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Experiencing the Digital Divide
COM105: Introduction to Mediated Communication
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I.LOC: LOC 2, as it allows students to understand via direct experience the digital divide and thus, better articulate the concept.

II. Length of Assignment: The assignment can usually be completed within two hours.

III. Materials Needed*:*

- A personal computer or web-enabled device (such as a tablet or smartphone)
- A web browsing program
- An active Internet connection
- Access to readings, including:
    - National Communication Association's "Resolution on the Digital Divide" (2013 edition: https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/2013_Public_Statements_Resolution_on_the_Digital_Divide.pdf)
    - Jakob Jensen's "Digital Divide: The 3 Stages" (online at https://www.nngroup.com/articles/digital-divide-the-three-stages/)
- Access to an Internet speed-test program (such as beta.speedtest.net)

IV. Instructions: The Digital Divide is understood as a systematic gap in access to the Internet between myriad populations that has implications for how different populations are able to access online resources critical to cultural, economic, and social well-being. Often times, the Digital Divide is framed in terms of wealthier and more poor nations, but this framing often ignores less-obvious but just-as-critical Divides, such as those that can even occur in the same nation, state, city, and even neighborhood.

For this assignment, students will be asked to explore, compare, and contrast their own capabilities to access the Internet—specifically, by assessing the quality of their own Internet connections.

To complete this assignment, students should:

Prior to Class (one hour)

1. Read Jensen's "Digital Divide: The 3 Stages" and NCA's "Resolution on the Digital Divide"
2. Log on to beta.speedtest.net, and run the speed-test on their personal computer or web-enabled device. Record the results of your speedtest, including:
    a. Wireless carrier or service
    b. Ping rate

c. Download speed, in Mbps
d. Upload speed, in Mbps
e. In addition, record the type of device you are using to access the Internet as well as the type of connection (i.e., private wired connection, home wireless connection, public wireless connection, etc.).

3. Craft a short reflection essay (~250 words) about how the quality of your Internet connection might impact your ability to use the Internet for daily tasks—such as homework, social interaction, and entertainment.

In-Class (one hour)

4. Compare and contrast themes from students' essays as a group, to uncover potential variance in Internet connection speeds—and the functionality of those speeds—within class.
5. For any variations within the class, discuss how these variations might impact students' abilities to access, use, and be empowered (or not) by the Internet.

V. Rubric or Scoring Guide: There is no set scoring guide for the assignment, given its experiential nature. Some instructors might elect to create an optional follow-up essay (in the ~250-word range) in which students are asked to compare their results with their classmates to discussion potentially observed access, usability, and empowerment gaps within their own class. In such an assignment, scoring is rather basic:

- Full credit for assignments that directly reference the access, usability, and empowerment divides.
- Partial credit for assignments that indirectly reference the access, usability, and empowerment divide concepts.
- No credit for assignments unable to articulate the access, usability, and empowerment divide concepts.

VI. Notes: Students and instructors might need some assistance understanding some of the technical language in the speedtest, such as ping (how quickly a connection responds to the user's request), download speed (how fast a user can pull data from a connection; important when watching streaming videos for example), and upload speed (how fast a user can put data online; important when using video-chat software for example). A good glossary of these terms is offered online: https://support.speedtest.net/hc/en-us/articles/203845290-What-is-ping-download-speed-and-upload-speed-

VII. References:

Jensen, J. (2006). Digital divide: the 3 stages. Nielsen Norman Group. Retrieved from https://www.nngroup.com/articles/digital-divide-the-three-stages/

National Communication Association (2013). Resolution on the digital divide. Retrieved from https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/2013_Public_Statements_Resolution_on_the_Digital_Divide.pdf