

2006 Annual Report  
LSA Program Committee

Chair: Cathy O'Connor (Boston University)

## **Four topics:**

- Brief overview of the Annual Meeting 2007
- Addressing growth of the Annual Meeting
- New abstract review system
- New abstract submission deadline(!)

# Annual Meeting Overview

457 Abstracts submitted on-line  
(all-time highs: 419 papers, 38 posters)

289 Abstracts accepted  
(63% acceptance rate overall;  
comparable to last 3 years)

12 Organized sessions proposed and accepted

Billions of parallel sessions

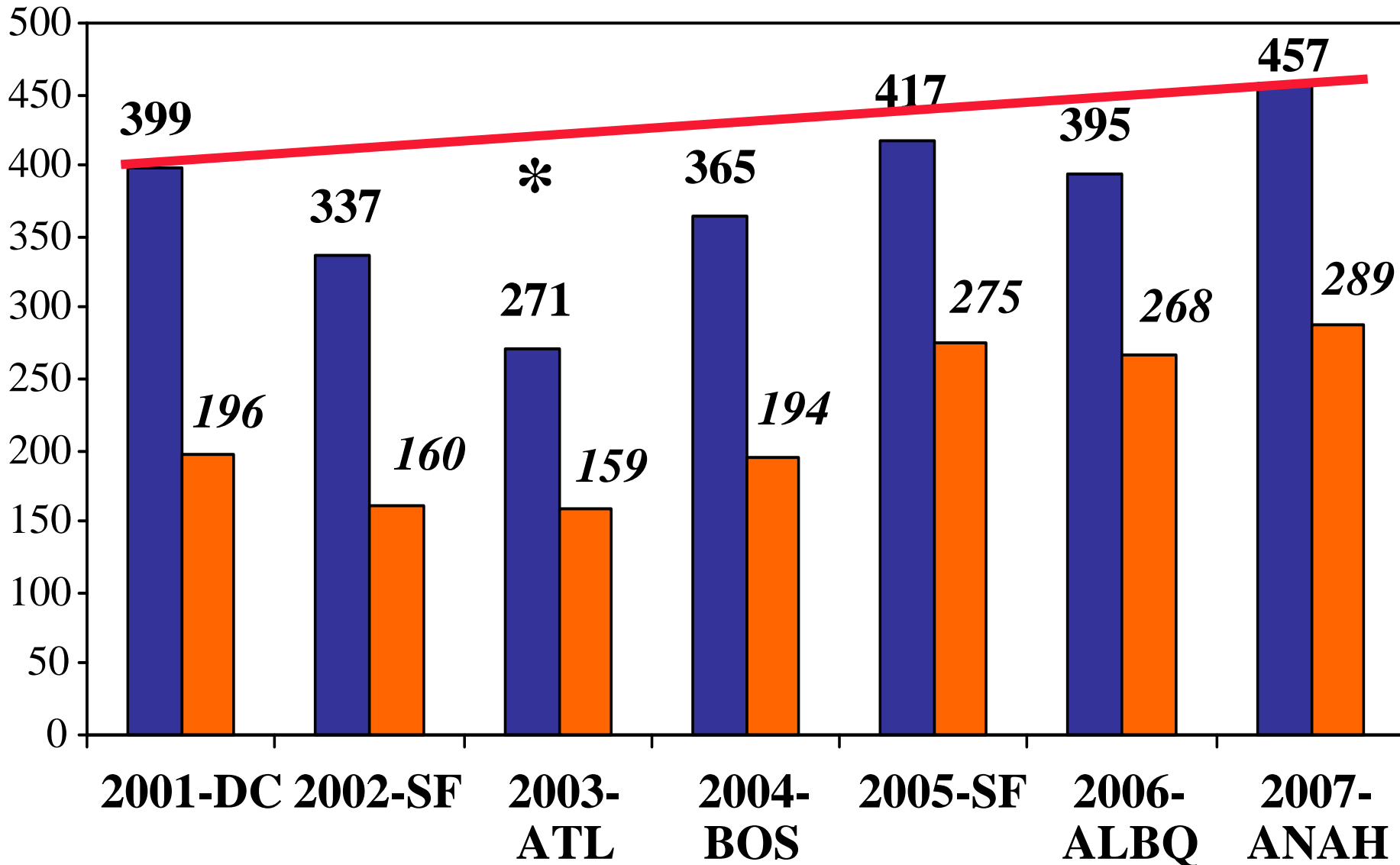
# Responding to Growth of the Annual Meeting

***Q: Is the Annual Meeting getting too big?***

*Yes, I can't see the all papers I want to see. The quality is inconsistent. There are too many parallel sessions. There should be fewer papers.*

*Well, yes, there are too many parallel sessions, **but** this conference is important for students and people on the job market. And it should include all kinds of work in the field. So I wish there were fewer papers, but I fear the negative consequences of that.*

# Number of abstracts submitted and accepted (papers and posters) from 2001-2007



Number of submissions is increasing.

