IS METASEARCHING THE WAY TO GO?

While walking to the Library, I overheard a conversation among a group of undergraduate students discussing their first assignment. Being a librarian, my immediate response was a knee-jerk one – I asked, “which databases are you going to use?” The chorus replied: “Google”. This is the generation that we label “the Google Generation”. As librarians, we ask the question: “Are we losing our students to Google?” This question is designed not in opposition to the search engine Google, but rather see how we can learn from a much sought after resource.

The appeal of Google is that it is easy to use and students go to only one place to access information. The inception of the Internet and the decreasing cost of technology (hardware) is allowing more people to use the World Wide Web as the first point of call for information gathering. Being accustomed to search engines on the Web many find the Library and its databases too cumbersome by comparison. Librarians know that by using only one source, even a meta search engine such as Google, the student misses out on much relevant information. Further, much information on the Web is unreliable and not subject to peer review. However, Luther (2003) asks the question: “but do our users care?” She comments that for many users “Google provides ‘good enough’ answers”.

The Web is making an impact on integrated library systems (ILS). Kenney (2003) believes that “ILS is the technological backbone of many library operations and services”. ILS vendors have to become innovative in order to keep up with technological trends, particularly in the light of the range of competition that exists, particularly with regard to metasearching. Metasearching is the ability to search multiple resources at once.

So for Libraries and ILS vendors the challenge is to find ways of providing seamless searching across different databases and formats. Metasearching across different databases and files that do not have common indexing terms and are not accessed using standardized URLs, as is the case with Web search engines, creates a complex set of demands. Libraries are rising to the challenge. ILS vendors are beginning to provide metasearch capability and many Libraries are using software created by the vendors such as WebFeat and MuseGlobal that have developed this capability and licensed it to the library systems market (Luther 2003). Capabilities vary across systems and the way these systems integrate with the Library’s own ILS.

There are valid reasons for caution. Luther notes that it must be remembered that metasearching provides easier access but not the greater precision that Librarians would like researchers to benefit from. System overload is also a potential problem as every search is run against every database. Creating metasearchability across Library databases is a slow and time-consuming process and is very demanding on staff time both when setting-up the system and in the ongoing maintenance. It requires considerable and ongoing commitment of staff.

Metasearching capability can only be considered if the ILS is web-based. All users of this Library’s OPAC are aware that our ILS in its current form is old-fashioned and needs updating. We are pleased to say that we are presently engaged in a needs assessment so that we can put a request to a variety of ILS vendors to present to us their products and demonstrate the system’s capabilities with a view to us migrating to a new system. We are not doing this alone. We are working together with the other tertiary institutions belonging to esAL (eastern seaboard Association of Libraries), which falls under esATI. This project is referred to as ESP (esAL Systems Project). It is planned that the first vendor presentations take place in December and we hope to be able to make a decision regarding a new system in the first quarter or 2004. Metasearchability will certainly be one consideration that will form part of our assessment of these Library systems.
SUBJECT LIBRARIANS ON THE MOVE

Sadly the Library will be losing two subject librarians in the next short while. Ruth Hoskins from the Main library leaves at the end of October to take up a lecturing position in the Information Studies department on campus. Ruth has been based in the main library for the past seven years. She has a BA degree, an Advanced University Diploma in Information Studies and an LLB. At the end of 2002 Ruth completed her Masters degree in Information Studies. Whilst her subject portfolio has changed from time to time, Ruth has nurtured the subjects of theology and religious studies in particular over this time period and has played a major role in the coordination of the Theological Cluster libraries which form part of the Cataloguing Network in Pietermaritzburg project. Ruth has been instrumental in the development of the Library’s website; coordinated the day to day management of the Library’s CDROMs and workstations and the library side of the Multimedia classroom which is shared with the Centre for Visual Arts.

Vivien Langley of the Life Sciences branch leaves at the end of November for New Zealand. Vivien has spent the past 12 years at Life Sciences, most of that time with colleagues Leonie Prozesky and Annette Andersson both of whom are no longer with the library. Vivien played a major role in the design and management of the Agri 220 Information Retrieval course in particular, part of a robust ‘library instruction’ programme maintained at Life Sciences. Vivien enjoyed reference work with students in particular and dealing with the challenges and opportunities of technology. She will miss the academic environment and interaction with staff and students.

They will be sorely missed by their colleagues and we wish them well in their new endeavours.

RK

ONLINE RESOURCES UPDATE

CABDIRECT Online
Although this database has been available online since the beginning of 2003, replacing the CDROM version which was only available in the Life Sciences Library, the software has undergone a radical change recently.

The browser requirements for the new version of CABDIRECT is: Microsoft Internet Explorer 6 and higher or Netscape 6.2 and higher. If you have no access or if the results are incomplete, this may be the problem.

Electronic journals (E-journals)
The list of e-journals available on this campus, which is found on the library website (www.library.unp.ac.za) is regularly being updated so please keep checking the lists by subject.

