

## Someone wants to give us a hundred thousand dollars?

As some of you already may know, Mod\_survey has been nominated for the "Mellon Award for Technology Collaboration", a prize/grant which tops at a hundred thousand dollars. The last few hours my university has issued press releases about this (they can be found on the mod\_survey homepage too). This is a more personal comment about the whole thing.

I was pretty surprised when the guys at MATC contacted me about this. First I had never heard about the award, and secondly I had no clue whatsoever as to who would nominate mod\_survey for it. First thing I did was to dish out a bunch of mails to the germans and italians in order to force them to own up their part in the conspiracy. Both groups vehemently denied their part in it though. And the people at MATC refuse to tell me who wrote the nomination.

Well, never mind. I have had a conversation with a representative at MATC, and he says that mod\_survey has a "reasonable" chance to be selected in the end. What probability this means in practice I have no way of knowing. We should get some indication during the fall I guess.

Anyway, as subscribes of the mailing lists will have noticed, the development on mod\_survey has stalled somewhat recently. The main reason for this is that all the major involved parties (me, the italians and the germans) consensually agree that none of us have the resources to implement the changes that would be required to take the software to a higher level. At the moment, the software is mature for the tasks it was initially intended to solve, but adding extra functionality would require lots of effort. What I would want to do, if time and resources permitted, is to rewrite large parts of the core logic, to allow for things such as:

- Asymmetrical data structures: Cases with different numbers of variables
- More efficient routing and branching
- Real XML parsing rather than internal parser
- Other modes for survey defining (for examples surveys stored in databases)
- Auto-generated surveys

And also add curricula such as:

- Integrated GUI for defining survey (ILSE is a good candidate, but it is currently separate)
- Population management
- Following up progress of answers, and issuing reminders
- Automatic mailing of invites to possible respondents
- Web hosting with accounting (so that it is easier to give students access)

In the case that the award is granted in the end, my university has agreed that the money will go a year (or so) of development of features for mod\_survey. If this in practice will mean a complete rewrite, or if the current code base will developed, is too early to say. In any case, with the award, the above features have a chance to make it into reality

-- Joel Palmius