

# Promoting and Incorporating the Use of Electronic Databases

A presentation by faculty from Xavier University of Louisiana at the “Creating Partnerships, Creating Scholarship: Strengthening Research, Teaching and Learning with Effective Use of Electronic Resources” workshop, October 27, 2000, Minneapolis, MN

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## ***A Brief History of Xavier’s JSTOR Project***

JSTOR was made available to the Xavier community in spring 1998, thanks in large part to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Southern Education Foundation’s Gateway 21 Project. (The Gateway 21 Project began in 1997, and was designed to improve technology access and use at 22 black colleges and universities.) Xavier and other historically black colleges and universities were invited by the Southern Education Foundation to submit proposals for access to JSTOR and improvements to campus information technology infrastructure (*e.g.*, networking, computers). Xavier’s proposal was funded.

In January 1999, Xavier received a letter from a senior advisor to the Mellon Foundation in which it was noted “...there has been very limited contact ... with the JSTOR database by faculty, staff, and students at HBCUs.” The letter also included a copy of a January 10, 1999, article from The New York Times which described some very creative and scholarly uses of the database. The senior advisor inquired about “... (our)... opinion on the frequency (of) JSTOR use at Xavier University of Louisiana and the degree to which (we) think continued access to it is important.” The letter was copied to the university president.

Well, you can imagine how a letter like this gets people’s attention. Here we were staring the proverbial gift horse in the mouth.

In February, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching initiated discussion with the University Library Committee (with a membership of elected faculty), other Library faculty, and staff and faculty of the Center. The discussion focused on ways to encourage and support faculty and student use of the JSTOR database.

The result of these discussions was what we called the “JSTOR Project” (admittedly, not very flashy!).

Following an informational meeting for all faculty members to learn more about JSTOR and to discuss project ideas, the Center issued a [request for proposals](#) (RFP). The RFP was also extended to the teachers of our three partner schools in the New Orleans public school system.

Faculty members of the University Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable reviewed the proposals. Each of the seven proposals submitted was evaluated independently by three faculty members. The evaluation form is online.

Six faculty projects were funded during the spring 2000 semester. Brief descriptions of the projects follow.

- Dr. Ashish Chandra (Pharmacy) integrated JSTOR into his Research in Pharmacy Administration course by requiring students to use the JSTOR database for their library research papers. Dr. Chandra helped students access and search the database, and prepare written and oral summaries of articles from the database.
- Dr. Chris Campbell (Communications) used the JSTOR database for a research paper on media coverage of crime. The paper was an examination of interdisciplinary cultural studies theory and

scholarship as it pertains to crime and the “narrative” of crime coverage. A preliminary search of the JSTOR database revealed over 200 papers related to the research project in such diverse disciplines as African American Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Economics, Literary Theory, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. This research also had relevance to his Media Criticism and Writing for Radio and Television courses.

- Dr. V. J. DuRapau (Mathematics) integrated the JSTOR database into the department’s Senior Colloquium courses. Student use of JSTOR provided them with additional sources of information for research, and opportunities to critically evaluate electronic sources of information and develop their skills in reviewing mathematics and statistics literature.
- Dr. Sheri Hoem (English) integrated the database into her Literary Criticism and Theory course. The journal articles available from JSTOR provided students with exemplary models of criticism in practice, and offered students a chance to determine which theoretical assumptions and methods learned from the course were exhibited in the published criticisms. Dr. Hoem used a computer laboratory to teach the students how to access and search the JSTOR database. Students were required to write a term paper using, among other resources, JSTOR articles.
- Dr. Cirecie Olatunji (Education) used the JSTOR database in her Practicum in Counselor Education graduate course. The project goals were to provide an opportunity for students to expand their computer competencies by using the JSTOR electronic database and to offer students an easier means for accessing counseling journals. Students in the course completed two papers based on journal articles in the JSTOR database. This project also met a technology competency guideline of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.
- Dr. Pamela Waldren-Moore (Political Science) used the database in her Research Methods and Quantitative Analysis courses. The project, centered on student research papers, gave students practice in one of the most important aspects of research analysis—the art of reviewing literature in order to develop general explanations for observed behavior. Secondly, the project was intended to help students identify relationships among concepts and research findings.

## ***Noteworthy Outcomes of Faculty JSTOR Projects***

Faculty members were required to submit a final report (the report is online at <http://www.xula.edu/Administrative/cat/forms/MelRS200.htm>). The following comments were gleaned from the final reports.

Dr. Chris Campbell submitted his paper to the *Louisiana Communication Journal*. The research also led to a second paper in which he examines how news organizations cover crime statistics. Once completed, the paper will be submitted to the *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* journal. Finally, Dr. Campbell noted that “... support for this project served as an incentive [...] to return to scholarly activity. The substantial teaching and service requirements of Xavier faculty make it very difficult to actively pursue a research agenda.”

