interest in student activities than those who are older.

The interest in faculty news was significantly related to respondent occupation. As would be expected, more than 95 percent of those in education/research occupations were interested or very interested in faculty news. This category would contain information on the professional development of College faculty members and persons in similar occupations would undoubtedly want to know about colleague activities. Table 28 shows that the faculty news category received widespread support from the other three occupation categories as well.

Question 10 asked respondents whether the use of advertisements in ANR should be considered if publication costs continue to rise. Since only about 18 percent responded negatively (Table 29), the ANR Alumni Association should not be concerned that advertisements would detract

Table 28
Interest in Faculty News by Occupation

	Very Interested	Interested	Not Interested	No Opinion	
ag. and nat. resources production/development	18.9	54.7	22.6	3.8	N=53
management/ professional services	16.7	56.7	12.2	14.4	N=90
education/research	31.8	63.6	2.3	2.3	N=44
retired/unemployed	16.1	69.6	3.6	10.7	N=56

$\chi^2 = 25.20$, $df = 9$, $p < .01$

Table 29

Response Frequencies by Use of Advertisements

	Frequency	Percentage	
yes	176	69.0	61.8
no	47	18.4	18.7
no opinion	29	11.4	11.5
no response	<u>3</u>	<u>1.2</u>	
Total	255	100.0	

from readers' generally high opinion of the magazine. Several respondents expressed their approval of advertisements provided the number was kept to a minimum and they were appropriate for the publication.

About 30 percent of the respondents wrote comments in response to the open-ended Question 11. The comments were divided into four categories (Table 30). Almost one-third were classified as praise or encouragement. Many were similar, brief comments such as "Keep up the good work" or "Good publication." Others made more specific statements like: "I appreciate that your staff has worked hard to get our magazine to a highly readable standard"; "Receiving ANR is like receiving a letter from home and, even if I don't have time to read it all, I would miss not having it"; "I enjoy the publication very much--since I'm located out of state, ANR helps to keep me aware of what's going on"; and "I would like to compliment the editors for a good job--the ANR covers a lot of subjects and is interesting."

Table 30

Response Frequencies by Written Comments

	Frequency	Percentage
praise/encouragement	25	32.5
criticism/suggestions	37	48.1
comments on survey/methods	8	10.3
comments on Col./Univ.	<u>7</u>	<u>9.1</u>
Total	77	100.0

About half of the written comments were criticisms or suggestions for improving the magazine. Eight respondents criticized ANR for not including news about their major programs. Several felt the content should provide more analyses of current issues: "Too much reporting of facts and events and too little critical commentary on issues confronting ANR education today"; "ANR seems too cut and dried--I'd like more on answers students and faculty might have on national issues." Other content suggestions included requests for more articles on outstanding student achievements, articles on alumni working in ANR fields here and abroad, more news on research experiments and more news about achievements of older alumni. A few respondents criticized the magazine's format: "Need better quality paper and more open space"; "Redesign the logo--it's too hard to read"; "Paragraphs are too long and involved and there are no subheads or bold face type"; "More shorter articles and better editing would help this publication."

Of the eight persons who made comments on the survey or survey methods, two expressed appreciation for receiving the questionnaire and one person said, "Thanks for the football schedule" (included as a response inducement in the initial survey package). Three respondents were somewhat uncomfortable about completing the questionnaire because they had not received many ANR issues and one person said, "Due to my age (85) I didn't think my opinion would mean much." Two respondents felt the large return envelopes were a waste of money and that business reply envelopes should have been used.

Seven diverse comments pertained to College or University affairs and were irrelevant to the purposes of this study.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

This study supported the hypothesis that the ANR alumni magazine is generally well-received by its audience. The extent of readership is usually indicative of reader approval and the majority of respondents reportedly read all or most of each issue. Only four people said they did not read the publication and about half of the total said someone, other than themselves, read ANR.