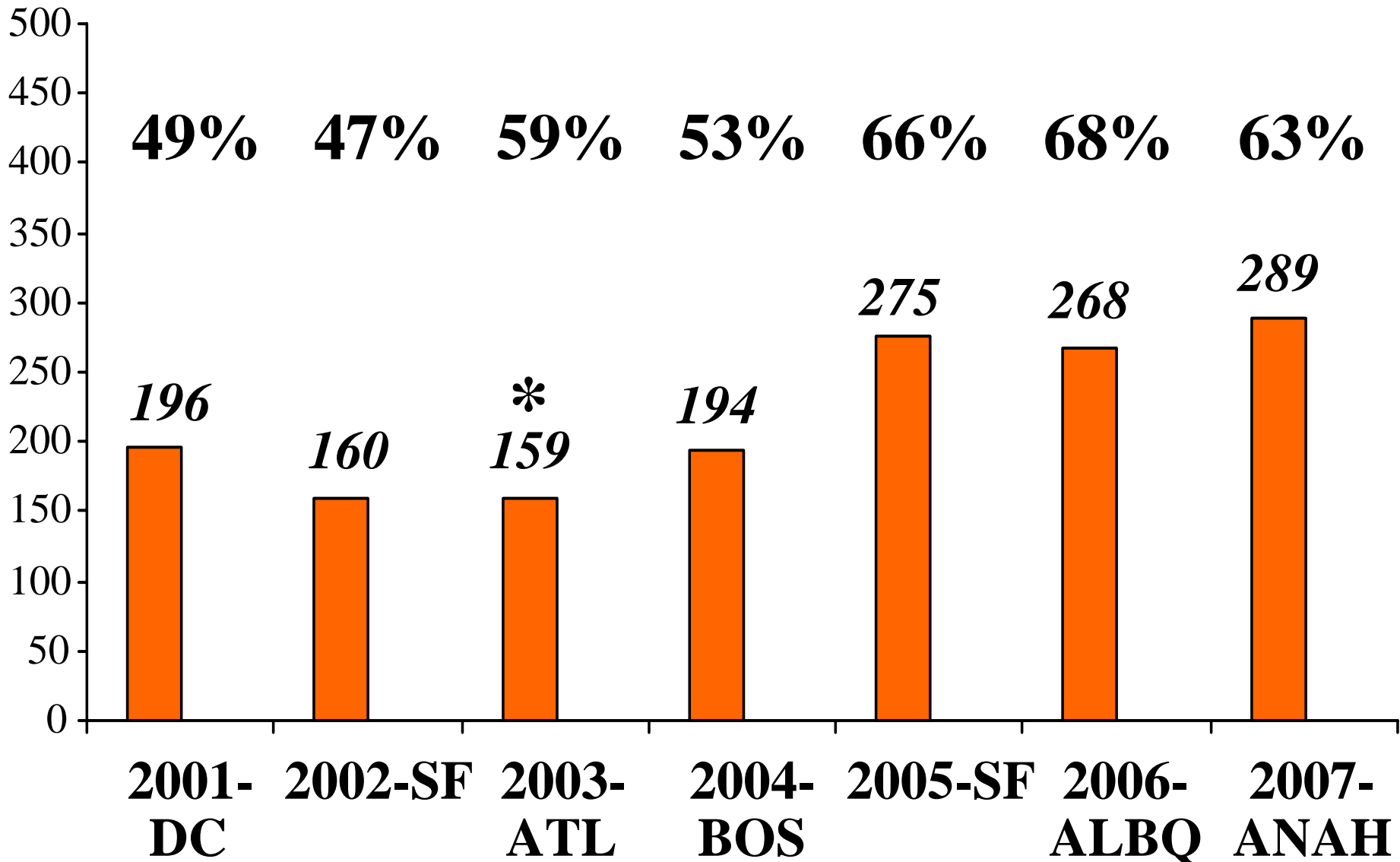
2007 up about 10% from San Francisco in 2005

2007 up about 15% from Albuquerque in 2006

Average submissions for 2005-2007 up 15% from  
average submissions for 2001-2004 (excluding 2003)

Is the Annual Meeting growing only because  
abstract submissions are increasing?

# Abstract acceptance rates from 2001-2007



So submission rates and acceptance rates are both rising, and the number of parallel sessions is growing.

Saturday Morning: 18 parallel sessions

X X X X X X X X O O P S S S S S S S S

X = LSA paper session

O = Organized session

P = Poster session

S = Sister society session (SSILA, NALS, etc.)

So submission rates and acceptance rates are both rising, and the number of parallel sessions is growing.

Saturday Morning: 18 parallel sessions

X X X X X X X X O O P S S S S S S S S

Why is this a problem?

Attendee frustration with quantity and quality

Narrowing of venue options (few hotels big enough)

Executive Committee decision: allow a maximum of **six parallel LSA paper sessions** per time slot.

Saturday Morning: 16 parallel sessions

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*So how much will this affect acceptance rates?*

Six parallel sessions over six time slots means we can accept up to **216 papers**.

If we had followed this plan for 2007, our acceptance rate would have been **47%** instead of **63%**.

*So how will you address the reduced opportunities for graduate students and others to present their work?*

Executive Committee: Let's follow the practice of many other conferences, and allow people to submit their abstract as

a) a paper

b) a poster

c) a paper OR a poster

After all the abstracts are rated and ranked, and the 216 papers are selected, the Program Committee can return to the rankings and select any number of abstracts for poster sessions.

