

2003 ACS Technology Fellowship Final Report

Improving HIV/AIDS Education: A Web Portal

**David R. Wessner
Anna G. McDonald
Davidson College**

Summary

As part of our ACS Technology Fellowship, we proposed to develop a web site devoted to popular culture references to HIV/AIDS, for use in the classroom and by the general public. In this final report, we detail the status of this web site and the development of a student-produced documentary about HIV/AIDS. We also discuss the responses from students who have viewed these materials, our plans for disseminating our work to a larger audience, and for using these web materials in the classroom.

Project

During the summer and fall of 2003, we compiled artistic images, video clips from popular movies and television programs, and sound clips from popular recording artists that referenced HIV/AIDS. Additionally, we developed short biographies of the artists or descriptions of the movies/television programs. For sound and video clips, short segments that fall within the accepted copyright "fair use" standards were selected. For artistic images, copyright permissions were obtained from the artists or their estates.

With the help of the Instructional Technology staff at Davidson College, we digitized these materials and developed a web site that displays these images and sound and video clips within the context of a timeline of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. When a particular year on the timeline initially is selected, a brief description of a major HIV/AIDS scientific advance associated with that time period appears on screen. Additionally, menus listing the popular culture materials associated with that time frame also are active. Users then can view specific selections. As the image or clip is being displayed, the biography of the artist or description of the material also is displayed. Embedded within these descriptions are links to outside web sites that provide additional information.

With this format, it is our hope that people will be able to get a better sense of how our scientific understanding of HIV/AIDS has progressed over the past two decades and how the artistic and entertainment communities have responded to this pandemic. In conjunction with this project, we have published an article that examines the pedagogical uses of artistic images to teach students about HIV/AIDS:

"The visual art of HIV/AIDS: An interdisciplinary approach to teaching about HIV/AIDS." Wessner and McDonald (2003). *Bioscene: Journal of College Biology Teaching* 29:15-21.

Additionally, a student (Alex Trzebucki) produced a short documentary (*Living With AIDS*) that examines the life of a woman and her daughter who are living with HIV/AIDS. This film focuses primarily on the importance of support groups in helping people who are HIV-positive. The entire film and a series of shorter, related clips are available on the Web and as DVDs.

Evaluation

To determine the effectiveness of these web sites, we asked students in both introductory biology courses and upper level biology courses to view these materials and provide us with their feedback. Generally, the student evaluations were very positive. Most students thought the popular culture site was easy to navigate and it increased their interest in HIV/AIDS and the popular culture references to this pandemic. A number of students commented that an increased scientific content would be helpful. These students thought it would be useful if a more detailed explanation of the scientific advances associated with different years on the timeline were provided.

All viewers provided very positive comments about the HIV/AIDS documentary. This film, they remarked, increased their understanding of the stigma still associated with HIV/AIDS and the social and medical challenges faced by people living with HIV/AIDS.

Future Directions

In response to student comments, we will include on the HIV/AIDS popular culture site a menu that provides newspaper headlines from the different years and a menu that provides more complete information about the scientific advances. These entrees will provide references to the articles and include links to the actual articles, if possible. Additionally, we continually are collecting and adding new resources.

We hope to provide DVD copies of the *Living With AIDS* documentary to interested parties.

Dissemination and Use

To this point, these materials have been used in an informal way at Davidson College in an introductory biology course and an advanced biology seminar focused on HIV/AIDS. In future semesters, these materials will be used more extensively in both courses. Additionally, these materials will be used extensively in a non-majors biology course focused on HIV/AIDS that is being developed with the support of an Associated Colleges of the South science reform grant. These web sites also are available for use by any interested parties.

To encourage the use of these materials by a larger audience, we will submit them for inclusion in an appropriate compendium of educational resources.

Project Web Sites

HIV/AIDS Popular Culture

<http://www.bio.davidson.edu/projects/aidspopculture>

Living With AIDS Documentary

<http://www.bio.davidson.edu/livingwithaids>

06/29/04