



Central Asian Journal of Global Health

Is the Supercourse useful for Latin America?

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: The success of the Supercourse showed that the effort was needed in Latin America. But would a Spanish language version be better for the region?

METHODS: Google Analytics was used to determine website usage. A custom evaluation form was created to get user feedback on the usefulness of both the English language and Spanish language Supercourse lectures.

RESULTS: Over a year's span from June 2009 to June 2010 there were 257,403 unique visits and 448,939 page views. The overall average rating of lectures was 4.87 with the Spanish language lectures getting even higher ratings.

CONCLUSION: Supercourse lectures in Spanish were a great success in Latin America. This success shows the need for this information and similar success could be found in Central Asia.

Keywords: *Supercourse, education, Latin America*

Is the Supercourse useful for Latin America?

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Research

Introduction

The Global Health Network Supercourse project was launched in the late 1990's to help with the difficult task of providing high quality teaching materials to instructors of the world who wanted to teach about global health and prevention (www.pitt.edu/~super1). The Supercourse group argued that cooperation in higher health education was needed to prevent duplicate efforts and a waste of resources.¹ In addition, it has been found that the vast majority of the materials used in classes were at least 5 years old, which is far behind the fast pace of science. Thus, the Supercourse was developed in order to speed up the translation of research information from labs to classrooms. This initiative was originally supported by NASA and the National Institutes of Health and it had great success, reaching 174 countries of the world.

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In the mid 2000's the Supercourse effort started to spread to the countries of Central Asia as well as Mexico. As these efforts spread in these two very different geographic areas, we found that the challenges were surprisingly similar: a lack of English skills among local faculty members, a lack of time, and simply low awareness about this global effort. Thus, we view the development of the Supercourse in Mexico and Central Asia as sister efforts.

The Supercourse model empowers public health teachers worldwide by offering more than 4700 high quality lectures free of charge, distributing them through the Internet and via DVDs, with the invitation to join and expand the network. One of the main goals of the Supercourse is to help professors and instructors diminish the time spent developing a lecture for his or her class through the availability of the slides of lectures in the Supercourse.² Thus, a teacher could use 5 slides from an expert in cancer, 10 from an expert in diabetes, and 8 of their own. The "recycling" of slides markedly improves the quality of lectures, as the slides come from the world's experts, as well as the efficiency, as one does not have to make slides and lectures from scratch. Moreover, as the majority of the slides are developed in leading academic institutions, they are quite up to date.

The Supercourse remains a very active and highly visited website today. In the first step of project development, the Supercourse team established a network of collaborators, then began to collect lectures from recognized authors from the University of Pittsburgh. Little by little, it grew until it reached approximately 50,000 faculty members in 174 countries, with Nobel Prize laureates in Medicine donating several lectures to the Supercourse.³ Through collaboration with the network of scientists in Mexico, the Supercourse website and its materials became accessible to Spanish speaking faculty members. Under the direction of Nicolas Padilla, a new version of the Supercourse has successfully been built: the Latin American Supercourse (<http://www.feoc.ugto.mx/super/curso.php>).

The initial success of the Supercourse was demonstrated by the number of daily site hits and the search tools in Google®, where the lectures from the Supercourse are in the first ten among millions of results, and at one point receiving recognition as one of the top webpages in the area of health by PCMagazine as well as Science Magazine.³

Eight years ago, the School of Nursing and Obstetrics of Celaya, from the University of Guanajuato, Mexico, began to translate some lectures from English to Spanish in order to overcome the language barrier and to ensure that global health knowledge reaches more health professionals in Spanish speaking countries, including those of Latin America.

Health professionals in Latin American countries have little or no access to continuing education materials in the field of public health because of high costs, the need to travel, a lack of English language skills, etc. This is especially true when it comes to obtaining training in global health and prevention, as medical schools traditionally focus on clinical work. The Supercourse and the Latin American Supercourse overcome this difficulty because materials are updated and offered via the Internet free of charge. The Supercourse uses low bandwidth technology, allowing for easy access in regions with slow or expensive Internet connections.

Because of the growing interest in Spanish language content, the next logical step was to launch the Latin American Supercourse on Epidemiology, Internet and Global Health on May 3th, 2007.⁴ Lectures chosen for translation into Spanish were those that were identified to be the most valuable for Spanish speaking faculty members in Celaya, Mexico. The goal of this paper is to report the progress of the development of the Latin American Supercourse and to explore preliminary data about its usage. It is our belief that our findings will have very interesting implications for the countries of Central Asia and that our study can encourage the development of similar assessments in the region.

