

RHIC/AGS Users' Executive Committee Quality of Life Survey 2003

Summary of Results

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(for the RHIC/AGS Users' Executive Committee)

During the APS Division of Nuclear Physics Meeting in Tucson in October/November of 2003, a Quality of Life survey was distributed at the RHIC/AGS Users' Meeting, and at many of the parallel sessions related to RHIC/AGS physics. Soon after, the survey was sent out via email to the RHIC/AGS Users' Group. From among the ~1000 recipients of the survey, there were 48 replies.

Who responded?

With the exception of undergraduate students, replies came in from the full spectrum of scientists performing research at the RHIC and AGS facilities, with a cumulative experience covering ~500 years of research at BNL. The vast majority of those responding are users of RHIC, and most of them expect to continue to use RHIC for more than 5 additional years.

The Housing Facilities

Several questions asked about various aspects of the housing facilities. Respondents were generally pleased with the facilities, although there were many suggestions for improvements. Reduction of noise, installation of air-conditioning, improvement of internet services, improvement of room and air cleanliness, and improvements to the bathrooms and kitchens were most often suggested. There was not support for the installation of computers in some dorm rooms -- users prefer that support for laptops be improved, especially more wireless internet at BNL in general, especially in common areas. The resistance to spending money on computers in dorm rooms was partly motivated by the fact that most folks have computer access at their research areas.

FLIK

The one question about FLIK and the dining facilities generated the most response of any question. The Brookhaven Center received severe criticism: The service, hours of operation, and quality of food at the Brookhaven Center are all held in very low regard. There was a general desire for longer operating hours of the cafeteria, perhaps 24-hour operation. Especially there was a desire for a true dinner service, not including that currently available at the Brookhaven Center.

Association of Students and Postdocs (ASAP)

There is (sadly) a general lack of knowledge of even the existence of the ASAP and the ASAP lounge among those who responded. ASAP clearly has a marketing challenge still to be overcome.

RHIC & AGS Users' Center

Users responding to the survey expressed overwhelming praise for the work of the RHIC & AGS Users' Center. There were a number of improvements suggested for the

handling of users' site access problems, especially those of international users, but there were also many comments of praise concerning those same issues.

There were many comments, in response to the question about the Users' Center, concerning access problems at the front gate. Many users complained about being turned away at the front gate (or they knew of colleagues who had been turned away), even when they had done everything correctly in advance. The guards who work at the front gate are not under the supervision of the Users' Center staff, so User's Center staff can only indirectly change the policies that implemented at the front gate. The Users' Center staff are very aware of the problems that occur at the front gate (because they are contacted every time this sort of thing occurs) and they are working to alleviate these problems.

Safety Training and Safety Quality

Users seem generally pleased with the safety training and with the quality of safety in the workplace at BNL. Especially, users were pleased that many training courses can now be taken over the web, and they wish to see this trend continue. There were a number of suggestions concerning the amount of required training (too many different courses, too many tests) but unfortunately some of these comments were non-specific and hard to interpret. There were suggestions with respect to having a single Radiation Worker Training that would be valid at all labs, or that at least BNL should honor Radiation Worker Training that users have taken at other labs.

Recommendations:

- Users desire more widespread wireless computer access in public areas (cafeteria, dormitories, meeting areas, and the like). A very specific recommendation along these lines was that there be a multi-port hub installed in each apartment, instead of just a single port connector, since there can often be multiple computer users in a single apartment.
- The food service at the Brookhaven Center needs to be reviewed and overhauled.
- The food service at the cafeteria needs to have either (1) extended operating hours or (2) lower prices. It would be nice if both of these objectives could be achieved, but it is understood that probably these are mutually exclusive goals.
- The operation at the front gate needs to be improved and standardized so that users can expect to be allowed into Brookhaven when they have satisfied all the entrance requirements in advance of their arrival.