With the permission of his students, Dr. DuRapau published their papers online at <http://www.xula.edu/~vdurapau/papers.htm>.

Dr. Sheri Hoem noted, “As a teaching method, I will definitely use this kind of JSTOR project [...] when I teach Literary Criticism and Theory, as well as in other upper level literature courses in which students are asked to consult published scholarship.”

Dr. Cirecie Olatunji conducted pre- and post-tests of student technology competencies. The results of the surveys indicated an increase in technological competency, a change in perceptions regarding the effectiveness of JSTOR as a research tool, and enhanced research skills overall.

Dr. Waldren-Moore noted that several students produced useful drafts of potential research papers for publication. Three papers were selected for publication by InterneXUS, Xavier’s forthcoming electronic journal (temporarily at <http://xavier.xula.edu/~cdoumen/CV/Internexus/Current.html>). The project also

generated new research questions and teaching methods using the JSTOR database. Last, Dr. Waldren-Moore made several important suggestions that the Center (or another department on campus):

- provide training to the University Library staff in various technical aspects of using the JSTOR database
- promote university-wide discussion about purchasing online subscriptions and access to databases
- seek information from the Information Technology Center regarding firewall and other security issues related to databases such as JSTOR
- provide new faculty with an introduction to JSTOR
- promote faculty use of JSTOR through workshops, brown bag discussions, *etc.*

## ***The Broader Context for Xavier's JSTOR Project***

Funding for the JSTOR Project was provided by a faculty development and technology grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The project is but one of several technology initiatives funded by this grant. And this grant is one of two grant-funded faculty development initiatives in Xavier's Center for the Advancement of Teaching. Let's first talk some about the current faculty development and technology initiatives at Xavier. I'll conclude by pointing to a guiding vision for the integration of information technology into the teaching and learning process at Xavier.

### **Andrew W. Mellon grant initiatives**

This program is designed to engage faculty in activities that will enable them to acquire, improve, and advance their capabilities in using information technologies to transform the teaching and learning process. The specific objectives of the program are to:

- provide training in the use of currently available software applications and information technologies (a sort of "core curriculum" for faculty technology skills);
- provide expert support and consultation necessary for faculty to integrate information technologies into their courses;
- establish collaborative networks of faculty and students to work together to integrate information technology into research and the curriculum;
- provide incentives for faculty to develop and implement Web-enhanced or Web-based courses and other more innovative uses of information technology [note that the grant funds individual faculty technology projects; this is in contrast to the Bush initiatives (see below)].

Faculty technology projects during the 1998-99 academic year (the first year of the grant) ranged from using spreadsheets for recording grades, to holding virtual office hours via WebBoard, incorporating e-mail into courses, and creating course websites. Of the sixteen projects, most involved the development of course websites or integration of WebBoard into a course. At least 29 courses offered at Xavier were affected by these projects. (WebBoard is a Web-based conferencing system that itself is a result of the Mellon grant; read more about it at <http://www.xula.edu/Administrative/cat/webboard/about.html>.)

During summer 1999, eight faculty members were supported by the grant. All but one of the projects involved the development of course websites (the other project involved the development of an interactive CD-ROM). These projects were integrated into at least fourteen courses at Xavier.

During the 1999-2000 academic year, ten faculty members either continued projects begun during summer 1999 or launched new projects in the fall 1999 semester. These projects included course website development, assessments of technology use in the classroom, use of electronic communication and the JSTOR database in the teaching and learning process, and multimedia development for CD-ROM.

During summer 2000, several faculty members developed [design documents](#) as the first phase of the Rich Media Projects initiative.

Finally, during the 2000-01 academic year, 10 Xavier faculty members are participating in projects that are supported by the Mellon grant. These include faculty involved in phase II of the Rich Media Projects Initiative and faculty who are using Web Course Management Systems (*e.g.*, WebCT, eCollege, Blackboard) in their courses.

Go to the Center's website to learn more about the Mellon technology initiatives (<http://www.xula.edu/Administrative/cat/facdev/mellon/mellon.html>) and the current faculty technology projects (<http://www.xula.edu/Administrative/cat/news>).

## **Bush-Hewlett grant initiatives**

Xavier's faculty members recognized that the ultimate goal of any faculty development program, regardless of its specific aims, is to improve student learning. To this end then, Xavier has implemented a faculty development program that includes, among other aspects, the establishment of teaching, technology, and research communities. A grant from The Bush and William and Flora Hewlett foundations aims to:

- promote the scholarship of teaching by creating a campus culture where teaching is made public, discussed, examined, improved, and rewarded
- implement a faculty development program that encourages and supports the use of technology in the classroom
- establish communities of faculty and students whose conversations are focused on specific teaching and learning problems and opportunities
- establish communities of faculty and students engaged in research using information technology and other resources.

