10-1-2002

Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Although many students might perceive our discipline to be a dry subject, for most of us associated with the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and with this journal, nothing could be further from the truth. There are endless unanswered questions and raging battles within the field. We scarcely know what we don't know yet. A number of civilizations may be dead and gone, but the lessons about the human experience that arise from those civilizations can speak to each of us alive today. Our task is uncovering as much data as possible on civilizations, arraying these data in consistent patterns, and interpreting the findings in an accurate, coherent and meaningful way.

As with those who study all disciplines, however, we need to update our research skills routinely. We cannot conduct thorough research without using as many as possible of the tools at our disposal. Unfortunately, for those of us in the academic world, our courses in the methods of systematic research typically end with our graduation ceremony. We apply the methods we learned back in graduate school and teach these to our students. Unlike accountants, physicians, or lawyers, we are not always required to take professional development courses as part of maintaining our license to do research. As a result, many of us do not keep up-to-date.

That is a great shame, I think, for nowhere has research methodology been more profoundly affected than in the technological realm. Over the past 20 years, the digital revolution has dramatically changed the way most individuals, businesses, governments, and organizations carry out their work. How many of us now participate, for example, in communication via e-mail? It may be difficult to recall the days before e-mail; how restricted we were in the ability to communicate with a wide range of individuals on a timely basis just 15 or so years ago.

The editors of this journal conduct most of their work these days via e-mail. Without that facility, reviewing papers coming in from around the world and in many languages, as well as editing, commenting, and planning would be greatly impeded.

Similarly, the research capabilities offered by the Internet are enormous. Working without the Internet today almost guarantees, for most people, that full command of the literature is severely, if not fatally, restricted. Simply put, although comparative civilizations research and analysis is a widely respected discipline, drawing for the most part upon

study of the past, the Internet is a valuable tool that all of us should be familiar with on at least a rudimentary level.

Moreover, it is not just the research community, those engaged in advancing the frontiers of scholarship, who must concentrate on computer technology and the Internet. Many of us in this association are also professional educators. Increasingly, education involves technological sophistication.

As the former Executive Director and now the Provost of the Potomac Regional Education Partnership, I have been pleased to lead a team that has served for the past several years as a training agency for the "Intel Teach To The Future" program. This effort, sponsored by Intel, Microsoft, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Premio, and others, constitutes a major effort worldwide to help both experienced teachers and teachers in training integrate technology into the classroom to enhance student learning. The fact is that many schools and colleges in the developed world have computers in the classroom, yet instructors may be unaware of the tremendous uses to which the technology can be put. Therefore, we have been running week-long workshops for teachers in the Greater Washington area, and thousands of elementary and secondary teachers now have a more sophisticated understanding of how to enhance both the teaching and learning processes.

College professors need this knowledge, too. During May, I administered two faculty workshops -- one at The George Washington University campus in Arlington, Virginia, and the second, with co-sponsorship of the Consortium of Universities of the Metropolitan Washington Area, at the Old Capitol Pump House in Washington, D.C. -- for professors from around the Washington region. The purpose was to provide faculty members with training and resources so that they can teach future teachers about research and teaching using technology. Topics included locating resources electronically, creating multimedia presentations, evaluating web sites and other resources on the Internet, locating curricular materials, understanding copyright laws relating to computer use, making student publications, building web sites, and creating teacher support materials. The May seminars received good reviews from the attendees.

In all the years I have been reading and working on this journal, however, I have rarely if ever seen reference to the Internet, let alone computer-generated studies. So I wondered how much reference materials on comparative civilizations actually exists on the Internet. The following is the result of an informal study I conducted.

Researchers on the Internet generally use directories, search engines, or meta search engines to begin their search for resources and information. A scholar who seeks general information on a broad topic often starts with a Web directory or index. These are much like the old card catalogues we used in college or at the public library. One can progressively narrow down the topic on such a directory to find out what is available on the web.

Two examples of directories on the Internet are Yahoo! and the Internet Public Library. So, I chose Yahoo! and typed in "comparative civilizations," using the Boolean delimiter of quotation marks; this restricts the results to that actual phrase, with no intervening words. I found 1,090 web pages or sites listed. Then, I typed in comparative civilizations without the Boolean quotation marks and found a list of 22,800!

Generally, researchers go directly to search engines, however. Examples of search engines include AltaVista, Excite, Google, and Hotbot. I went to Google first; that's the one I generally use anyway. I typed in "comparative civilizations" using the Boolean marks and found 1,410 entries; the entries began with 14 pages of listings. Without the Boolean marks, I found a total of 41,000 entries. One site listed as a result of the latter search itself yielded, it claims, 4,900 web sites as "Repositories of Primary Sources."

Next, I tried the same method with AltaVista. This produced 905 results with the quotation marks and 17,834 results without. With Hotbot and a related Lycos search engine, I came up with 2,471 entries using the Boolean indicator. A search using All the Web came up with 2,829, when the delimiters were used, and 68,818 when they were not.

Finally, to search multiple databases simultaneously, the researcher uses a meta search engine. AskJeeves! and Dogpile are the two best known. Through Dogpile, I found that an engine called Fast produced 2,492 references.

Obviously, many of the directories, search engines, and meta search engines produced similar information. What types of information? I found throughout the following: college course outlines, lesson plans for high school classes, syllabi from universities, listings of relevant research libraries, professional information, college major outlines, key terms, listings of master's and doctoral programs (Japan), resumes of civilizationalists, national standards, related PBS information for teachers, and college catalogues. I also found specific research references ranging from UNESCO studies of the Silk Route to information

on "civilizations" of the UFO variety.

These resources open up a whole new world of tools for researchers in comparative civilizations, as in any other field. Scholars need to learn only the basics -- using Boolean logic, refining searches, and, perhaps, how to find the best, most relevant search engines. Also, it is very important to know how to evaluate the accuracy of web sites. These basics can be acquired relatively quickly, and anyone with access to the Internet should begin as soon as possible.

In addition, I would urge all of us to learn how to employ other uses of technology. In just a brief period of time, one can learn how to make PowerPoint presentations, for example. Given the large amount of data comparative civilizationalists tend to present, wouldn't this technology prove quite valuable -- especially for those attending lectures at the annual meetings and trying to absorb as much information as possible? Then there is the development of web sites and the capturing of video and film from the web for classroom use.

The nature of research and the methods by which teaching and learning are carried out have both changed dramatically as a result of recent technological advances. The comparative study of civilizations is a discipline that requires a very broad grasp of facts and data. Therefore,we can anticipate that it will greatly benefit from these new technological tools.

I hope that the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations leads the way and that at annual meetings the new technologically-based research and presentation methodologies can be taught to all of us.

In the meantime, I also hope you will find this another valuable issue of the CCR.

Joseph Drew
Prague
Summer, 2002