Details of the Survey:

1. A total of 48 people replied. Who are they?

0	Undergraduate students
5	Graduate students
7	Post-doctoral research associates
4	Junior research staff members
18	Senior research staff members
4	Tenure-track professors
10	Tenured professors

2. How long have they been doing research at BNL?

17	0-5 years
12	6-10 years
13	11-20 years
2	21-30 years
4	More than 30 years

3. and 4. They mostly use this facility at BNL... and expect to use it for....

		0-5 more years	6-10 more years	more than 10 more years
35	RHIC	14	14	7
4	AGS	2	1	1
4	RHIC & AGS	1	3	
2	NSRL	1		1
2	Theory Group			2
1	RCF	1		

5. Furnishings in the housing facilities:

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
36	5	7

General nature of comments:

Kitchen and bath facilities are not in an acceptable state. The shower stall doors do not seal properly, and the showerheads cannot be adjusted to increase/reduce/redirect the flow of water.

Must have air conditioning in apartments for the summers.

Could upgrade the alarm clocks to clock-radios.

Even non-smoking rooms often smell of smoke, due to common air system for all rooms.

Rooms are often not cleaned very well.

Furniture positioning often blocks access to power sockets and internet ports.

Often the power sockets are tied to the light switch, which can be inconvenient.

The beds are uncomfortable, and too short for tall persons. Mattresses and box springs need replacement (if not yet done already).

Gym is open at bad hours, so either improve the hours for the gym or put small gyms (treadmill, exercise bike, weight machine) in the housing facilities, as exists in many hotels now.

Allocation process for the apartments is very chaotic.

Placement of the refrigerator in the dorm rooms is always a problem.

Adding coffee vending machines in the dorms would be great.

There is often too much noise from neighboring rooms and the hallway. Install soundproof doors?

Several persons suggested the construction of a common central housing facility with nearby cafeteria, bar and meeting rooms, so that there would be a natural way of meeting colleagues after work. These comments usually referred to the facilities at CERN by way of comparison.

6. Cable TV in the rooms and/or lobbies:

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
35	0	13

General nature of comments:

I don't come to BNL to watch TV. The money would be better spent improving the sleeping quarters.

Don't be so cheap! Buy the pay channels!

There is little opportunity to watch TV, but it is useful for checking the news.

Yes, it is a nice addition.

7. Internet in the Rooms

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
42	1	5

General nature of comments:

This is the single most important change to the housing facilities in recent years.
[Many comments to this effect. – SFP]

When do we get wireless?

“Failure to connect many times.”

“It seems that SMTP is blocked from the dorms. I can receive email there, but cannot send it (bnl won’t accept outgoing mail from there).” [Two comments like this. -- SFP]

“But when service is down late a night (happened several times to me in Guest House) it is very frustrating – no way to fix or file report.”

What about the summer cottages?

Need a wireless hub in each apartment. Current system can only handle one person at a time.

8. Equip some rooms with computers?

Yes	No	No Opinion
10	18	20

Pro:

Important for students sent to BNL for long periods. Not every graduate advisor will buy a laptop for a student.

Just access to the internet (browser and ssh) would be sufficient.

Con:

People can go to their offices if they need computer access. Better to put a few computers in common areas.

There are already computers in common areas of the dorms and cafeteria.

Money is probably better spent elsewhere.

How would you decide who gets these rooms with computers?

The computers will immediately become obsolete in a year or so.

Already there is very little space in the dorm rooms. Make the rooms better instead.

9. Public computer access area at your research facility?

It exists, and they are:

Pleased	Not pleased	No Opinion
26	2	10

Doesn't exist, and it is:

Needed	Not needed	No Opinion
2	2	6

General nature of comments:

Need wireless in the cafeteria, or computers in the cafeteria lobby.

Better to provide wireless for everyone's laptops than a bunch of computers.

10. Flick

Pleased	Not pleased	No Opinion
22	17	9

The "pleased" and "not pleased" numbers here are a little misleading --- many persons checked "pleased" and then went on to write a strong criticism of some component of the food service.