NEW REFERENCE WORKS


Our roots are speaking is the title of an Oral History Seminar which took place on 17 September 2003, in celebration of Heritage Day, in the Colin Webb Hall. This seminar had two purposes - one being the official launch of the KwaZulu-Natal Oral History Association, the acceptance of the constitution and the election of the committee. This was done through nominations from the 85 people who were present, followed by voting, and the newly elected committee is Professor Philippe Denis of the Sinomlando Project, UNP; Phumuzile Mwandla of KZN Archives, Ulundi; Pieter Nel of KZN Archives, Pietermaritzburg; Sibongiseni Mkhize of Voortrekker Museum; and Vino Reddy of the University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre. The objective of the Association is to encourage and facilitate the collection, preservation and study of oral history in KwaZulu-Natal. In the past, the various organisations working on different oral history projects (OHPs) had very little contact with each other, and were unaware of what others were doing, whereas now a network can be established for mutual information and sharing of knowledge and skills.

The second objective of the seminar was to provide the opportunity for representatives of the different OHPs to give presentations on their projects. The projects which were presented were the Sinomlando and Memory Box projects; the UDW Documentation Centre project; the Natal Museum Edendale Family History Project; the National Botanical Institute Zulu Botanical Knowledge Project and the KZN Archives OHP based in Ulundi.

This seminar was co-organised by KZN Archives; KZN Oral History Association; Voortrekker Museum; Sinomlando Project and the Alan Paton Centre.

JK

SAMA BOOK REPAIR WORKSHOPS

Two excellent workshops on book repair were given by the KwaZulu-Natal Branch of SAMA (South African Museums Association) on the 29th, and the 30th September and 1st October. Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen did much of the planning and organizing of the workshops and must take full credit for an excellent ‘hands-on’ three days. The workshops were led by Mary Minicka, Conservator at the Conservation Centre, Parliament of South Africa, Cape Town. Mary readily shares of her copious skills and knowledge, and it is an inspiration to learn from her.

The Monday workshop taught participants very useful practical skills in basic conservation treatments. Important background theory was also covered. Mary explained the code of ethics which must be abided by when considering any kind of conservation treatment to a library/archival/museum item. ‘Dry’ cleaning of a book was meticulously demonstrated, as was the cleaning of dirty pages and marks. The cleaning of single-sheet items (documents, maps, and photos) was also covered. Other basic treatments taught were mending the damaged corners of a book, and relaxing ‘dog-eared’ pages. Several ‘non-treatment’ options were also demonstrated and their benefits highlighted: boxing items; book tying; and wrapping card around a book.

‘Non-adhesive bindings’ were the focus of the Tuesday and Wednesday workshop. These binding structures are an option for the re-formatting of single and multi-sectioned pamphlets and books which are staple bound or have a very weak sewing structure. These bindings involve no gluing.

Participants learnt the various stitch bindings by making their own example of each. The three-hole, and five-hole pamphlet stitch, for single-section booklets, were learnt. Participants then stitched two bindings each with a different type of cover for the booklet. A four-flap pamphlet folder was made to house a booklet. Two bindings were then learnt to accommodate a two-section booklet. Mary also showed participants examples of a ‘fascicule system’ for single sheet document storage.

The stitch bindings, the four-flap pamphlet folder and the fascicule system have very useful applications for the preservation of booklets and documents in an archives.

BJ
This book is about violent behaviour some men turn to in times of stress or crisis and its consequences. The focus is on a particular organization in Sweden, called Manscentrum, that was created to offer help to men exclusively. Societal transformation is blamed for many changes including changes in gender roles and social patterning. The first crisis centres in Sweden were established for men in the 1980's in a response to men's difficulties with dealing with societal transformations which often lead to emotional crises and other problems.

Manscentrum, Stockholm, is an autonomous, private, non-profit-making organization. It was established in 1988 to provide men with support, counselling and short-term therapy. Its work focuses on finding solutions to problems as described by the men who attend the Centre. At Manscentrum, violence is regarded as an expression of weakness and fear, not of power and strength. It is seen as a strategy to avoid feelings of weakness and helplessness. Their main task is to help men change their violent behaviour. This operates on the belief that it is possible for a violent man to cease the practice of violence. One of its overall goals is to work towards improved cooperation and understanding between and among both men and women.

The author explains the sort of help the Centre offers and includes some case-studies. Men are encouraged to personally make an appointment and then attend one-to-one counseling sessions. Depending on the situation, most men are then encouraged to sign an agreement to join the once-a-week, ten session group sessions, with no excuses for dropping out or not attending. Failure to appear extends the time of the period of help.

Each situation is looked at on its own merit and very few generalizations are made. Low self-esteem, instability, unemployment, pending divorce and other conflict-laden areas are largely seen as the spur to violent behaviour. When the man stops making excuses and blaming his situation on others and starts taking full responsibility for his violent behaviour, counsellors believe he has made a step in the right direction. Counsellors attempt to guide the man to this realization of ownership of his actions. Talking about the violent episodes rather than focusing on attributing blame and guilt is part of the ethos of the Centre. The man must take responsibility for his own actions. They say that the road ahead is not easy, but once one has taken the initial steps of seeking help many problems can be potentially solved by making alternative choices.

The book stresses that there is evidence that violent men can change their behaviour and that there is hope and safety for the family members of abusive men. They also advocate that the women in these abusive relationships also seek help with the issues that they have to deal with. The author hopes that others might be able to use some of the methods adopted at the Centre, with adjustments for different cultural settings. I feel the book is useful for people who offer counseling to the batterer since there seems to be very little written on this particular area.

Related readings:

Renee Damonse