Poster sessions can be as large as the venue will allow, so acceptance rates for posters can be quite high.

Saturday Morning: 16 parallel sessions

X X X X X X – – O O P S S S S S S S S

*Hmm. So if fewer abstracts are going to be accepted, maybe we want to know more about just how this review process is done...*

# The New Abstract Review Process

# What was the old reviewing system?

8-member Program Committee (PC)

Each PC member was expected to rate (and possibly discuss) every abstract

A small number of outside experts were asked to evaluate abstracts in areas outside PC expertise

(Outside experts were not allowed to rate abstracts)

# What was problematic about the old reviewing system?

Lack of coverage

(sometimes fewer than 3 knowledgeable ratings for a given abstract)

Reluctance of PC members to reject questionable abstracts because of lack of expertise ("*How can I reject it if I don't understand it?*")

Chagrined and desperate PC members as abstract numbers climbed past 400 ("*How can I reject it if I didn't have time to read it?*")

# **What is the new reviewing system?**

8-member Program Committee

Panel of 60+ outside experts; each rates 20 abstracts

Each abstract receives 3 outside expert ratings and at least 2 PC member ratings

PC members expected to rate 100+ abstracts, including all those in their fields of expertise

All abstracts rated on a 1-10 scale (10 high).

All reviews submitted on-line.

Statistics and rankings (raw and normalized) compiled.

PC members discuss cut-offs and individual cases.

# Questions about the New Review System

***Q: Who are these expert reviewers? How were they chosen?***

We asked for nominations from LSA officers, Executive Committee members and Program Committee members from the past ten years.

From the 210 nominations we received, we invited about 60 who had been nominated by two or more people.

Names of the 2007 reviewers are published in the Program and on the LSA website.

*Q: Is it fair to rank an abstract on its average rating by three or so expert reviewers?*

*What if the three experts who rate my abstract are 'tough graders' who give every abstract a 2 or a 3?*

*Won't I be at a disadvantage, especially if others get three 'easy graders'?*

# Remedy:

Each abstract is ranked

according to its average raw score (the average rating it got on the 1-10 scale)

and

according to its average "z-score"-- a standardized measure that corrects for reviewer bias towards tough or easy grading.

*But what if the experts disagree?*

*What if one gives my abstract a 9 and  
another one gives it a 1?*

*Am I just a 5?*

# Remedy:

The PC makes the final decisions based on

- the raw score rank
- the z-score rank

and

- discussions of abstracts where reviewers showed significant disagreement

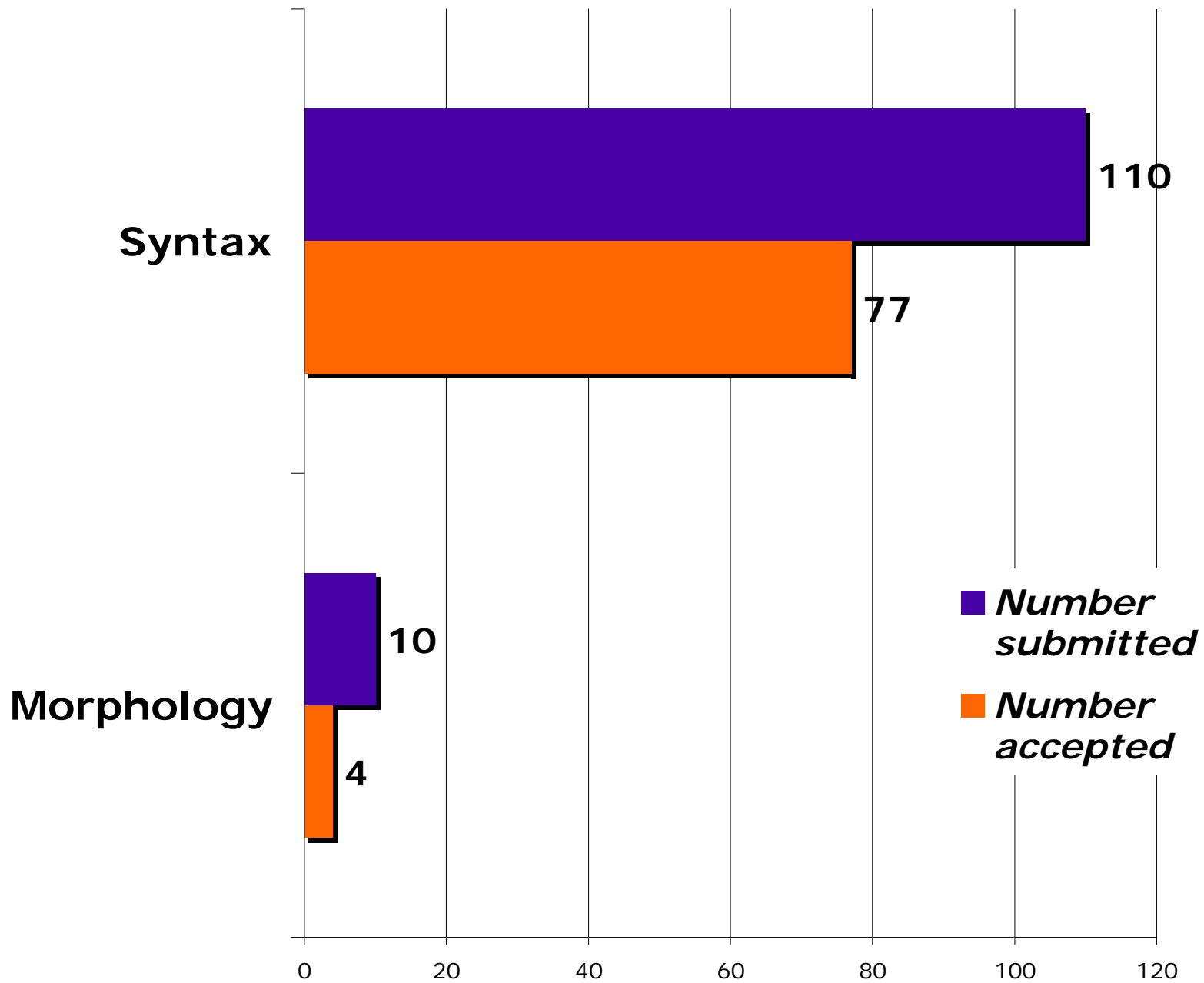
***Q: How can we tell whether the review process is fair to different subfields?***

