Software Review, SNAP Campus Edition: Version 3
by Geoffrey P. Lantos

SNAP Campus Edition: Version 3

SNAP Campus Edition by Mercator Corporation in Newburyport, Massachusetts, is software designed for classroom applications in the marketing research course (as well as other social science courses which use survey research). It allows users to manage the entire survey research process from questionnaire design and data collection to analysis and results presentation. SNAP Professional survey software was originally developed in the early 1980s and currently is used commercially in over 10,000 corporations worldwide. Recently, Mercator's parent company, Mercator UK, has configured SNAP Professional for the academic environment. Mercator has begun marketing SNAP Campus Edition: Version 3 to North American academic institutions.

SNAP's capabilities include design of a polished, professional questionnaire (all students need to do is enter the question text and range of possible answers; SNAP formats the layout and design elements); questionnaire printing; data entry in three modes; data import/export; basic statistical analysis, including basic descriptive statistics; tabular analysis, including frequency tables and grid tables (with mean scores and standard errors); cross tabs (with chi-square tests with phi-coefficients, contingency coefficients, and Cramer V); and graphics, including 2 & 3D bar charts, line charts, and pie charts. SNAP permits an unlimited number of variables and four variable classes: single response, multiple response, quantity (numerical responses), and literal (open-ended responses). It allows up to 100,000 cases with up to 5,000 characters per case.

During the 1995-96 academic year, Stonehill College served as a pilot site for evaluating SNAP Version 3 in an academic environment. It was felt that use of SNAP could streamline student projects by handling the entire survey research process for them.

The SNAP Campus Edition we received consisted of one User Guide for the professor, a 40-user network license of SNAP Professional for installation on one designated campus network, and a very helpful teaching package which included an audiotape, tape transcript, and overheads. Each of ten student groups received a student license consisting of one diskette containing SNAP which they loaded onto their own PC if they

didn't wish to use the campus system.

Student teams of about four students each were assigned to perform survey research for a local client organization and write a research report term paper for the client. Ten student editions of the software (one manual and one diskette each) were distributed, one to each marketing research team. A training session was offered at Stonehill by Mercator's general manager. Student attendance was optional, and unfortunately, only a few students took advantage of this opportunity.

Some students found that the software literally lived up to its name; one group was able to design and print their questionnaire after only an hour at the computer. Students were impressed with the professional looking questionnaire, statistical and graphical output, and with SNAP's potential ease of use. As one team reported, "We felt very comfortable administering the questionnaire since it didn't just look like it was thrown together by a few college students." Data entry was easy for most because questions appear on-screen with all response options listed; users merely check the appropriate on-screen response.

However, some aspects of SNAP proved to be problematic for some teams, mostly because many of our students weren't very proficient in a windows environment. For instance, they encountered difficulties in using the import and export commands, saving the survey from the hard drive to a diskette, deciphering the tool bar icons, cutting and pasting and resequencing questionnaire questions, and entering data (positioning problems). Also, there were systems problems on Stonehill's PCs which frustrated students (getting printouts of tables and charts, losing data, being shut out of the system), and the User's Guide was less than user-friendly. The manual, though very comprehensive, was poorly organized and difficult for some students to comprehend. Also, it did not address or severely downplayed certain important issues. Fortunately these issues will be addressed in Version 4.

One group summarized these mixed reviews: "Yes, SNAP can be annoying, but it actually helped us out and made our project much easier to complete." Another said that "SNAP could be an excellent program. It is far beyond Minitab in its abilities. Our group ran into problems, but once the bugs are worked out, it could be great."

Despite some snafus with Version 3, I plan to use Version 4 in the Spring 1997 because (1) student training by me outside of regular class time will be mandatory for at least one student

from each project group and (2) at least one class period will be conducted in the computer lab with hands-on training. I recommend that instructors teach students the fundamentals of SNAP. I neglected to do this, which meant students were on their own in learning SNAP—a task most of them were not up to.

SNAP runs on Windows 3.1, Windows 95, Windows NT, and OS/2, and it requires a minimum of a 486DX processor with 4 MB of memory, plus Version 4 will occupy 15 MB hard disk space. SNAP Campus Edition is sold as an annual software license for under $2,000. License renewal is provided by the Annual Maintenance Agreement of $400, which allows your institution to upgrade the 40-user network license at no cost upon the release of a next-generation product within that year.

SNAP would not be of interest to professors who expect higher-level analyses such as ANOVA, correlation and regression, cluster analysis, factor analysis, and conjoint analysis. However, for the professor who stresses more of the basics of the marketing research process, SNAP can prove to be a useful and involving tool for students. It is relatively simple to use as long as your students are reasonably comfortable working in a Windows environment and you have a reliable operating system at your institution. As more and more companies get on board, it will be a valuable skill for students to have and to list on their resumes among their computer competencies.

For more information contact Mercator Corporation at 508-463-4093.

Geoffrey P. Lantos
Stonehill College