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Methods

Website utilization: Google Analytics

Google Analytics (GA) has been used to collect basic information about the utilization of the Supercourse website in terms of number of visits per country, per language, etc. GA is a free service offered by Google that generates detailed statistics about the visitors to a website. GA is currently in use at around 57% of the 10,000 most popular websites. GA can track visitors from all referrers, including search engines, display advertising, pay-per-click networks, email marketing, and digital collateral such as links within PDF documents.

Lecture evaluation: Lecture Review Form

The lecture review forms utilized in this effort (see Figure 1) have the following questions: name, position, organization, e-mail address, have you ever taught an introductory epidemiology course (yes or no), rate the lecture on content, presentation, relevance, and overall rating (the rating scale for these last four items: 5 = excellent, 4 = above average, 3 = average, 2 = below average, 1 = poor). In May 2004, Dr. Songer suggested that an “expectation” rating of the lecture may provide many important insights into quality measurement for the Supercourse. In August 2004, an additional question was added to all of the Supercourse peer review forms: “How does the quality of the lecture compare with your expectations about it?” (The rating scale for this item also utilizes Likert scales: 5 = Well above what I expected, 4 = Above what I expected, 3 = Same as expected, 2 = Somewhat below what I expected, 1 = Well below what I expected.)

[Figure 1: Lecture review form, Supercourse project](#)

Results

Using Google analytics® from June 10th, 2009 to June 10th, 2010, there were 257,403 unique visits to the main webpage of the Supercourse, with 448,939 page views. This means that on average, a visitor accessed 1.74 lectures. Table I demonstrates the number of visits to the Supercourse webpage from 212 countries/territories; the visits were mainly from United States of America, India, and United Kingdom. It is interesting to point out that the Biostatistics Course by Nicolas Padilla, Lecture #15 on Correlation, is the 5th most visited lecture in the Supercourse as of October 2010.

[Table I: Visits to Supercourse Webpage by Country/Territory](#)

Table II presents the number of accesses of the Supercourse webpage by countries and languages. It is important to point out that most popular languages were English and Spanish. The number of visits is a very low estimate of the usage of the Supercourse, as these numbers include visits only to the main server in Pittsburgh. Due to technical limitations, it is not possible to assess the number of visits to the mirror server sites, the number of lectures downloaded in PowerPoint format, and the number of lectures presented in front of classrooms.

[Table II: Languages of Lectures from the Supercourse Webpage](#)

Lecture evaluations filled out in Spanish can be used as a surrogate measure of interest of Spanish language speakers in certain areas. Based on this assessment, it appears that the ten most interesting topics to Latin American faculty members include: addictions, diabetes, global warming, disasters and Just-in-Time lectures, statistics, nursing, infectious diseases,

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epidemiology, public health, and cancer. This appears to be somewhat similar to the interest of English language faculty members, who are also interested in Just-in-Time lectures, cancer, and statistics, while the difference between these groups is that English speaking faculty members appeared to be less interested in infectious disease. For the 3,233 evaluations we obtained, content had a mean score of 4.82 ± 0.61 , relevance had a mean score of 4.84 ± 0.55 , and presentation had a mean score of 4.78 ± 0.69 , with the overall average rating being 4.87 ± 0.47 and the expected quality average rating being 4.80 ± 0.58 . Clearly the lectures are most appreciated. The mean scores for lectures translated into Spanish were at least 0.5 points higher than scores for the main Supercourse lectures in English.

The Latin American Supercourse was divided into areas (see Table III) to make searching easier. In three years, the Supercourse had almost 30,000 webpage accesses to the front page alone, and the Latin American Supercourse database had faculty members from almost all Latin American countries. Each month, members of the network received a newsletter from the Latin American Supercourse with news about new lectures, changes in the lecture of the week, or updates about new important lectures, such as those for Influenza A (H1N1) or hurricanes.^{5,6} These messages were regularly sent to over one thousand of e-mails contacts from the Supercourse Latin American Network.

[Table III: Areas of concentration for Latin American Supercourse and numbers of lectures available in these areas](#)

Conclusions

Large numbers of public health instructors, especially Spanish speaking instructors, are using the Supercourse lectures as a source of information from the

world's leaders in public health and medicine. The efforts of the Supercourse and the Latin American Supercourse teams are giving "fruit" in the form of better, up to date education for public health professionals. The selection of translated lectures in the Latin American Supercourse potentially represents gaps in the existing materials available to Mexican faculty members, such as biostatistics, infectious disease epidemiology, and just-in-time knowledge on disasters.

