
TUGboat open-access survey results

TUG Board

Earlier this fall (approx. August 6–September 16), the TUG Board conducted a one-question survey on increasing open access to the *TUGboat* journal. To date, *TUGboat* has been delayed open-access, with most technical articles available only to members for about one year after publication.

Clearly, we would only want to change the policy if doing so would help TUG, not hurt it. Memberships are what pay the bills, and we could not predict whether this change would cause a crash in memberships or not. We knew the survey could provide only general indications, since the responders would be self-selected and unverified, but it was the only way we could think of to garner any information at all. The survey had one question for members:

If all *TUGboat* material were publicly available online immediately upon publication, would that make renewing your TUG membership more likely, less likely, or have no particular effect?

and the analogous question for non-members, asking about joining instead of renewing.

There was an excellent response, better than we had hoped for. 588 people responded in all, 519 (88%) as current members and 69 (12%) as non-members. At the time of the survey, TUG had approximately 1180 members, so about 44% of members responded.

Overall, approximately 79% of respondents said that the proposed full open-access would have no effect on their decision, 11% said they would be less likely to join or renew, and 10% said they would be more likely. (The exact numbers are posted at tug.org/TUGboat.)

Given this split response, the Board has decided on a compromise change: all *TUGboat* issues *except the current one* will now be publicly available. For example, you are reading this report in *TUGboat* 39:3, so issues 39:2 and earlier are now publicly available, while the technical articles in this issue remain available only to members (either in print or online at tug.org/members), until issue 40:1 is published.

It is our hope that this change will both retain the current members who would have (understandably) dropped with full open-access, and lead more people to renew and join in support of the greater access. If future developments dictate, the policy may be changed again.

We also hope that the greater access will lead to more references to *TUGboat* articles on the forums and mailing lists, and greater visibility generally.

Comments

In addition to the one question above, we had a field where respondents could submit free-form comments. We were grateful to receive dozens of insightful and thought-provoking ideas this way, and would like to relate and respond to a few of them here.

The vast majority of comments, following the numeric results, were a statement of support for T_EX and TUG in general, and so any particular *TUGboat* policy would not change that support. Thank you all!

Among people responding “more likely”, the general sentiment was support for open access in general, and the concomitant benefits.

Several people asked about getting notifications when a new issue was published. We send out a monthly newsletter, which includes announcements of new *TUGboat* issues. Non-members can subscribe at lists.tug.org/tex-announce.

A few people were evidently unaware that it is possible to choose to get *TUGboat* electronically only, or how the fees changed. Indeed, there is a substantial discount on the membership fee for receiving benefits electronically only; see tug.org/join. That page also explains possible tax deductions.

On the other hand, quite a few respondents indicated a strong desire for the physical *TUGboat* (and software DVD), belying other respondents who wondered who would want anything on paper (or disc) nowadays. We have no plans to discontinue the physical *TUGboat* (or DVD).

A couple people suggested conducting the survey through the members’ area on the web site, to avoid multiple submissions and know if responders were members. We did consider this, but ultimately felt that responders’ anonymity was more important to gathering useful results.

And lastly, one eagle-eyed respondent noticed we incorrectly used past tense instead of the subjunctive in the survey text. Does any other organization have such proofreaders?! (We fixed it.) Thank you.

Thanks to all the survey respondents for giving us a foundation for a decision, and making so many thoughtful comments. And a special thanks to all the authors, reviewers, and all contributors to *TUGboat* over the years, who have made it an important resource for the T_EX world since TUG’s founding.

For further comments or discussion on this (or any other TUG questions), feel free to contact the Board at any time.

◇ TUG Board
board@tug.org