A variety of communities have been established since 1998, the first year of the grant. The use of technology has not been limited to the "technology communities," however. Several research and teaching communities have utilized the Internet, WebBoard and other electronic communication technologies, Blackboard, and online databases such as JSTOR. Examples of faculty and student communities include:

- Creative Writing Teaching and Learning Community. This community of five faculty members and two students engaged in a project with the following goals:
  1. strengthen teaching and student learning in the newly established creative writing minor
  2. refine and develop the curriculum and teaching standards of the creative writing minor
  3. develop a course portfolio for Introduction to Creative Writing.
- World Literature and World History Teaching and Learning Community. Students and faculty members from the History and English departments established a community of learners focused on:
  1. learning in the disciplines
  2. contextualizing literature with history
  3. assessing learning in the World Literature and World History courses.
- General Biology Teaching and Learning Community. Faculty and students from the Biology Department coordinated a long-term, comprehensive effort to assist first semester biology students in developing their note- and test-taking skills, and critical thinking abilities.
- Case Study: "Letter from Birmingham Jail." This interdisciplinary and inter-institutional project included two faculty members from Xavier (and the students in their courses) and two faculty members from the University of Wisconsin-Stout (and the students in their courses). The goals of this project included:
  1. utilizing the case study approach to promote meaningful discussion and active learning
  2. providing a means for students of diverse and possibly differing backgrounds and points of view to engage in honest, open, and respectful dialogue with one another
  3. utilizing electronic means of communication to promote meaningful discussion both between classes, as well as between universities.
- The Black Aesthetic and Beyond Research Community. An interdisciplinary group of three faculty members from the African American Studies, English, and Philosophy departments and four students investigated questions of cultural identity and subjectivity at the intersection of literature, literary theory, philosophy, art, and history, beginning with the "Black Aesthetic" theory.

- The Interaction of Science and Theology in Alternative Medicine. This interdisciplinary project involved two students and four faculty members from the College of Pharmacy, and the Biology and Theology departments. The focus of this group was the meeting point of science and medical care with religious beliefs and theological principles exemplified by Alternative Medicine.
- *InterneXUS*. To further promote faculty and student research at Xavier, three faculty members from the Biology, Political Science, and History departments developed this on-line journal for student scholarship.
- Students as Critical Researchers of the World Wide Web: Assessing Available On-line Resources for the History of Psychology. Two Psychology Department faculty members and two students developed a website for use in the History and Systems of Psychology course that provides students with tools to evaluate the quality of course-appropriate websites.
- On-line Writing Laboratory in Communications. Five faculty members and students from the Communications Department developed a website aimed at linking the field of communications, writing in the discipline, and technology.
- From Chalkboard to Keyboard: Adapting the Engineering Graphics Course to Today's Technology. This project involved two faculty members from the Physics/Engineering Department and two students majoring in physics. The community of faculty and students set out to incorporate the latest technologies as instructional tools and to redesign the current engineering graphics course by including industry-standard computing tools.
- Course Portfolio Working Groups. Several faculty members have worked together in writing their course portfolios.
- Scholarship of Teaching Working Group. A handful of faculty members have worked together in developing classroom research projects.
- The Comparative Literature Initiative. This project involved chairs of six humanities and social sciences departments in a yearlong discussion of how to construct an inter-disciplinary major in Comparative Literature, with a minor in a foreign language and appropriate upper-level courses in related humanities and social sciences.
- The Tragedy. This interdisciplinary group of faculty and students researched questions pertaining to tragedy at the intersection of literature, literary theory, philosophy, history, and art, beginning with the classic instances of this dramatic form, such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The faculty and students determined how competing visions of tragedy operate to inform the way in which tragedy has been defined, and also the kinds of tragedies that examine the most coherent scholarly theories of tragedy.

The Center's website contains a great deal of information about the Bush grant initiatives. Simply go to <http://www.xula.edu/Administrative/cat/facdev/bush/bush.html>.

### ***A Vision for Information Technology at Xavier: A Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable Position Paper***

In 1998, Xavier began a comprehensive self-study process, the immediate incentive for which was the need to prepare for an accreditation review by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In determining the goals of the self-study, the Steering Committee identified one major issue as significant to the enhancement of the University. This issue was technology and its integration into the teaching and learning process. During the self-study, the University community worked together to:

1. develop a shared vision of the role of technology in the teaching and learning process
2. improve student access to technological resources
3. use technology to improve University administrative processes.

One outcome of this self-study was the formulation of a vision for technology at Xavier University written by the University's Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable and approved by Xavier's faculty. The formulation of the vision, and the vision itself, continue to guide the institution in areas of teaching, learning, and technology. The position paper is online at

<http://www.xula.edu/Administrative/cat/temp/TLTR-vision-3-2000.pdf> .