

Could speed-dating style sessions lead to a lasting relationship for ISTS?

Andrew E. Myers¹, Michael Coyne², Carlos Diez³, Karen Eckert⁴, DuBose Griffin⁵, Adrian Maldonado⁶, Wallace J. Nichols⁷, Jeffrey Seminoff⁸, Amanda Southwood⁹, Sebastian Troëng¹⁰ and Bryan Wallace¹¹

1 - Large Pelagics Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824, USA.

Email: andy.myers@unh.edu

2 - Seaturtle.org, 1 Southampton Place, Durham, NC 27705, USA.

3 - Dep. De Recursos Naturales de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico 00926.

4 - WIDECAST, Nicholas School Marine Lab – Duke University, Beaufort, NC 28516, USA.

5 - South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, Charleston, SC 29422, USA.

6 - Instituto Tecnológico de Bahía de Banderas, Nayarit, Mexico.

7 - Ocean Conservancy, POB 324, Davenport, CA 95017, USA.

8 - Southwest Fisheries Science Center, La Jolla, CA 92037, USA.

9 - Dept. of Biology and Marine Biology, UNCW, Wilmington, NC 28403, USA.

10 - Conservation International, Arlington, VA 2202, USA.

11 - Sea Turtle Flagship Program, Conservation International, Arlington VA 2202, USA.

As part of the 28th Annual Symposium of Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, a novel oral presentation format (speed sessions) took place which gave presenters a limited amount of time (four minutes) to give an overview of their work. Generally, these speed sessions were based on a similar format that occurred at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB). At ISTS 28, presentations (eight for the conservation session, eleven for the biology session) were followed by a 30 minute discussion period where each presenter placed himself/herself in a predetermined part of the auditorium and audience members were free to approach presenters to further discuss their findings. Approximately 250 people attended the conservation speed session on Wednesday 23rd January, 2008 and approximately 350 people attended the biology speed session the following day.

Attendees and presenters were asked to complete an online speed session evaluation form. A total of 185 evaluation forms were returned, and without exception respondents recommended that speed sessions should continue at future meetings. An overwhelming majority of evaluation respondents (92%) viewed the sessions as being either good or excellent (Figure 1). Only one respondent judged the sessions as being poor and attributed this to the 'acoustics in the auditorium'. Almost half of the respondents (44%) declared that they would definitely consider submitting to a speed session

presentation for future symposia. Of the remaining respondents, 29% stated that they would probably consider speed sessions, 23% said maybe, with only 4% saying that they would definitely not consider presenting at a speed session (Figure 2). One can hypothesize that a similar percentage of respondents, if asked, would state that they would not consider presenting a traditional oral presentation. These few responses may not be a reflection on the speed session format (in fact, one of these respondents stated 'I am a volunteer and have nothing to offer and lots to learn!').

Respondents liked that the speed sessions 'cut the fluff' with presenters quickly getting 'to the meat of their presentations'. Some respondents were concerned that presentations with complex methodologies would not be suitable for speed sessions and that students may be judged unfairly against traditional presentations for student awards. Certainly, integrating Speed Sessions into the student award judging process is a challenge that would need to be addressed at future symposia.

The area in most need of improvement is the discussion section, where audience members often found it difficult to find presenters (and even presenters who had difficulty determining where they were supposed to be). A longer discussion period would have been preferred by 28% of respondents; 68% thought that the discussion length was 'just about right'. A handful of

respondents suggested a panel style discussion following the presentations; conversely, some respondents found the current format less intimidating and felt that they could more easily approach the presenters without the discussion being dominated by one or two individuals. A further suggestion recommended having a narrower scope for the sessions, introduced by an invited speaker giving an overview of the topic to be presented and discussed.

with the remaining opinions split equally between ‘too narrow’ and ‘too broad’.

