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# Using Computers to Present Sociological Principles

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Against the backdrop of the revolutionary changes in today's computing technology, it is remarkable that instruction in undergraduate introduction to sociology courses has remained virtually unchanged from what it was 25 years ago. Most of today's sociology students still start studying the discipline much as their parents did, aided by conventional textbooks, anthologies, and paperback monographs.

Today, many instructors feel that unless one has sufficient time, it may be best to leave computers out of the fundamentals courses, introducing them later on in the undergraduate program. Yet, we would maintain that the first social science course provides an excellent opportunity to introduce the use of computers to beginning students.

The present approach is based upon working with real social science data. It draws from the General Social Surveys, done by National Opinion Research Center, based on national probability samples of the U.S. adult population and offer publication-quality data for students to analyze.

The present approach is also based upon the popular data analysis software developed by MicroCase Corporation, known as the MicroCase Analysis System. This program is extremely straightforward and easy to use for beginning data analysts. With a minimum of keystrokes students generate easy-to-understand bar graphs, with accompanying descriptive statistical summary data. This software also provides clear cut crosstabulation analyses, making it possible to do two and three-way contingency tests almost instantaneously.

Campuses with ample personal computer resources offer the ideal situation for using this approach; but having a classroom with a computer for every student is not necessary for employing this approach. Instructors with a PC on a movable cart, a projection panel, and an overhead projector, will be able to demonstrate the software in their regular classrooms on one to three occasions. Once the instructor devotes several classes to teaching computer and software use, students should be able to work independently at their own home computers or at campus facilities. Then, students follow a set of workbook exercises in *Hands On Sociology* (NY: McGraw Hill, 1993).

The book leads them through sets of multiple-choice and essay questions which they answer while working at their computers running the MicroCase software. The various

assignments correspond to topics ordinarily presented in Introductory Sociology textbooks: Culture, Socialization, Social Stratification, etc.

Then, the EZ-Quiz answering disk software is introduced, enabling students to log their answers to the groups of multiple-choice questions onto an electronic record. Later, after students complete their activities, instructors can quickly evaluate their work by reading students' output disks (or campus network records) with an accompanying program. Many instructors who have attempted to use computers with their introductory students have found that reviewing students' computer work is often a painstaking and laborious enterprise. Yet, with EZ-Quiz the instructor can see at a glance just how much students have learned from the available batteries of multiple-choice questions.

EZ-Quiz can also be easily reconfigured into a powerful review and self-study tool, offering students immediate answer feedback. Thus, EZ-Quiz can be adapted for two academic purposes: to administer computer-based multiple choice examinations or to enable instructors to readily create their own self-study tutorial exercises.

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