Common variants of this question:

*Why are there so many syntax papers?*

*Why are there so few morphology papers?*

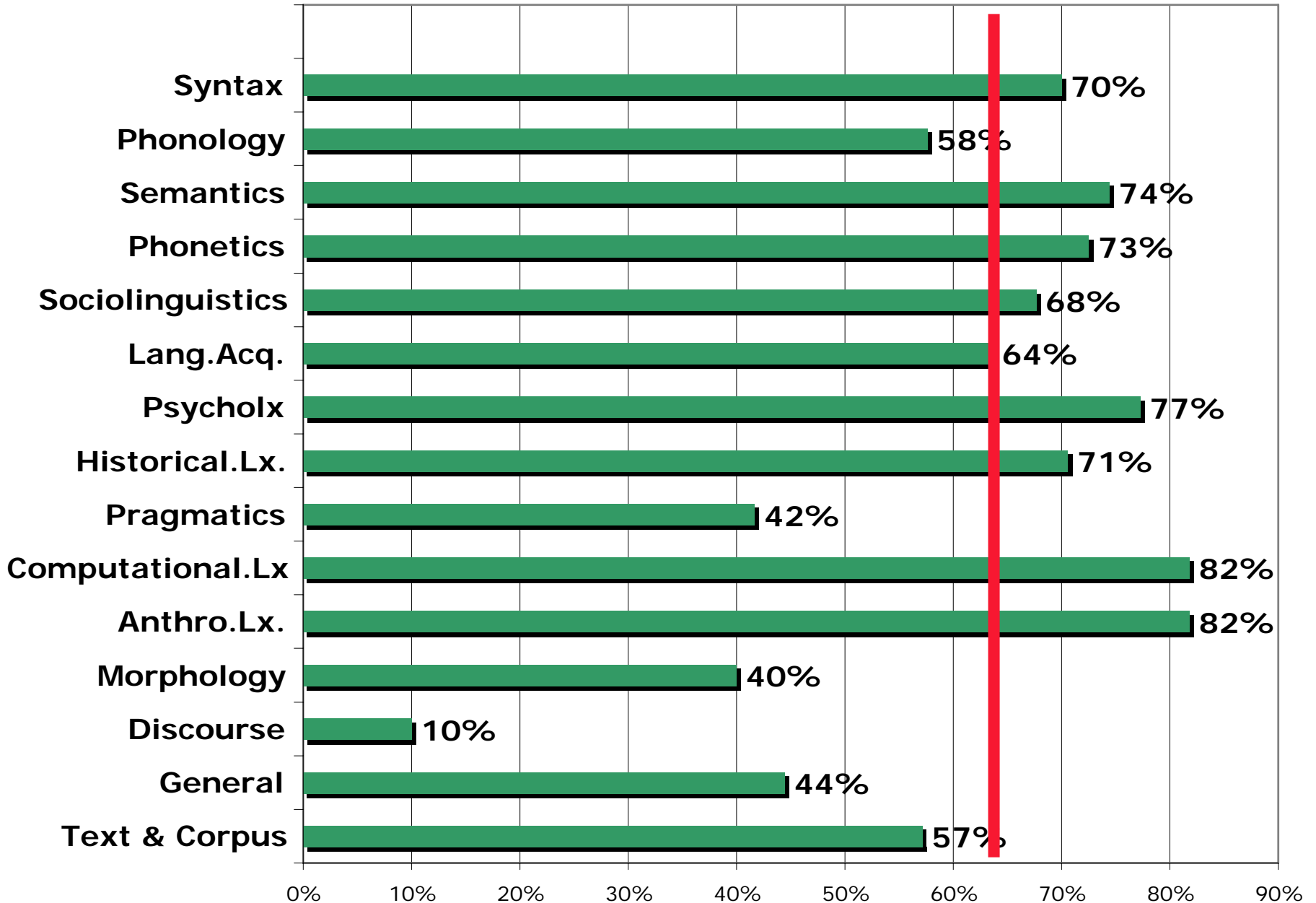
# Number of abstracts accepted depends on number submitted!