At future symposia, 48% of respondents would like an equal number of speed and traditional sessions, 30% would maintain the current balance of mostly traditional sessions with a few speed presentations. The remaining 22% suggested that future symposia comprise mostly speed presentation sessions with a few traditional sessions.

By and large, respondents found the session length to be ‘just right’ (90%) with an appropriate number of presenters (86%, Figure 3). When asked whether the time allotted to each presenter was appropriate 29% stated that the time was too short, with recommendations ranging from five to eight minutes. The remaining 71% thought four minutes was ‘just right’ (Figure 3). Topic diversity was thought to be ‘just right’ by 84% of respondents,

The program committee for ISTS 29 will incorporate comments and suggestions garnished from this evaluation survey, and implement a new and improved version of the Speed Sessions at next year’s symposium. Therefore, given the overwhelmingly positive response from the attendees of ISTS 28, it appears that the Speed Sessions have made a sufficiently good impression to earn a second date in Brisbane.

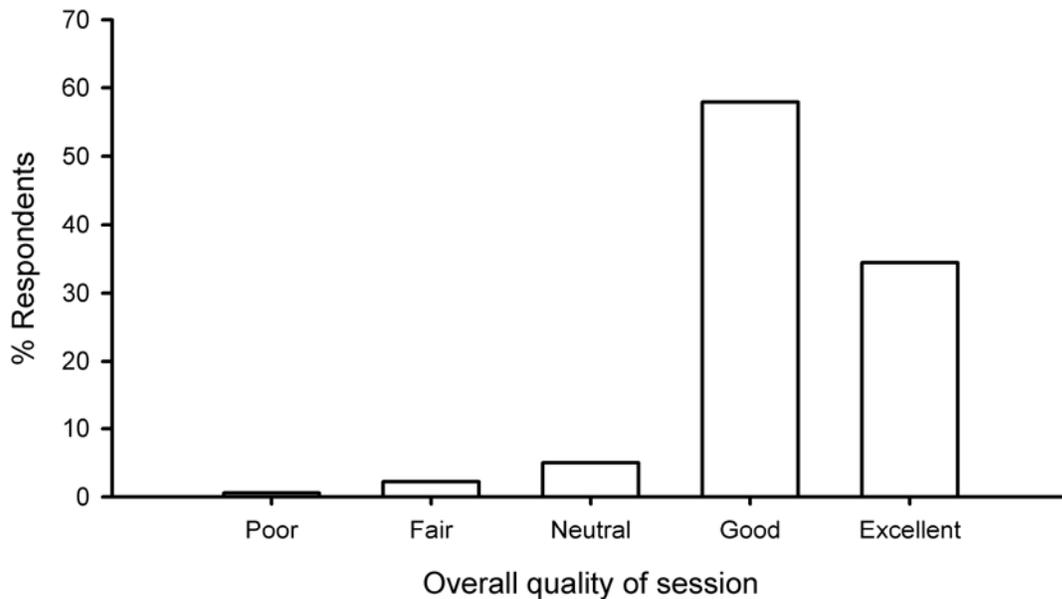


Figure 1: Responses were varied but overwhelmingly positive regarding the overall quality of the speed session. Poor (0.5%), Fair (2.2%), Neutral (4.9%), Good (63%), Excellent (34.4%)

