

USA Learns helps immigrants learn English

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ANN ARBOR, Mich.—A new Web site that teaches English to Spanish-speaking immigrants has attracted more than 500,000 visitors in its first three months of operation.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the site, <http://www.usalearns.org>, is the result of a collaboration between Project IDEAL at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (ISR) and the Sacramento County Office of Education in California.

"We couldn't be more pleased with the usage this new site has attracted so far," said Jerome Johnston, an ISR research professor and Project IDEAL director. "It's an important attempt to increase our capacity to supplement classroom-based English as a Second Language instruction for some 12 million U.S. adults who have low levels of English proficiency."

According to Johnston, the site has been averaging more than 7,000 visits a day, with users studying the materials for 25 minutes per visit.

Before launching the site, Project IDEAL staff conducted extensive testing in communities around the country, including Detroit. Even adults with little or no computer skills were able to use the site.

"For the last 10 years, we've been working on the problem of adult literacy," Johnston said. "Even though there is a large classroom-based effort, this only meets the needs of between five and seven percent of adult learners. So we've been concentrating on using technology to increase opportunities and reach more adult learners."

"USA Learns is one of many experiments in using technology to get more resources out to learners than we've been able to afford to do using only classroom-based education."

Online instruction is more accessible to adults who may be juggling several jobs and family responsibilities, and who find it difficult or impossible to attend formal classes. "USA Learns is available whenever learners have the time to study," Johnston said.

Online education also has great potential for assisting U.S. workers to retrain for new occupations and careers, Johnston said. "We're making tremendous progress in developing on-line learning programs that are both effective and user-friendly. These programs are shaping up as important tools in creating a workforce that fits the needs of the 21st century."

Established in 1949, the Institute for Social Research (ISR) is among the world's oldest survey research organizations, and a world leader in the development and application of social science methodology. ISR conducts some of the most widely cited studies in the nation, including the Survey of Consumer Attitudes, the National Election Studies, the Monitoring the Future Study, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the Health and Retirement Study, the Columbia County Longitudinal Study and the National Survey of Black Americans. ISR researchers also collaborate with social scientists in more than 60 nations on the World Values Surveys and other projects, and the Institute has established formal ties with universities in Poland, China, and South Africa. ISR is also home to the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), the world's largest computerized social science data archive. Visit the ISR Web site at <http://www.isr.umich.edu> for more information.

<http://ns.umich.edu/new/releases/7008-usa-learns-helps-immigrants-learn-english>