Public Abstract
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*Utilizing Online Surveys to Gather Data: An Application to Help Evaluate Missouri’s Interpretive Programs*

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Most state and federal agencies involved in the management of natural resources offer educational programs that serve several purposes. In addition to providing the traditional public education programs, they offer benefits to the agency itself. Resource managers have an outlet through which they can communicate their management agendas and goals, and then receive public feedback. Educational programs also provide a means of public outreach, allowing agency personnel to become familiar faces to local residents. Finally, these programs afford members of the public the opportunity to become informed about, and involved with, the resources available to them.

In Missouri, the Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources play this vital role. This study evaluates the programs offered by four sites that serve schools in and around the St. Louis area. Opinions were gathered from interpreters and educators alike. Responses were compared both among classroom teachers and also between the interpretive staff and teachers.

In addition, as the internet becomes a standard means of communication, new opportunities are available to disseminate information. This study makes use of traditional surveys in an untraditional way. Surveys were posted online instead of using traditional paper copies. This presented some new challenges!

The study had a response rate of nearly 50 percent; however, there were some unexpected demographic differences. Homeschoolers in this area did not participate in the online survey. For at least one of the study site, these students comprised a large share of their audience.

The survey did point out areas in which each site could use improvement. Educators reported that the programs met their required curricula and academic goals well. However, in some instances, interpreters had trouble connecting with and holding the attention of some audiences. Scheduling was also noted as a key issue for each site.