

FURSCA Research Program Cover Page

Name of applicant:

Date: 2/14/2011

Graduation Year: 2012

Major: Communication Studies

Advisor: Professor Andy Boyan

Advisor's Department: Communication Studies

Title of Project: The study of Internet usage: Understanding the transition from college-age students to recent graduates

Grant Period: Fall____ Spring____ Summer____

Summer start and end dates? date must start on Monday and end on Friday
May 23, 2011 – July 29, 2011

Has FURSCA supported this project or projects similar to it for the applicant or advisor in the past? YES NO
If yes, how is this project related to previously funded projects?

Does this project require IRB or IACUC approval? YES NO If yes, has approval been sought? YES NO
- I plan to submit my original survey to IRB by 3/31 to be approved for this FURSCA project

Does this project require chemicals or biological agents? YES NO If yes, Have you received approval to order these chemicals? YES NO

BUDGET SUMMARY

Amount(s) Requested

For each line requested, briefly explain the purpose

\$400

\$5 incentive for each participant (2 groups of 40 participants)

\$87

Cost for postage and envelopes for 80 letters (\$1.08 for each envelope including pre-paid return envelope)

Total: \$487

Introduction

The uses of the Internet are expansive amongst college students. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter occupy the time of many students as well as educational and communication uses. Seventy two percent of college students are Internet users, and eighty seven percent of college students have Internet access (Anderson 2001). **There is little research considering the Internet use of students after they leave college. Previous research shows that throughout the lifespan we experience changes in media uses and gratifications. Age is a useful predictive variable (Dimmick, McCain & Bolton 1979). A person's progression through the life cycle could be independently traced in terms of the cell structure growing and dying (biological), the development of attitudes, feelings, and learning ability (psychological), the communicative competence and peer relationships (sociological), or the outward appearance of size (physical) (Dimmick, McCain & Bolton 1979). The psychological and sociological factors are most relevant with this project. Theoretically backed research in the uses and gratification perspective shows that change across time provides differences in media uses. The transition from college to young professional in the work force is a major life change for a person. The focus of this study is to research the differences of Internet use between college students and graduates who have entered the workforce.**

This research question considers the usage of the Internet amongst young professionals after college and comparing the results to the usage among current students. Researching this topic, there is little information regarding the use of the Internet after college students leave college and enter the professional world. In a recent study following the demographic of Internet users, Gen Y (ages 18-32) totaled 30% of Internet user population (Jones & Fox 2009). Many studies follow the online activity of current college students, but neglect to study Internet use after graduation. There is the possibility that college graduates are not as active online after college; however, they still make up a large percent of the demographic tested in the Fox and Jones study. There is a huge transition between being in college, and living in the so called "real world." The transitional phase could have an effect on how much a person is online or change their online activities.

The emergence of the Internet is a major aspect in the field of Communication Studies. This research project is worthwhile in the field because many people today rely on online communication, and use the Internet daily. College students and young professionals are lumped together in the Gen Y demographic in Jones and Fox (2009); however, **I do not think college students are utilizing the Internet the same way as young professionals because they have experienced a life style change. When a**

student graduates and enters the workforce, I want to know if and how their use changes. I do not think they are spending less time online because they are the highest percentage of Internet users, so I want to study their specific activities. Are they still using Facebook? Or do they spend their time job searching instead? Playing games? Sending emails? That is my question. Because they are included in the demographic of highest Internet users, what are the online activities occupying their time and are they comparable to the activities of current college students?

Methodology

Over the span of ten weeks, I will research if there is a change in online activity between college students and young professionals. I will do extensive research on the Internet uses of the Gen Y demographic. Since my surveys will be approved before summer, I will study common factors seen in previous research and try to generate predictions. Peer-reviewed literature from Communication and Mass Media journals will inform this study, as well as research from current periodicals. **I will distribute my surveys during the first week of FURSCA.** There will be two specific groups to which I distribute these surveys: n= 40 college students aged 18-22, and n= 40 recent college graduates who have just entered the work force aged 23-27. These surveys will be identical, to ensure comparable results. The survey will include approximately 100 statements, asking about specific Internet usage of each person. An example statement is: "I use the Internet more for entertainment than education." There will be options for each statement for the participant to choose from ranging from 1-7. Each number will be assigned an answer for the participant to circle: 1 will be "Extremely uncharacteristic of me" and 7 will be "Very characteristic of me." The ideal goal is a response time of one to seven days to make certain I receive each survey in a timely matter to continue my research. Because this survey will be voluntary, and people will be contributing to my research, I plan to give a five dollar incentive to each participant. Participants will be assured that their answers will be confidential and will be aware that their efforts contribute directly to student research. I plan on sending these surveys and the incentive though the mail, along with a return envelope to each participant. They will be able to send their completed survey back to me anonymously and without cost.