The challenges involved in the development of the Latin American Supercourse include identifying collaborators and identifying a supporting mechanism for sustainable development of this effort. Another big challenge is that many faculty members of the Latin American based institutions do not have the websites of their schools available on the Internet, and thus they are difficult to find for initial contact. Additionally, many faculty in Latin American countries do not speak English, making international collaboration hard to initiate. As we mentioned in our introduction, similar challenges have been found in Central Asia.

The parent Supercourse and the Supercourse translations into Spanish are having a great impact on health professionals from Latin American countries, demonstrated by the number of webpage accesses and page views. Interest in the Spanish language Supercourse is also demonstrated by evaluations, which are scored even higher than English language Supercourse lectures. It is likely that the Latin American Supercourse lectures are teaching more students about Global Health and Prevention than any other lectures, especially in Latin American countries. The Latin American Supercourse will also continue to work on developing advanced quality control methodologies, building on the existing publications in this area.⁷⁻¹¹ Expansion of the Latin American Supercourse is an important and much needed effort.

Since the situations in Latin America and Central Asia are similar, we would argue that it would be important to develop more efforts into getting the

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Supercourse translated into Russian and the other languages utilized in Central Asia. The popularity and high ratings of the translated lectures show that this information is desired but unavailable to those who do not speak English. These translation efforts would greatly improve the reach of public health information in the region and globally.

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Figure 1: Lecture Review form, Supercourse Project

http://www.pitt.edu/~super1/lecture/lec5241/review.htm - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Refresh Home Search Favorites Media History Mail Print Edit Discuss

Address http://www.pitt.edu/~super1/lecture/lec5241/review.htm Go Norton AntiM...

8088 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000

Peer Review of the Lecture

Your input is critical to the continued development of the Supercourse. Please complete the review form below and return your response by clicking the **submit** button at the bottom of this page.

1. Name:

2. Position:

3. Organization:

4. Email:

5. Have you ever taught an Introductory Course in Epidemiology? Yes No

6. Do you currently teach an Introductory Course in Epidemiology? Yes No

7. How interested would students be in this lecture? Very Some What Little Not At All

8. May we post your review on this web site? Yes

Start | Inbox - Outlook Expre... | Fwd: [repe-ci-y#] Gran... | internetreview_nov3.d... | VELIKOLEPN_01_11_0... | http://www.pitt.edu... | 3:29 PM

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Table I: Visits to Supercourse Webpage by Country/Territory

Country	n	%
United States of America	110,299	42.8
India	14,875	5.8
United Kingdom	13,595	5.3
Canada	10,845	4.2
Australia	6,470	2.5
Philippines	4,781	1.9
Malaysia	3,937	1.5
Pakistan	3,568	1.4
Mexico	3,305	1.3
Egypt	3,224	1.3
Other	82,504	32.0
Total	257,403	100.00

Source: Google Analytics, from June 10th, 2009 to June 10th, 2010

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Table II: Languages of Lectures from the Supercourse Webpage

Language	Country	n	%
English	United States of America	206,348	80.2
Spanish	Latin American countries	7,133	2.8
English	Great Britain	6,602	2.6
English	Other countries	4,267	1.7
Chinese	Taiwan	2,934	1.1
Chinese	China	2,782	1.1
French	France	2,610	1.0
German	Germany	2,412	0.9
Spanish	Spain	2,344	0.9
Russian	Russia	2,207	0.9
Other	Other	17,764	6.8
Total		257,403	100.0

Source: Google Analytics, from June 10th, 2009 to June 10th, 2010

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Table III: Areas of concentration for Latin American Supercourse and numbers of lectures available in these areas

Area	Number of lectures by year						Total	
	2007-2008		2009		2010			
	O	T	O	T	O	T	O	T
Addictions	6	9	2	0	1	0	9	9
Cancer	0	11	0	1	0	0	0	12
Global Warming	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	2
Disasters	0	15	0	2	0	0	0	17
Diabetes	2	3	0	0	0	0	2	3
Cardiovascular diseases	10	3	0	1	0	0	10	4
Infectious diseases	5	10	1	0	0	0	6	10
Nursing	104	0	4	2	0	0	108	2
Statistics	0	8	16	0	0	1	16	9
Epidemiology	1	81	2	1	0	1	3	83
Nutrition and obesity	0	8	0	4	0	0	0	12
Global health	3	11	2	3	0	0	5	14
Maternal and childhood health	5	62	0	0	5	0	10	62
Public health	9	15	2	0	0	0	11	15
Supercourse, internet, and technology	11	27	0	1	0	2	11	30
Just in Time	0	25	0	1	0	3	0	29
Total	157	290	30	16	6	7	193	313

Source: LatinAmerican Supercourse webpage (<http://www.feoc.ugto.mx/super/curso.php>)

O = Original

T = Translation

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