***Q: So what about rates of acceptance? That's another approach to "subfield fairness."***

*You said the overall rate of acceptance is 63%.  
I don't think we should have quotas for each  
subfield,  
but did **my** subfield have a comparable rate of  
acceptance?*

# No. Rates of acceptance within subfield vary widely:



*Does that mean the process is unfair to some subfields?*

We don't think so.

Subfields may vary in quality over time. (Comments by reviewers are in accord with this claim.)

No reviewer was told to aim for a target acceptance rate. Nevertheless, the ten largest subfields all have acceptance rates within one standard deviation of the overall mean.

Smaller categories showed more variation, but here percentage differences are magnified, and may have a small practical impact.

## Two examples of small subfields from 2007:

### Computational Linguistics:

11 abstracts submitted;

9 abstracts accepted--- acceptance rate 82%

*If 7 had been accepted, rate would have been 63%*

### Applied Linguistics:

6 abstracts submitted;

2 abstracts accepted--- acceptance rate 33%

*If 4 had been accepted, rate would have been 66%*

*Q: So if we want to check whether subfields are getting fair treatment, we can't use raw numbers of acceptances, and we can't use percentage of papers accepted.*

*Is there a measure of fairness that works for small and large subfields without setting quotas?*

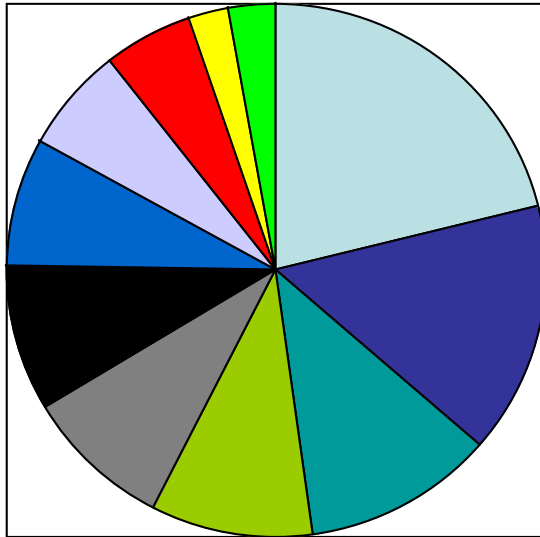
Maybe. Let's compare what a given subfield contributes to

- (a) the total number of abstracts submitted, and to
- (b) the total number abstracts accepted.

# Example:

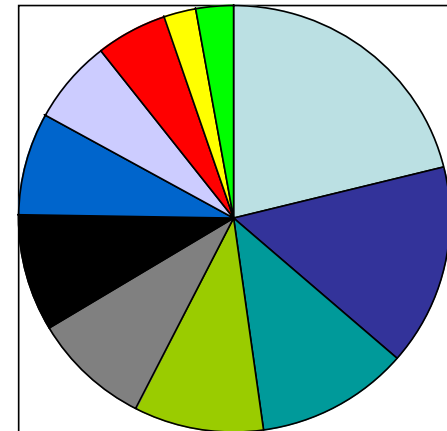
Of all abstracts *submitted* this year, how many were in **Phonology**?

