

### *III. Internet Research Assistant*

#### **The Setting**

The local Task Force on Youth had just completed a study that identified the need for developing programs for youth in the community. Such programs were to address teen involvement with local community service organizations, businesses, and law enforcement officials. The director of the task force asked a team of local 'college-bound' high school students to conduct research to identify the 'top ten programs' in the country that would possibly meet the needs of the task force. Specifically, the director was interested in having the students access the various resources of the Internet in contacting individuals and researching world wide web and gopher sites for such information.

#### **Comparable Settings**

Communities having the need to develop and implement programs for their youth abound around the country. Access to such information through the Internet is universal in nearly every school and in many households nationwide.

#### **The Work**

The Students prepared a letter to the director of the task force outlining their understanding of the problem, the process they would be following in conducting the research, and the specific product (the 'top ten programs' they would be presenting. The students were careful to specify the criteria for selecting the 'top ten programs' -- criteria specific to the needs of the local community, not criteria that were irrelevant to the needs of the task force. The team then prepared postings for various E-mail listservers, posted the messages requesting information, and gathered the responses. For those which sounded promising, the students followed up with phone calls and collected copies of program brochures, descriptions, and the like via mail. The team also accessed various world wide web sites and gopher sites that were specific to the information they were seeking. Following the data gathering process, the students assembled the information, selected their 'top ten programs', and presented their findings to the task force and to the local city council. Their presentation was televised on local cable TV.

#### **The Learning**

Students were faced with an important community problem that needed to be addressed through techniques quite unfamiliar to most individuals -- the world of the Internet. The students practiced their resource competencies by operating under severe time constraints and having a flood of information to analyze. Their information skills were addressed by the need to identify from among the thousands of possible sources which ones might appear most fruitful. Their systems skills were exercised by the need to develop a process to access the Internet, keep track of sources, and follow up with promising leads. Additionally, they needed to develop a way to clearly present their findings and supply back-up information regarding their 'top ten' for later follow-up and action. Their technology skills were addressed through the need to use various Internet access programs to navigate around the information highway and collect the appropriate information.