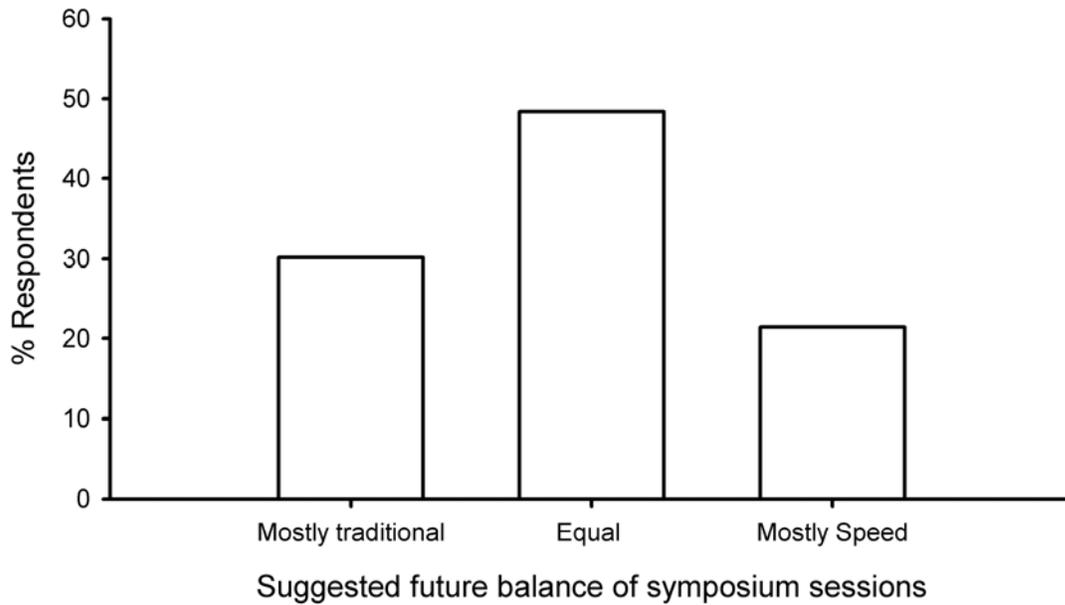


Figure 2: None of the respondents thought that future symposia should comprise of exclusively traditional or speed sessions. The majority (48.4%) thought an equal balance would be preferable with the remaining respondents preferring either mostly traditional (30.2%) or mostly speed (21.4%) sessions.

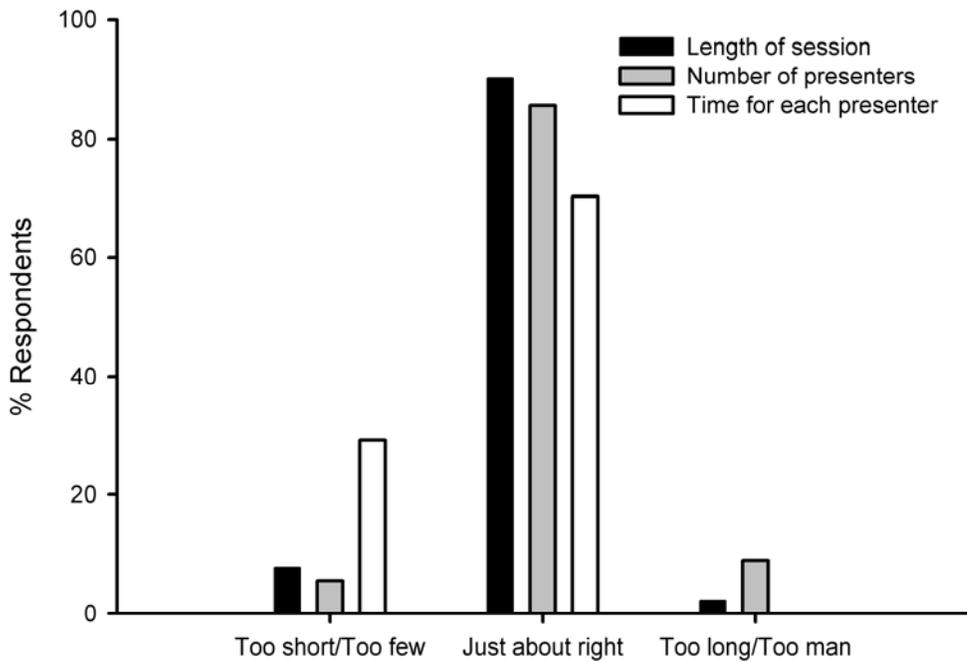


Figure 3: In general, respondents found the length of the speed session, the number of participants and the duration of each presentation to be just about right.