Statement of the problem

The analyses presented here are based on data representing a diverse group of mainly 18- and 19-year-old college students. The study was conducted in February and March of 2007 at the University of Illinois, Chicago, which is a U. S. urban public research university. 1U. S. News and World Report (2006) ranked this campus among the top 10 national universities as regards campus ethnic diversity, suggesting that this school offers an ideal location for studies of how different kinds of people use online sites and services.

The project had the support of the First-Year Writing Program at the university, ensuring that a representative sample of the school's undergraduate student body would participate. The writing course offered through this program is the only course on campus that is required of all students; thus, enrollment in it does not pose any selection bias. Out of the 87 sections offered as part of this course, 85 took part in the study, constituting a 98% participation rate on the part of course sections.

Overall, there was a final response rate of 82% based on all of the students enrolled in the course. In order to control for time in the program, this article focuses on students in the first-year class. The survey was administered on paper instead of online. Relying on an online questionnaire when studying Internet uses could create a bias toward people who spend more time online, given that they may be more inclined to fill out the questionnaire and also, perhaps, more inclined toward higher rates of participation on the sites of research interest.

The average survey completion time was approximately 30 minutes. The survey included detailed questions about respondents' Internet uses (e. g. , experience, types of sites visited, and online activities) and their

demographic background. Basic demographic information was measured using standard modes of operationalization. Students were asked their year of birth, and this information was used to calculate their age, which is included in the models as a continuous variable.

Male is the base gender category (male = 0, female = 1). Information about race and ethnicity was collected using the U. S. Census Bureau (2000) questionnaire format, and dummy variables are used in the statistical model, with White as the omitted category. Consistent with work by others, parentaleducationwas used as a measure of socioeconomic status (e. g. , Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Stice, Cameron, Hayward, Taylor, & Killen, 1999).

Since asking about household income has limited utility with such an age group (both because students do not know their parents' income and because those who live in dorms may not know how to interpret " household"), and since educational level is constant in this group (every respondent is in the first year of college), parental schooling is a helpful measure. This information is included in the model as dummy variables, with some college education (but no college degree) as the base.

Both the question aboutliving at homewith parents and the question about having access to the Internet at a friend's orfamilymember's house is included as a dummy variable, where 1 signals yes to that question, and 0 stands for no. Finally, figures for both hours spent online per week and number of years a respondent has been an Internet user are logged in the analyses, given that an additional hour or year, respectively, likely has diminishing returns as the values increase. The analyses first consider only

the core background characteristics of the user (age, gender, race and ethnicity, parental education).

Then, a second model includes information about context and experience with use supplementing the core demographic variables. The 1, 060 first-year students included in these analyses represent a diverse group of people. 2 Fifty-six percent of the respondents are female, 44% are male. Almost all are 18 or 19 years old, with a mean age of 18. 4 and a median of 18. Fewer than half are White and non-Hipic. Slightly less than 8% claim African or African-American descent, almost 30% are of Asian or Asian American ancestry, and just under one-fifth are of Hipic origin.

These students come from varied family backgrounds. Over a quarter of respondents have parents whose highest level of education is high school, with an additional 20% whose parents do not have a college degree. While it may seem that sampling from a college population assumes a highly educated group, 25% of first-years at this university drop out of college by their second year (Ardinger et al. , 2004) and fewer than half (43. 6%) will graduate within six years of enrollment (University of Illinois-Chicago, 2004).

Unlike many U. S. colleges, over half of the students at this university commute from home and live with their parents (53. 1%). Baseline access and use statistics (Table 1) for the sample suggest that the Internet is not a novel concept in most of these students' lives. On average, participants have access to the Internet at over six locations and have been users for over six years. When asked how often they go online, the vast majority report doing so several times a day. They estimate spending 15. 5 hours visiting Web sites weekly (excluding email, chat, and VoIP).

While there is certainly some amount of variation in access and use, there are no basic barriers standing in the way of these young adults accessing the Internet. Limits may be put on their uses due to other factors (e. g. , the need to share resources at home, limited hours of access due to employment), but they all have basic access. This suggests that traditional concerns about the so-called digital divide do not apply to these students as regards basic availability of the Internet. Thus looking at such a wired group of users allows us to hold basic access to digital media constant and focus on differences in details of use instead.