A substantial majority gave favorable ratings on the magazine's general appearance and the quality of its photos, illustrations and writing. It appears from the findings that major format revisions for ANR are not warranted. While Knoop found that 43 percent considered carolinaType's appearance "average," only about 13 percent of respondents in this study rated ANR's appearance "fair."⁷⁵

Younger readers were the most critical of ANR's qualitative aspects but they are apt to view the magazine as part of the institutional establishment and, therefore, somewhat out-of-date. Similarly, in Knoop's study the percentage of respondents giving carolinaType a "good" or

⁷⁵Knoop, p. 182.

"very good" overall rating increased with age.⁷⁶ Two other studies suggest possible explanations for the relationship between age and attitudes about publications. Schramm and White found that the amount of news reading tended to increase with age, education and economic status;⁷⁷ another newspaper readership study showed that those who spend more time reading the daily paper evaluate its news content more highly than other readers.⁷⁸ In this study, a high percentage of those who read all or most of each issue thought the magazine's presentation of the College was outstanding.

The survey showed a large majority perceives ANR as a reliable source of information on the College. Since the magazine is essentially a public relations tool, the finding that most respondents consider its coverage fair and accurate is significant. Another important finding is that more than one-third of the respondents receive other alumni publications and more than half of them think ANR is as good as these publications. The fact that more than one-third consider ANR better than other alumni publications underscores its credibility, since it is competing with publications from major institutions rather than smaller academic units. In

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 101.

⁷⁷Schramm and White, p. 158.

⁷⁸James E. Brinton, Chilton R. Bush, and Thomas M. Newell, The Newspaper and Its Public (Stanford, California: Institute for Communication Research, Department of Communication and Journalism, Stanford University, 1957).

Knoop's carolinaType study, about 30 percent of alumni considered the publication better than those they received from other colleges and universities.⁷⁹

Judging by readership of the May/June 1978 issue, it would appear the content also appeals to a majority of readers, since more than half of the respondents read all or part of two-thirds of the articles. But the study also showed that, as hypothesized, the editor's perceptions of reader interests have not been entirely accurate.

The data indicate that ANR's appeal could be strengthened by regularly including alumni news. Widespread support was reported for profiles of outstanding alumni and alumni class notes. Similar findings were reported by other researchers. In Jankowski's survey of Old Oregon readers, 54 percent reportedly read class notes "almost always,"⁸⁰ and 44 percent of those surveyed by Nelson read class notes before anything else in the Montana Collegian.⁸¹ About 56 percent of carolinaType readers surveyed "usually" or "always" read news about alumni and Knoop concluded it is "a must category to sustain alumni interest."⁸²

"Letters to the Editor" was another very popular item for future issues. Letters from readers have been

⁷⁹Knoop, p. 179

⁸⁰Jankowski, p. 53.

⁸¹Nelson, p. 59.

⁸²Knoop, p. 185.

requested in past issues but none have been received. Similarly, Knoop found that, although few carolinaType readers wrote letters to the editor, one-third of those surveyed "very much" wanted to read letters.⁸³ The fact that readers are interested in reading letters to the editor but have not written any themselves seems to indicate they may not regard ANR as "their" magazine.

It appears ANR could increase its popularity with readers by encouraging communication among alumni, rather than simply communicating to them. By soliciting news on the personal activities of alumni, the editor might indirectly encourage readers to write letters on the magazine content. It seems readers are less interested in news of the alumni association, as conveyed in articles like the ANRAA president's message, than they are in more personalized alumni information. Substantial interest was also expressed in news of faculty and student achievements.

