

The Illinois Report 2009

Chapter 10: The Evolution and Application of Digital Divide Research

Transcript of video interview with author Thomas Prudhomme

“When you look at computer ownership, access to computers, and access to the internet, it did fall down socioeconomic lines, and that’s why the concept of “digital divide” happened, which is to say there are haves and have nots. So, that was research from, say, 15 years ago.

“As we’ve studied this problem over the last 15 years, it’s been very clear that this is a more complicated issue. It’s not that those divisions don’t exist, the real question is, why? And from a policy perspective, what do you do about it to try to bring these communities together in terms of making the world a level playing field. So, Illinois fits into the digital divide story like a lot of its neighbors. We’re pretty much, in this part of the country down in the lower third of the states in the United States for access to computers and for access to the internet. And as you drill down a little bit in, say, high-speed, broadband, the statistics hold.

“So, what’s going on? The state of Illinois has had a program to bridge or eliminate the digital divide for a number of years. It’s been focused on creating Community Technology Centers and using those Community Technology Centers to provide public access to computers, but to training that can help people get jobs. So, it’s been primarily a work force-oriented program. There’ve been other programs in the state relating to education and bringing Internet access to schools and things, but the two programs have not worked together and they haven’t really sat down and thought about how are these two things related. How are kids different than adults? How are kids from this part of the state related to kids in this part of the state? How do African-Americans and Hispanics differ in their view of technology and how these things happen? So in our article we’ve tried to cover a lot of these issues from an overall review perspective.

“But the real question is, what are we doing in Illinois right now? We’re funding Community Technology Centers, but as I discuss in the article, we have started a new effort to build a digital community online, more of a social networking approach to helping Community Technology Centers and their members collaborate with each other, how to help them work together to bring in new funding, so that they can sustain their programs. And how to sort of organize a broader set of information resources that could be shared by all of them.”