

# Americans struggle with science, respect scientists, survey finds

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While most Americans could be a bit more knowledgeable in the ways of science, a majority are interested in hearing about the latest scientific breakthroughs and think highly of scientists.

This is according to a survey of more than 2,200 people conducted by the National Science Foundation, one that is conducted every two years and is part of a report – Science and Engineering Indicators – that the National Science Board provides to the president and Congress.

A Michigan State University faculty member served as lead author for the chapter in the report that covers public perceptions of science. John Besley, an associate professor in MSU's Department of Advertising and Public Relations, reviewed the data, as well as similar surveys from around the world, and highlighted key findings on Feb. 14 during the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

According to the survey, more than 90 percent of Americans think scientists are "helping to solve challenging problems" and are "dedicated people who work for the good of humanity."

"It's important for Americans to maintain a high regard for science and scientists," said Besley, who also is the Ellis N. Brandt Chair in Public Relations. "It can help ensure funding and help attract future scientists."

Unfortunately, Americans still have a tough time answering some basic

science questions. Out of a total of nine questions that covered the physical and biological sciences, the average score was 6.5 correct answers.

For example, only 74 percent of those queried knew that the Earth revolved around the sun, while fewer than half (48 percent) knew that human beings developed from earlier species of animals.

Some of the other highlights of the survey include:

- A majority of Americans – more than 90 percent – say they are "very interested" or "moderately interested" in learning about new medical discoveries.
- The United States appears to be relatively strong in the use of what's known as "informal science education." Nearly 60 percent of Americans have visited a zoo/aquarium, [natural history museum](#) or a science and technology museum.
- Nearly 90 percent of those surveyed think the benefits of science outweigh any potential dangers.
- About a third of the respondents think [science](#) and technology should get more funding.

Provided by Michigan State University

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