

CURRENT COMMENTS

What Some Science Students Don't Know: *Current Contents* Can Help Them During and After Their Formal Education

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We recently conducted a survey of *Current Contents*[®] (CC[®]) individual subscribers located in the United States. The survey was designed to let us know, among other things, when present subscribers first learned about *Current Contents* and how useful they perceived it to be at different stages of their careers. Out of 1,785 subscribers to whom the one-page questionnaire was sent, 1,042 returned it, for a response rate of 58.4 percent.

We found that over 88 percent of all respondents perceived CC to be either "indispensable" or "very useful" in their professional employment. Over 50 percent of the respondents, however, were not able to take advantage of CC until a considerate colleague told them about it--*after* they had obtained their first professional positions.

Fifty-five percent of all respondents thought that CC would have been "indispensable" or

"very useful" during their doctoral work. Nearly 42 percent believed that CC would have been at least "moderately useful" during their masters' programs; many of these felt it would be either "very useful" or "indispensable." Over twenty percent of the respondents even said that they would have subscribed to CC during their doctoral program--if they had known about it. Considering the financial state of most students, this is strong testimony to the value they see in *Current Contents*. Unfortunately, over half the respondents did *not* learn about CC during their school years.

To me, it is sadly ironic that students being trained to perform scientific research should be unaware of so important a research tool as *Current Contents*. Such students have not been prepared for their jobs as well as they might have been. But it is difficult to assess the effect of this on their future careers.

It would be interesting to see how many doctoral candidates are similarly ignorant of the existence of the *Science Citation Index*[®], the *Social Sciences Citation Index*[™], and other information tools. I would suspect the worst.

But ignorance of *CC* among doctoral candidates is merely indicative of a larger problem in science education: the inconsistent approach to teaching students about the use of information tools. Some colleges, of course, have excellent programs which stress the efficient use of a wide range of reference tools. But in too many colleges such programs are non-existent. Or, even if they do exist, they confine their instruction to the use of one or two indexes.

Focusing on the *Current Contents* situation, however, I'm sure it would help if we could send a free sample copy of *CC* to everyone who enters a master's or doctoral program. This would not be as beneficial to the student as classroom instruction, but it would at least be a beginning. Unfortunately, even this simple approach would be difficult because the names of such students are jealously guarded by their

schools, which wish to protect them against such "intrusions" of their privacy.

Perhaps a more direct way to expose students to *CC* would be for each reader who teaches to take his or her copy to class and ask how many students recognize it. For those who don't, suggest that it would be worthwhile for them to examine your copy and, if the library has a subscription, to use its copy regularly.

Maybe our readers have some other ideas for letting graduate students know about *Current Contents*. If so, I would appreciate hearing about them.

Incidentally, if you feel maligned each time your copy of *CC* is delayed by someone whose name appears before yours on the routing list, it may ease your annoyance to learn that you are not alone. According to our survey results, over 70 percent of the respondents shared a copy before subscribing to their own.

I'll present some of the other information obtained from our subscriber survey in subsequent "Current Comments."