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ONLINE DATABASES

Google in the Academic Library

By Carol Tenopir

GOOGLE SCHOLAR, INTRODUCED in beta form in November 2004, already has everyone talking. People wonder how scholarly the material is, whether it will put commercial information retrieval systems out of business, and if it will make the library obsolete. Is it really as good as promised?

The material in Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) is not just the peer-reviewed journals available in systems like ScienceDirect, Web of Science, or SciFinder; it also includes bibliographic information about books (scholarly or not) from the OCLC WorldCat database, book reviews, and links to publishers' web sites. Occasionally, other material sneaks through, but my sample searches largely retrieved mostly relevant, relatively scholarly materials.

Google Scholar also includes the number of citations for each hit and links to those that are available. Number of citations is factored into the ranking algorithm, so highly cited items are more likely to appear early on.

A search of "genome project" retrieved several thousand records. The first few screens were mostly articles in PubMed and other full-text journal sources (some available only when my IP address was recognized as coming from a subscribing library and others only as pay-per-view), a few abstracts, a book description, and some dead links. Searching for "geysers" yielded similar results but with more books and book reviews. WorldCat provided the nearest library that holds the title when I put in my zip code as prompted.

Same searches, other systems

On the full Google, "geyser" took me to the National Park Service sites, spring water companies, tourist companies, and more. The few truly academic things were buried. Google Scholar seems to have solved this problem.

Searching on the same topics in Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and EBSCO Academic Search Premier brought re-

sults you would expect—full-text articles and a few abstracts, almost all from peer-reviewed journals (plus popular science titles like *Smithsonian* in EBSCO). The results showed a much wider range of journal titles than Google Scholar, perhaps because Google is still building relationships with publishers (ACM, IEEE, PubMed, and OCLC are already on board). While graduate students and faculty still need the commercial systems, undergraduates may find all they want on Google Scholar, at least with regard to science and medical topics.

Potential and power

Google Scholar has real potential to provide easy, one-stop access to articles in both subscription journals and items in institutional repositories, open access

ResourceShelf.com, noted his searches have brought up "a lot of stuff people wouldn't consider scholarly," such as press releases, calendars, etc. Karen Blakeman, director, RBA Information Services, "would like to see a list of sources" included. Her experiences with Google Scholar have been disappointing because of missing power search features: a consistent, controlled vocabulary (or even access to vocabularies that exist in NLM-PubMed records); the ability to search on fields like ISBN; and sorting by publisher, author, or dates.

It will be popular

Whatever it does, Google Scholar will be wildly popular with students. Already students turn to search engines (and

Undergraduates may find all they want on Google Scholar

journals, and e-print servers. Although the beta version does not yet include Open Archives harvested materials, the power of identifying academic materials buried in a sea of web flotsam is enticing.

But easy access to multiple sources unwittingly highlights a multiple version problem. Preprints, revised versions, and final versions of articles all get retrieved. Most publishers allow authors to self-archive early versions of their articles, but the final published PDF may only be available by the publisher to subscribers. By crawling a variety of web sites, Google Scholar has unearthed some final published versions that authors or their institutions have mounted on open web sites in violation of licensing agreements. Publishers may find an unanticipated use for Scholar—as watchdog.

What the experts say

At the Online Information Meeting in London this past November, Scholar was a hot topic. Gary Price, editor of

Google most often) as a first choice. Google Scholar seemingly answers their teachers' and librarians' main objections to the web—that the material isn't of high enough academic quality for school assignments—and there are no advertisements or sponsored hits. Mary Ellen Bates, