

## **Developing a Curriculum to Introduce Internet-Based Research Materials**

A proposal for a ACS Teaching with  
Technology Fellowship for Summer, 2003

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### **Background:**

The proliferation of the internet and the World Wide Web has opened new avenues for research in the social sciences. These avenues afford greater possibilities for participant gathering, population accessibility, and even the ability to address new research questions with ease. Surveys which used to involve mailing packets to a number of participants all over the country (or perhaps the world) can now be done simply by having participants visit a web site. These opportunities might be particularly important for smaller institutions, where research opportunities and resources are sometimes limited. However, frequently the technical issues involved (e.g., knowledge of HTML, software development, hardware acquisition, server maintenance, database management) hamper researchers from using this technology.

There are a number of resources now available for internet-based research that are freely available to academic institutions. These resources would be appropriate for research methods courses and faculty/student research in many social science disciplines. These include tools relevant for anything from simple survey construction to complex experimental procedures. Once a project is developed, several off site locations can house and manage the administration of the study. This means local IT departments do not need to be taxed and little expertise in IT-related issues is required of the experimenter. Proficiency in developing simple web based materials (e.g., HTML forms) is all that is required.

### **Description:**

The proposed project will develop materials introducing the opportunities and resources in internet-based social science research. These resources will include (but are not necessarily limited to) the web based survey tools SurveyWiz (developed by Michael Birnbuam) and WWW Survey Assistant (operated by William Schmidt), as well as PsychExperiments (at The University of Mississippi) and Wextor (with Ulf-Dietrich Reips) for more complex experimental designs.

The materials will be geared toward faculty and students at smaller, liberal arts institutions. The project focuses on those resources developed to outsource or bypass many of the technical issues which can hamper researchers, thus increasing the feasibility of their use. The materials would be appropriate for supplementing a research methodology course, conducting a modular course, or for professional development.

These materials will include links to the relevant resource sites, descriptions of these resources, their potential use, bibliographic reference information, and general information regarding internet-based research (e.g., participant recruitment, data collection, etc.). Also, I will develop applications for use as class projects to illustrate the use of each resource. For example, one application will demonstrate the development of

a simple attitude survey and how this internet-based procedure can be used to establish validity of this measure.

**Timeline:**

The first step will be a web document outlining resources for internet-based research as discussed above. The second step will involve the development of example applications/class exercises illustrating the use of the various products. These applications will allow faculty to pick and use those most relevant to their course or research area.

Prior to the summer fellowship, a sample application will be developed and used in a statistics/research methods course at Centenary College. During the summer, this application will be expanded and others will be developed.

All project materials will be available for Fall of 2003.

**Technology:**

The goal of the project is the introduction of off site internet-based research tools. Thus, most of the necessary technology is freely available via the web. I currently have access to any resources not available on the web.

**Other Support:**

I do not anticipate the need for any additional support.

**Learning Outcomes:**

The project has two primary objectives. First, introducing these resources to faculty at smaller institutions for their individual research programs and the involvement of student researchers. Second, once faculty are introduced to these methods and materials, they can enhance their courses in research methodology and educate students on these recent developments. The ease of access to these resources will allow more opportunities for faculty/student collaboration.

**Curriculum:**

The materials would be appropriate for research methodology courses in most social science disciplines. Most social science programs incorporate at least an introductory methodology course, and many include an advanced experimental or lab component to their curriculum. The project applications and other materials could be easily adapted into these courses. I am planning on using just such an application this semester in an introductory methodology course.

Also, the materials would be an appropriate introduction for any social science researcher to develop internet-based studies. This increases the research opportunities for students and faculty alike. Given these methods are relatively meager drains on departmental and college resources, their use is potentially attractive to researchers across a variety of disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, criminal justice).

**Assessment:**

During the development of the materials, other ACS professors in the social sciences will be consulted concerning relevant applications to be developed. In addition, once the

materials are made available, an assessment will be made of the integration and feasibility of these materials into methodology courses and research programs. At the end of the Fall, 2003 and Spring, 2004 academic semesters, social science faculty will be contacted via a (you guessed it) web-based survey tool to assess their use of this new resource. This will also allow for the continued development of the applications and other materials.

**Dissemination:**

The materials will be made available via the WWW. First, the web document detailing the available resources will be produced. This will be followed by a web document presenting the applications for various class projects. In addition, a mechanism will be available for other faculty to post custom applications developed for their courses.