*457 Abstracts Submitted*



13%

*291 Abstracts Accepted*



12%

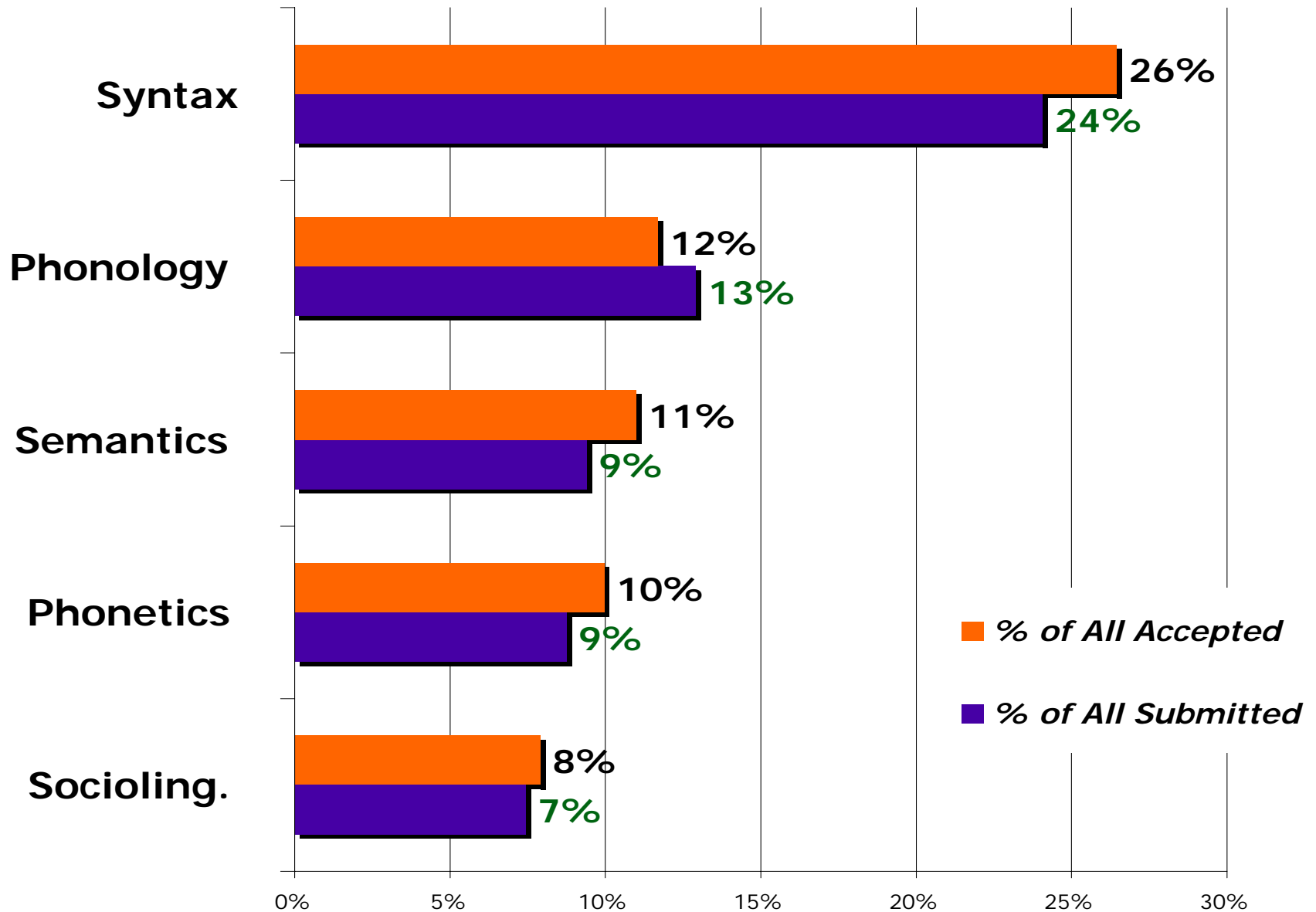
Of all abstracts *accepted* this year, how many were in **Phonology**?

We can scan the subfields to compare their proportions of abstracts submitted vs. accepted against the background of all submissions and acceptances.

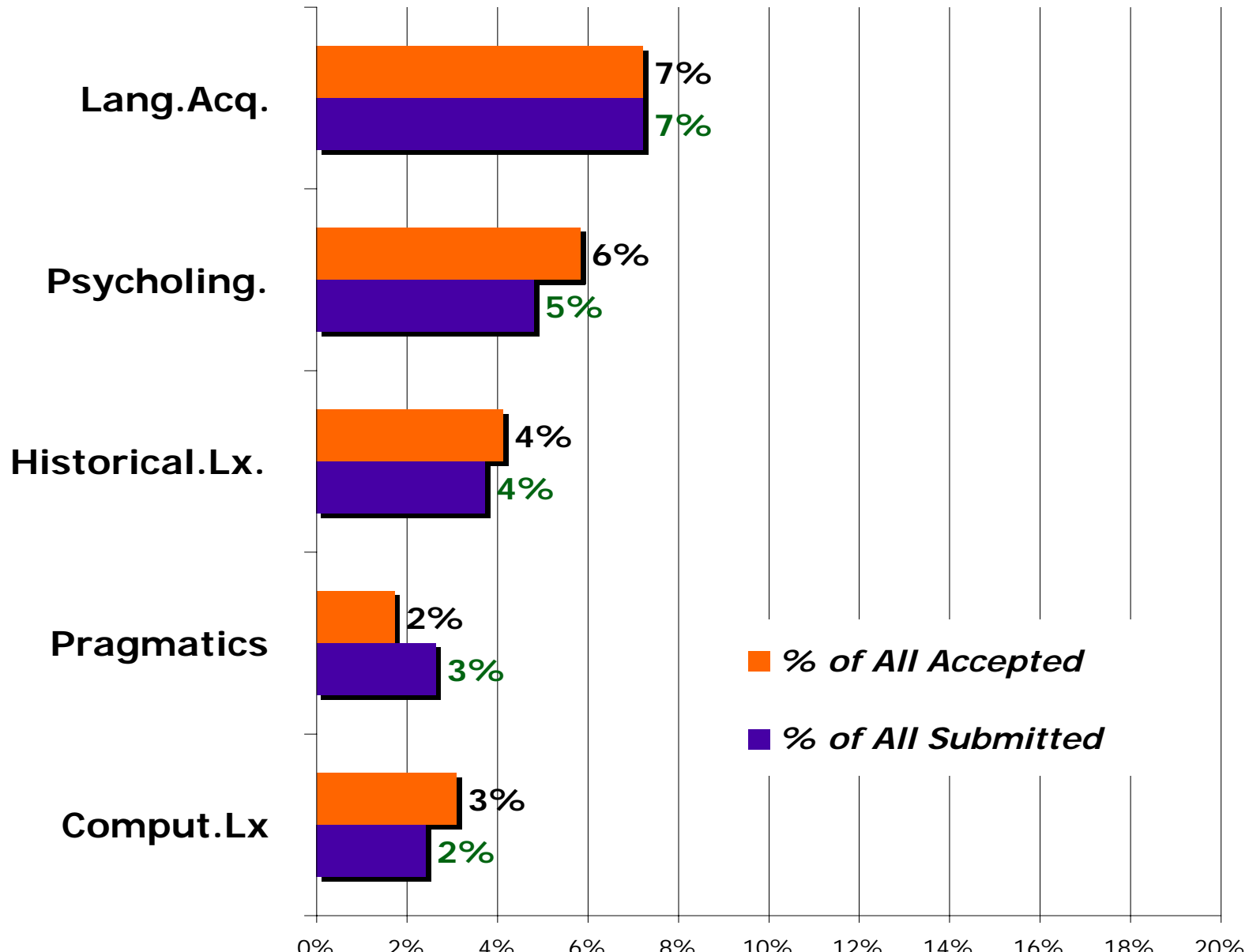
This is one measure that may provide evidence about possible unfairness.

