GOODMAN RESEARCH GROUP, INC.
Program Evaluation • Consultation • Market Research

AMERICAN PASSAGES:
A Literary Survey
Formative Research
Survey Results
Executive Summary

PREPARED BY
Kathleen R. Mohrle, M.A.
Sarah A. Geddes, B.A.
Irene F. Goodman, Ed.D.

SUBMITTED TO
Oregon Public Broadcasting

March 2001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), a research company in Cambridge, Massachusetts that specializes in evaluation, is conducting formative research for Oregon Public Broadcasting's (OPB) college course *American Passages: A Literary Survey*. The formative research is designed to obtain information to advise decisions made by the producers regarding the design, production, and implementation of the course's 16 videos, Web components, and associated Guides.

In consultation with OPB, GRG developed two separate surveys (Content Survey and Technology Survey) to gather information from instructors of American Literature survey courses at the high school, 2-year college, and 4-year college or university level. Although the surveys shared several questions, the Content Survey specifically focused on instructors' course organization, their use of instructor and student guides, and which literary movements the instructors teach. The Technology Survey specifically focused on instructors' current use of the Web and other technologies in their teaching of American Literature, as well as what might encourage them to increase their use of technology in the future.

We mailed the surveys to a total of 2,000 instructors of American Literature survey courses. Half of them received the Content Survey and half of them received the Technology Survey. The overall response rate for the two surveys was 23%, and response rates to the two surveys were similar.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings from the Merged Data

❖ Respondents reported spending most of their time lecturing or in discussion with students. Eighty-five percent of our respondents include presentations with media support in their classes, and over three-quarters of them include student presentations in their classes.

❖ Respondents generally rated the teaching objectives of interest to OPB as highly important and also reported that they are quite comfortable in carrying them out. The objective that received the highest ratings was *teaching American Literature in the context of history, politics, the arts, etc.* Information about teaching in this way also received the highest usefulness

ratings out of nine possible items that might be in an Instructor's Guide.

❖ The primary factor these instructors consider when they choose new course materials is whether or not they can customize the materials.

Findings from the Content Survey

❖ Virtually all of our respondents (96%) have input regarding which anthology they use in their American Literature survey courses. Forty-four percent use either the Norton one-volume edition or two-volume edition anthology in their courses. The inclusion of texts they use in their courses was a primary factor for respondents' decisions to use one anthology over another.

❖ Respondents reported that they would be most likely to use a Student Study Guide for its *discussion or study questions.* The feature they would be the least likely to use in a Student Study Guide was *fill in the blank exercises.*

❖ The three movements taught by the highest percentage of respondents to the Content Survey were Transcendentalism & the American Renaissance, African-American Literature, and Modernist Prose.

❖ The three movements taught by the lowest percentage of respondents were Chicano Literature, Asian-American Literature, and Literature of Spanish Colonization.

Findings from the Technology Survey

❖ Out of 10 different types of technology, respondents indicated that they use video and audio recordings the most frequently during their class time with students. The three technologies most frequently assigned or suggested for use in class work are video, Web, and personal computer.

❖ Most of the instructors said that they could be encouraged to use technology more in their courses (range from 63%- 89%, depending on the technology). However, these percentages were lower for threaded chat/online discussion groups or online composition software. For these technologies, 52% and 53% of respondents, respectively, said they could be encouraged to increase use. The factor that would encourage the most use of

all of the technologies is the availability of American Literature content materials.

POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE FORMATIVE RESEARCH

This section presents a few suggestions for further research as OPB continues its development of *PASSAGES.* We propose a few areas that OPB may want to explore in further depth and suggest possible methods for obtaining more formative feedback.

Investigation of Instructors' Access to Technology

In this research, we determined that the use of technology (other than video) by instructors of American Literature survey courses is rather low. Another avenue to explore as OPB makes its plans for the direction of *Passages* is the extent to which instructors actually have access to technology in their high schools, colleges, and universities. OPB may also wish to gather information about the plans such institutions have for the building up of their technological platforms over the next several years. Such information could help to further inform the sophistication of *Passages'* Web-based components.

Typical Users of Annenberg/CPB Materials

As OPB, Norton, and Annenberg/CPB make their plans for marketing the *Passages* course, it may be helpful to gain more information about who the typical users of Annenberg/CPB materials actually are. Information such as the selectiveness of the schools at which they teach, the features of Annenberg/CPB materials they find the most and least helpful in their teaching, and how their age relates to use of such materials could help the course producers target their materials effectively to the appropriate market.

Focus Groups

Now that we have gathered information from a large sample of instructors of American Literature survey courses, OPB may wish to gain more detailed information from a smaller group of instructors. Topics to be explored include information instructors would like to know about literary movements with which they are unfamiliar and challenges they face in using technology in their classes. Depending upon the timing of the focus groups and OPB's production of

prototypes, the prototypes could also be pilot tested in the focus groups.

Telephone Interviews

GRG could conduct phone interviews with a subset of the survey respondents in order to explore more fully their thoughts on teaching American Literature survey courses. Other issues to be addressed include respondents' perceptions of student receptiveness to using technology, the availability of training for instructors on the use of technology, or more explanation of their decisions to include certain movements in their courses.

Viewing Groups with College Students

It may also be useful to obtain student feedback regarding the videos, written materials, and Web site once these materials are in their prototype phase. One option is arranging with a college professor to have a video showing. A GRG field researcher or staff member would then discuss the viewers' opinions about the video with them. We could also have students look at the Web site prior to coming to class. They would be given a list of questions to think about before coming to the discussion and we could explore their perceptions of how easy the site is to navigate and how easy it is to find the information they need.