After I receive all the completed surveys, I will examine trends between participants in the same group as well as trends between the two groups. With the completed surveys, I'm going to look at the similarities and differences between the two groups tested. I will compare how much time each group spends online, and study specific websites each group is using most frequently. There are many websites on the Internet ranging from: social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter, informational

websites, blogs, online shopping sites, entertainment sites, etc. Within each site are different available functions for a user to enjoy. I will break down the major types of websites into sub-topics and question exactly what each person is specifically doing on these websites and how much time they spend doing it. For example, I will question how much time spent on the Internet is used socially. Then I will ask follow-up questions about particular social activities available on the Internet to see what each person is doing. Social activities on the Internet include: social networking, photo sharing, Twitter, online chatting, etc. I will repeat this pattern with each major type of website.

I plan on analyzing and presenting my results through descriptive statistics, specifically: means, median, mode, range, comparison tests (t-tests), skewness, and kurtosis. I will also use visual graphs of the raw data to make the results clear. Within the final weeks, I will finalize my summer project and write a paper containing all of my results. I also have plans with Professor Boyan to create a presentation of my results in the hopes of presenting this project at an academic conference.

Outcomes

I would love to present my research at conferences in the future. Professor Boyan has mentioned a conference in my field called the National Communication Association or the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference (both in 2012) where I could potentially present this project and be noticed for the hard work I've put into it. Also, I would be interested in presenting at the Elkin R. Isaac Student Research Symposium during my senior year. I think it would be a great closing stage of my four years of Albion College. As a Communication Studies major, I would enjoy demonstrating ways of how communication is changing in the world today. By presenting my research to current students, I hope it will interest them as well as encourage them to participate in FURSCA in the future.

The broader context of this project is to gain insight on my generation's online activity. I am truly interested in seeing the outcome of my project, and finding out if the transition to a college graduate has any effect on internet usage. I feel it is important to study my generation because the use of technology is rapidly increasing amongst college students, and I am interested to see if we are as connected to the Internet after graduation.

References

Anderson, K. J. (2001). Internet Use among College Students: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of American College Health, 50*(1,) 21-26.

Jones, S., Fox S. (2009). *Generations Online in 2009*.

Retrieved from <http://www.floridatechnet.org/Generations Online in 2009.pdf>

John W Dimmick, Thomas A McCain, & W Theodore Bolton (1979). Media Use and the Life Span. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 23*(1): 7-31.

Timeline

- **Week 1: Begin Research/Send Surveys**
 - i. Internet use among college students: An exploratory study
Anderson, K. J. (2001). Internet Use among College Students: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of American College Health, 50*(1,) 21-26.
 - ii. Internet use among female and male college students
Patricia M. Odell, Kathleen O. Korgen, Phyllis Schumacher, Michael Delucchi. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. October 2000, 3(5): 855-862.
 - iii. The Benefits of "Facebook friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites
Nicole B Ellison, Charles Steinfield, Cliff Lamp. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. August 2007, 12(4): 1143-1168. Wiley Online Library
 - iv. College life on-line: Healthy and Unhealthy Internet use
Kathy Scherer. *Journal of College Student Development*. Nov-Dec 1997. 38(6): 655-665.
 - v. Jones, S., Fox S. (2009). *Generations Online in 2009*.
Retrieved from <http://www.floridatechnet.org/Generations Online in 2009.pdf>
 - vi. Media Use and the Life Span
John W Dimmick, Thomas A McCain, & W Theodore Bolton. *The American Behavioral Scientist*. September/October 1979, 23(1): 7-31.

- **Week 2: Research**
 - i. College students' Internet use, relationship formation, and personality correlates

Katie Bonebrake. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. December 2002, 5(6): 551-557.

ii. Internet addiction in students: a cause of concern

Kanwal Nalwa, Archana Preet. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. December 2003, 6(6): 653-656.

iii. Internet use and collegiate academic performance decrements: early findings

RW Kubey, MJ Lavin, JR Barrows. *Journal of Communication*. June 2001. 51(2): 366-382.

iv. Internet dependency and psychosocial maturity among college students

Wei Wang. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*. December 2001. 55(6):919-938.

v. Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation in internet usage

Thompson Teo. *Omega*. February 1999. 27(1): 25-37.

• **Week 3: Research/Start to receive completed surveys**

i. Internet addiction on campus: The vulnerability of college students

Johnathon J. Kandell. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. SPRING 1998, 1(1): 11-17.

ii. Problematic Internet use or Internet addiction?

Peter Yellowlees, Shayna Marks. *Computers in Human Behavior*. May 2007. 23(3):1444-1453.

iii. Internet use by university students: an interdisciplinary study on three campuses

Timothy T. Perry, Leslie Anne Perry, Karen Hosack-Curlin. *Internet Research*. 1991. 8(2):136 - 141

iv. The functions of Internet use and their social and psychological consequences

Eric B. Weiser. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. December 2001, 4(6): 723-743.

v. Older adults' use of information and communications technology in everyday life

NEIL SELWYN, STEPHEN GORARD, JOHN FURLONG and LOUISE MADDEN (2003). Older adults' use of information and communications technology in everyday life. *Ageing and Society*, 23, pp 561-582

• Week 4: Receive completed surveys, try to predict outcomes

• Week 5: Deadline to receive all completed surveys, begin to study answers

• Week 6: Compare answers, study trends

• Week 7: Compile results

• Week 8: Make graphs and charts to show results, begin to write paper

• Week 9: Finalize paper and compile a presentation with Professor Boyan

• Week 10: Finalize presentation