These findings strongly suggest the editor should strive for a balance between long feature articles, which have been predominant in previous issues, and short news items. Such an editorial mixture might increase readership among those in the middle age ranges, who seem to lack the time or motivation to read the magazines as thoroughly as those in the youngest and oldest age categories. There is no evidence that the editor should discontinue the use of

⁸³Ibid., p. 160.

feature articles on teaching, research and extension developments. In fact, a number of open-ended comments suggested ANR should include more information on breakthroughs in agriculture and natural resources areas and emphasize issue-oriented articles with viewpoints of faculty and students. Several respondents criticized ANR for being too factual and avoiding "critical commentary." Knoop also received "numerous requests for more issue-oriented information" in responses to open-ended questions.⁸⁴ By including opinion pieces, the editor might stimulate a dialogue between College representatives and readers, which is one of the magazine's main purposes.

While the written comments favored continued and even increased coverage of research, teaching and extension activities, less than one-fourth of the respondents preferred separate magazine issues on each of the College's branches. The message to the editor seems to be to produce articles as timely developments occur, rather than an annual summary of activities. Since the study also showed that only a small percentage of respondents felt negatively about the use of advertisements in future issues, the editor should feel free to conduct an ad campaign to defray publication costs.

Findings indicated that, as hypothesized, most respondents have considerable interest in the College and have definite ideas about the function of their alumni

⁸⁴Knoop, p. 176.

association. A majority felt reunions, job placement services for alumni and scholarships for students are activities the association should sponsor. Considerably less support was indicated for College alumni travel tours and county alumni clubs.

The results of this study should be useful to the editor in planning upcoming issues. By gaining information on what has interested readers in the past, the editor will be better able to make judgments about reader interests in the future. But the study had several weaknesses which might have diminished the usefulness of the results.

Four occupation categories were selected to facilitate data processing by narrowing the range of occupations reported by respondents. The major programs offered by the College are diverse and this diversity is compounded by the number of career options available to agriculture and natural resources graduates. The four categories used were rather broad in scope and generally did not serve to identify major attitudinal differences among specific subgroups. Although some significant conclusions based on occupation emerged, a comprehensive understanding of relationships between employment positions and opinions of the magazine did not develop.

Another weakness of the survey was the omission of an "other" category under the list of items for future issues of the magazine (Question 9). By providing a line for written suggestions, the researcher might have uncovered

potential ideas that were overlooked in the itemized list. Some suggestions for future issues were made in written responses to the open-ended Question 11. But the half page of space provided under that question might have intimidated some respondents who did not want to write lengthy remarks. The open-ended question also created a problem in questionnaire design. The author provided a half page of space for written comments and suggestions, with directions at the bottom of the page to "see next page." Eleven respondents failed to read the directions. Since they did not complete the demographic data on the final page, their questionnaires were unusable.

In spite of these weaknesses, this study demonstrated that an alumni readership survey can be successfully conducted when systematic, scientific research methods are used. By reviewing the relevant literature, the author identified techniques to increase the study's effectiveness. The achievement of the relatively high response rate of 76.6 percent assures that the findings meet acceptable standards of reliability. Knoop's mail questionnaire survey of carolinaType readers achieved a 46.2 percent response rate, which he considered "very satisfactory" in comparison to similar studies.⁸⁵ The highest response rate for college and university mail readership surveys cited by Knoop was the 56 percent achieved in a 1973 survey conducted by Arthur

⁸⁵Knoop, p. 179.

→ 1977

Ciervo, then director of public relations at Georgetown University.⁸⁶

This survey also demonstrates the usefulness of survey research in evaluating the effectiveness of a public relations program within a university. Some specific conclusions about ANR readers' opinions emerged through the study. The fact that it was conducted by an inexperienced researcher with assistance of faculty familiar with quantitative research should encourage other public relations practitioners in educational institutions to undertake similar studies.

It should be emphasized that the results of this survey are not directly applicable to other alumni publications nor can they be used to predict future opinions of ANR readers. Follow-up studies are recommended to measure future changes in the demographic characteristics of readers and their opinions of the magazine. Such studies can be designed to determine whether specific changes made in the publication, as a result of the initial readership survey findings, have had a positive influence on readers' perceptions.