So what does it look like this year?

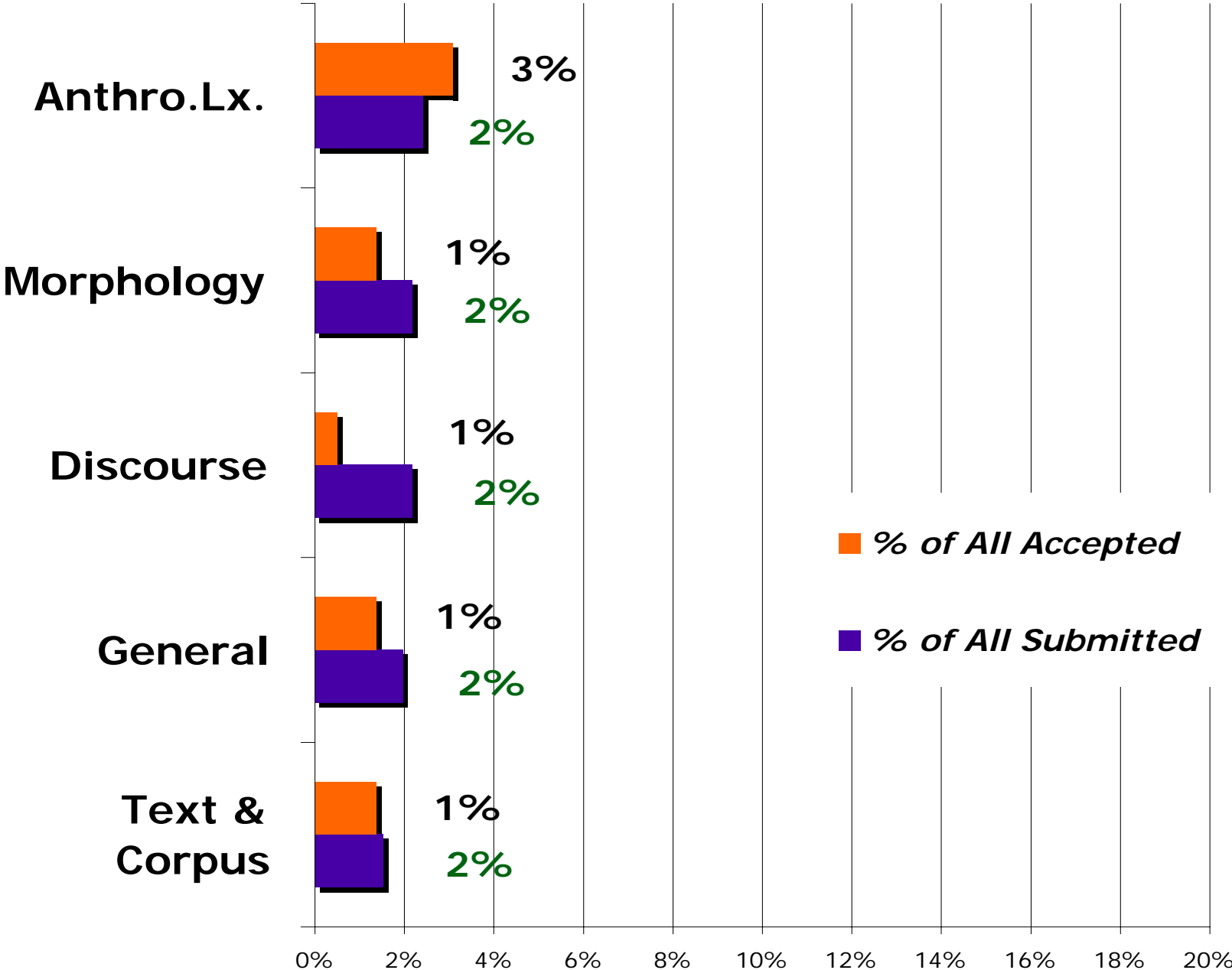
# Top 5 subfields (include > 63% of submissions and accepts)



# Next 5 subfields (include > 21% of submissions and accepts)



# Next 5 subfields (include > 7% of submissions and accepts)



## Tentative conclusion:

The new reviewing system does not use quotas, yet it appears to result in subfield acceptances roughly proportional to subfield submissions.