There were so many comments written concerning Flick that they became "statistical" and I can easily summarize them all in a few statements:

The prices are too high, especially for students.

The service, hours of operation, and quality of food at the Brookhaven Center are all held in very low regard.

The hours of operation of the cafeteria are insufficient. Many persons want to eat breakfast earlier (say 6am), while others want a longer lunch period, and still others want a true dinner service (and not the service at the Center). A few suggested that the cafeteria should be open 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, like the cafeteria at CERN. Some wanted better food at the cafeteria but such comments were not as strong as those regarding the Center.

11. ASAP

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
6		42

Some comments (only taken from the 12 student and post-doc entries):

(No opinion) [five times]

(Pleased) [three times]

“Didn’t know about it.”

“Not visited yet.”

“I didn’t go there yet (haven’t been to BNL recently), but I’m aware of their activities.”

“I have not visited the lounge.”

12. RHIC & AGS Users’ Center

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
37	4	7

General nature of comments:

The folks at the Users’ Center are doing a very good job. [This comment occurs many times, in many forms. --- SFP]

Some users experience long waits at the gate, despite having used the web sign-in form.

Some users are very worried that they will make some little mistake and be turned away at the gate in the middle of the night. There seem to be many stories to back up this fear.

It is very annoying that site access regulations are constantly changing.

Many suggestions for improvements: (1) Can we fax a new visa to BNL instead of having to carry all paperwork to BNL every time the visa changes? (2) Can it be made clear if it is OK to wear official DOE badges instead of the BNL-specific badges? (3) Can they install a passport scanner (such as is used at the border) so that correct personal information can be loaded in quickly? (4) Can more paperwork be processed before arrival at BNL? (5) Can you make the online checkin/checkout form easier to use? (6) Can BNL make more personnel available to assist the Users’ Center, so that there can be more assistance available for those who have difficulty obtaining visas?

13. Safety Training

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
38	9	1

Some comments:

It is much better, now that access and training from off-site is possible. More and more of the material and training should be made available from off-site! [This was the most frequent type of comment. --- SFP]

Especially, the web training is easier for non-native speakers of English.

“There is too much emphasis on blanket training. It becomes difficult to distinguish what training is actually useful. I would suggest overhauling the training program to emphasize legitimate safety concerns, rather than using training classes as a way to protect the Lab by showing due diligence.”

The Lab needs to make up its mind whether or not it is going to accept Rad Worker training from other National Labs. This policy recently changed without any warning.

Some of the training expires too quickly. [The contributor did not specify which ones! --- SFP]

We should be able to do all required training at home institution. [It isn't clear to me if this means that all training should be able to be done over the web from the home institution, or if all training should be able to be provided by the home institution. I think the former is the more likely interpretation. --- SFP]

More flexibility on when training is offered during runs. [Again, this is rather non-specific. --- SFP]

Training should be practical, i.e. experimental and not theoretical, so that you don't forget. Many people sleep during the long training classes.

14. Safety Quality at BNL

Pleased	Not Pleased	No Opinion
43	2	3

Some comments:

“Make BNL a safer place by developing training programs that actually promote real-life safety. By taking too many training courses, the most important messages are often lost. I suggest management commission an independent audit of the safety training at BNL that studies the effectiveness of the training in preventing injury.”

“Too much training doesn’t help. The lab has given the users the impression that they care about the safety. If everything comes down to ‘just passing tests’ (and sometimes it is like this, since there are/were too many tests to do) this isn’t of any help.”

Better communication is needed between those who write the regulations and those who do the work. Avoid capricious regulation!

A lot of training seems to just be “going through the motions,” and is not taken seriously.

There should be some way for users to provide feedback on what they think the real safety hazards are in their work areas.

“Generally safety is regarded seriously, I think the message has gotten through.”

“I am always requested to take HazCom by the Physics department, but I have never handled explosive material at BNL. Do AGS users really need to take HazCom?”