Further studies could be used to determine what effect ANR has on alumni support for the College. A study of alumni donors could be conducted to find out whether those who make sizeable contributions through the MSU

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 37.

Development Fund are alumni association members and whether reading ANR affected their decision to make a donation.

Other research could be used to determine reasons graduates join the alumni association and what influence the magazine has in their decision-making processes. Would they join if they did not receive the publication? Is their interest in ANR merely a reflection of their general support for the College or is it influenced by the magazine's quality?

Since ANR readers also receive MSU, the University alumni association magazine, a study could be conducted to compare the extent of readership for both publications. Do alumni read material on activities within their College more thoroughly than news pertaining to the entire institution? Do they prefer receiving both publications or would their interests be better served by one or the other of the publications? The study could also attempt to find out whether alumni prefer to attend events, such as reunions, sponsored by the College alumni association or the MSU alumni association.

As Root observed, "All magazines, whatever their publishers' desires or goals, must meet the wishes and needs of readers in order to survive."⁸⁷ His statement applies to alumni magazines as well as to the administration of alumni activities in general. Considering the influential role alumni play in generating support, the survival of a

⁸⁷Root, p. 45.

college or university depends, to a large extent, on meeting the needs of its graduates. Survey research can be a useful tool in determining those needs and in planning programs to meet them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ANR READERSHIP SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



READERSHIP SURVEY

You are one of 350 College of Agriculture and Natural Resources alumni chosen to represent the thousands of readers of ANR. Your participation is vital to the success of this survey.

This questionnaire is designed to take only a few minutes of your time. Your answers will be completely confidential. Would you please complete the survey today and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Please check the appropriate space:

1. How much of each issue of ANR do you usually read?

all of it ☐

some of it ☐

most of it ☐

none of it ☐

2. Does anyone, other than yourself, read your copy of ANR?

yes ☐

no ☐

3. Please rate these elements of ANR (circle the appropriate number):

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
quality of writing.	1	2	3	4	5
range of subjects covered	1	2	3	4	5
quality of photos/illustrations . . .	1	2	3	4	5
general appearance of magazine. . .	1	2	3	4	5
coverage of alumni events	1	2	3	4	5

4. You recently received the May/June issue of ANR. Would you please indicate how much you read of each of the articles? (Circle the appropriate number).

	<u>Read All</u>	<u>Read Part</u>	<u>Looked At</u>	<u>Didn't See or Don't Remember</u>
Skillful Staffers Steal Spotlight. . .	1	2	3	4
Students Saw Away At Cabin Problems. .	1	2	3	4
Diet Issues Yield Food For Thought . .	1	2	3	4
Treats Galore in Store	1	2	3	4
Alumni News Reports.	1	2	3	4
A Few Lines From Lein.	1	2	3	4

5. Which of the following most nearly describes ANR's presentation of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources?

outstanding ☐ overly sentimental ☐ no opinion ☐
 fair and accurate ☐ objectionably biased ☐

6. You presently receive one issue devoted to Experiment Station research, one issue on Cooperative Extension programs and one issue on academic activities. Do you approve of the separate issue on each area or would you prefer a combination of them in all issues?

prefer separate issues on teaching, research, extension. . ☐
 prefer combination of three areas in each issue. ☐
 no opinion ☐

7. Do you receive alumni publications from institutions other than MSU?

yes ☐ no ☐

8. If you answered "yes" to question 7, how do you think ANR compares to the other alumni publications you receive?

ANR is better ☐ About the same ☐ Other is better ☐

Please specify other alumni publication(s) you receive _____

9. We would like your help in planning future issues of ANR. What would be your interest in reading the following items? (Please circle the appropriate number).

