

# Improving HIV/AIDS Education: A Web Portal

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## Background

Since 1981, when the first reports of the disease now known as AIDS appeared in the scientific literature, numerous scientific reports have been published on this syndrome and its causative agent, HIV. Along with these scientific reports, there have been numerous accounts of this pandemic in the news media. During this time, also, a wealth of visual arts, musical recordings, and movies have been produced that deal with HIV/AIDS. These news and artistic items can represent valuable tools in learning and teaching about HIV/AIDS and, as such, should be included in a comprehensive curriculum devoted to this pandemic.

For the past several years, I have taught a Senior seminar course at Davidson College devoted to HIV/AIDS. In this class, we take a chronological look at the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Students read and discuss the major scientific reports in order to gain an understanding of how our scientific knowledge of HIV/AIDS has progressed. Also, we discuss the societal issues, and their evolution over time, associated with HIV/AIDS. Obviously, a comprehensive course devoted to HIV/AIDS should not focus exclusively on the science.

Recently, a student and I have begun to explore the use of the visual arts in this course. We have reasoned that incorporating the visual arts into this course will serve two main purposes. First, it will emphasize to the students the benefits of interdisciplinary studies. Science and art are not necessarily distinct, non-overlapping subjects. Second, and more importantly, the visual arts associated with HIV/AIDS can be used effectively to reinforce important scientific principles. For instance, one can view and discuss the art of Jackie Kirk when discussing the epidemiology of this disease. Jackie Kirk's paintings depict various types of people with AIDS; male and female, old and young, rich and poor. These paintings reiterate the scientific data showing that HIV does not discriminate. The use of the visual arts, then, can augment greatly the effectiveness of the curriculum. We recently have submitted for publication a manuscript detailing this project.

To extend our work incorporating the visual arts into the study of HIV/AIDS, we also desire to incorporate other popular materials into this course. Various musical recordings and video clips could be used in the classroom to increase the effectiveness of a HIV/AIDS curriculum. Similarly, historical news accounts could provide students with a

better understanding of the social and political climate of the times. All of these materials would further our two objectives of emphasizing interdisciplinary studies and teaching students about HIV/AIDS. Finally, such materials also could be used outside of the classroom as a means of improving public awareness and understanding of HIV/AIDS.

## **Description**

During the summer of 2003, I propose to develop a web portal devoted to artistic endeavors and news media accounts associated with HIV/AIDS. Currently, there are no good collections of such materials that are readily accessible. By identifying, evaluating, and obtaining rights to display such works on a web site, we will be able to provide students and educators with a comprehensive source of materials to be used in conjunction with more traditional scientific sources. These items will be available directly on the Davidson College Department of Biology server or as links. Additionally, I propose to develop a discussion board so that students, educators, and interested members of the public can engage in an informed discourse on HIV/AIDS.

## **Timeline**

June: Identify appropriate materials for web site

July: Obtain copyright permissions for as many items as possible

August: Compile web site and contact other ACS schools to inform them of this resource and to obtain their feedback

September: Begin using this portal as an integral component of the HIV/AIDS seminar

December: Assessment

## **Technology and Other Support**

In addition to server space, the successful completion of this project will require computer hardware and software sufficient to capture, reformat, and display sound clips, video clips, animations, and images. The Center for Instructional Technology (CIT) at Davidson provides these materials. In addition, Mur Muchane, the Director of CIT, and his staff are available to help with technical aspects of this project. The web site will be designed primarily with Dream Weaver. I have a current version of this program, have participated in a Dream Weaver training course, and have used this program extensively for other course development projects. Server space will be provided by the College. Finally, the Department enthusiastically supports this project, in particular, and the constant improvement of course technology, in general.

## **Learning Outcomes**

As stated previously, it is anticipated that this HIV/AIDS web portal will enhance the learning process. First, it will allow students to see more clearly the interdisciplinary connections that exist among different disciplines. Second, it will help students understand scientific principles related to HIV/AIDS. Third, the discussion board will allow students to communicate with others in a meaningful dialogue about this important disease. Finally, as mentioned previously, this web portal will be very useful outside the classroom in efforts to increase public awareness of HIV/AIDS.

## **Curriculum**

Beginning in the Fall of 2003, this web portal will be used as an integral component of my seminar on HIV/AIDS. A link to this portal will be included in the syllabus and on the course homepage. Throughout the semester, students will be asked to investigate various items on the site and these items will be included in our discussions.

## **Assessment**

The effectiveness of this web portal will be evaluated by several means. First, the comments and suggestions of faculty in my department and at other ACS institutions will be solicited. Second, student evaluations will be obtained. Third, a description of this project will be submitted for presentation at an upcoming American Society for Microbiology meeting. Finally, information about this web portal will be provided to local public health educators in hopes that they will use it as part of their outreach efforts and then will provide valuable feedback.

## **Dissemination**

The URL for this HIV/AIDS web portal will be displayed on my homepage and Davidson College Department of Biology homepage. Additionally, I will notify members of other ACS schools about this portal and provide them with the URL. To further disseminate information about this portal and its usefulness in the classroom, I will present it at an appropriate scientific meeting and submit a description of it to an appropriate science education journal.