The Program Committee will continue to monitor these indicators and will post procedures, submission data and acceptance data on the LSA website to ensure that the review system is transparent.

**New Abstract Submission Deadline!**

Because the new review procedures involve 60 external reviewers,  
and because of the increase in submissions,  
**more time** is needed to put the program together.

Executive Committee: The new deadline for abstract submission for the LSA Annual Meeting is...

**August 1st!**

Send comments and questions to  
[lsa@lsadc.org](mailto:lsa@lsadc.org) (LSA secretariat)  
[mco@bu.edu](mailto:mco@bu.edu) (Cathy O'Connor)  
[ck@uchicago.edu](mailto:ck@uchicago.edu) (Chris Kennedy)

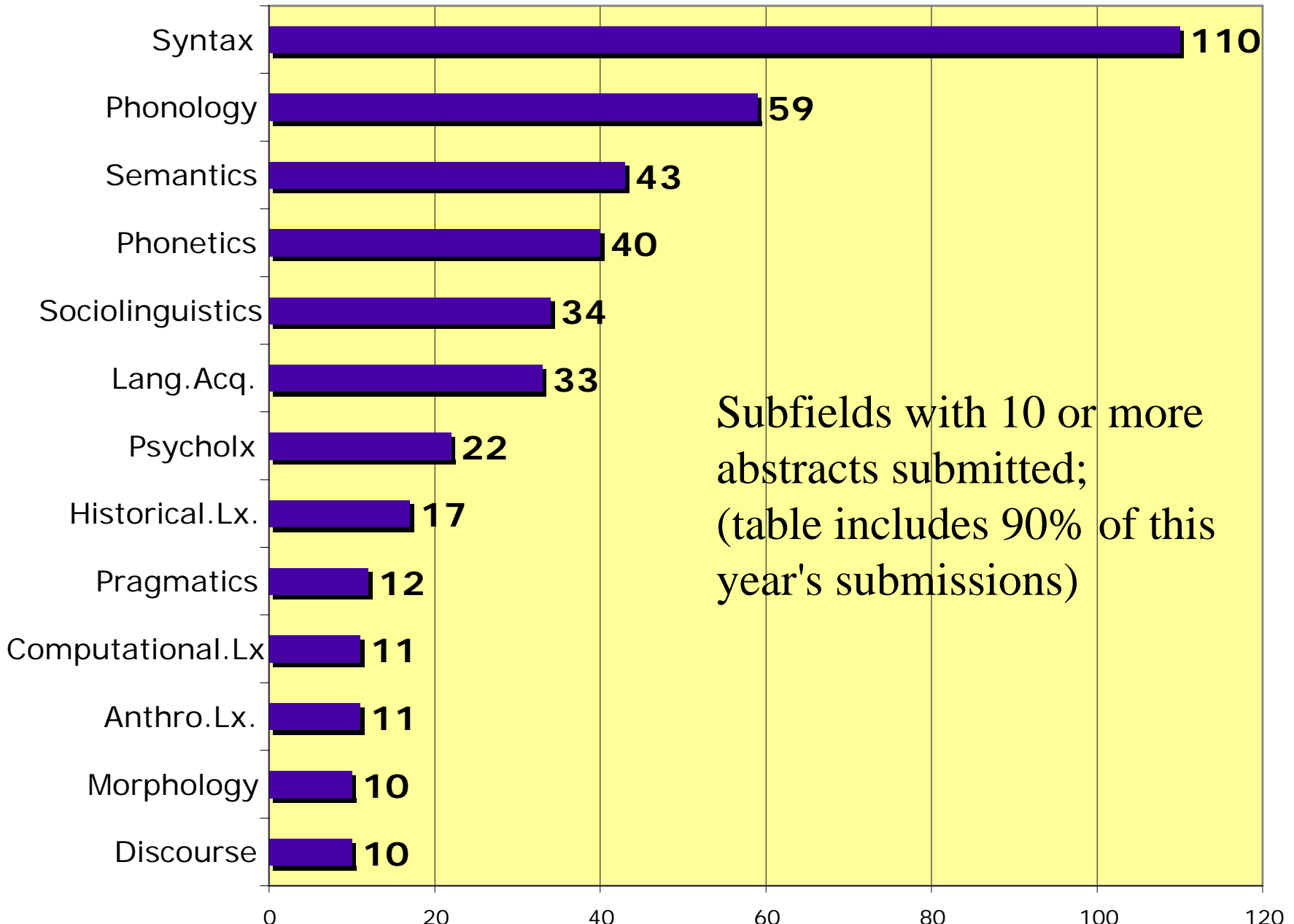
Many thanks to Maggie Reynolds, the LSA staff,  
the Executive Committee and officers, and to the  
reviewers:

**Program Committee**

**External Expert Reviewers**

(listed in the Introductory Note of the Handbook)

# Number of abstracts submitted varies widely by subfield



# Number of abstracts accepted by subfield thus also varies