	<u>Very Interested</u>	<u>Interested</u>	<u>Not Interested</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
Outstanding Alumni Profiles.	1	2	3	4
Alumni News (class notes).	1	2	3	4
Faculty News (grants, awards).	1	2	3	4
Student News (honors, clubs)	1	2	3	4
Letters to the Editor.	1	2	3	4

10. If publication costs continue to rise, do you think the use of advertisements should be considered for ANR?

yes ☐

no ☐

no opinion ☐

11. We would appreciate any further comments or suggestions you wish to make about ANR. Please write them below.

SEE NEXT PAGE

Please check the appropriate answer or fill in the blank:

12. Your age: 20-24 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 55-64 ☐
 25-34 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 65-over ☐
13. Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐
14. Year graduated or last attended: _____
15. Major field of study in College: _____
16. Present occupation: _____
17. Approximate income of your household:
\$5,000-9,999 ☐ \$20,000-29,999 ☐ \$40,000-49,999 ☐
\$10,000-19,999 ☐ \$30,000-39,999 ☐ \$50,000-over ☐
18. Frequency of campus visits since leaving College:
several times annually ☐ less than once a year ☐
at least once a year ☐ never ☐
19. Which of the following do you think the ANR Alumni Association should sponsor or continue to sponsor? (You may check more than one).
Autumnfest reunion ☐ Placement service for alums ☐
Farmers' Week alumni event ☐ ANR travel tours ☐
Scholarships for Students ☐ County/area ANR alumni clubs ☐
Other (please specify) _____

Thank you for your cooperation. If you wish to make any further comments on any subject mentioned in the questionnaire, you may write them below or on a separate sheet and return along with the completed survey in the self-addressed envelope provided.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY COVER LETTER

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
OFFICE OF THE DEAN • AGRICULTURE HALL

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824

July 6, 1978

Mr. John Smith
601 Grand River
East Lansing, MI 48823

Dear Mr. Smith:


We would like your help in conducting a survey of readers of ANR, the magazine published for the members of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Alumni Association. The opinions obtained as a result of this research will be used by the editor to try to make the magazine more interesting to its audience.

Your name was drawn in a scientifically selected random sample representing the entire readership. Your answers are very important to the accuracy of the survey. Of course all answers are confidential and will be used only in a combination with those from other readers.

It will only take a short time to answer the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the stamped reply envelope. If you are interested in receiving a report on the findings of this research, you may request a complimentary copy in a separate letter.

Please return the completed questionnaire at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,


James H. Anderson
Dean

JHA/mr
Enclosure

P.S. The enclosed Spartan football schedule is just a token of our appreciation.

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP POSTCARD

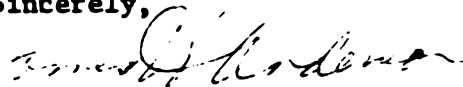
Dear Alumnus:

We recently mailed you a questionnaire asking for your participation in an important survey.

If you have already returned the questionnaire, please consider this as a "thank you" for your valuable help.

If you have not yet had a chance to do so, would you please return the completed form now? Your participation is vital to the success of our study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James H. Anderson".

**James H. Anderson, Dean
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources**

APPENDIX D

SECOND COVER LETTER

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
OFFICE OF THE DEAN • AGRICULTURE HALL

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824

August 11, 1978

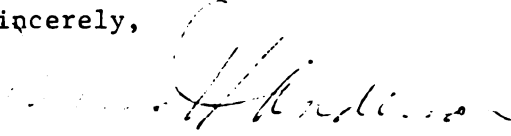
Mr. John Smith
601 Grand River
East Lansing, MI 48823

Dear Mr. Smith:

We recently sent you a short questionnaire asking for your opinions of ANR, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources alumni magazine. Since a limited number of these were sent out, your response is very important to the accuracy of our readership survey.

It will take only a few minutes to fill out the four pages and return the form in the stamped envelope enclosed. We would greatly appreciate it if you would do so now. Of course, your answers will be held in strict confidence. If you have already returned the questionnaire, many thanks.

Sincerely,


James H. Anderson
Dean

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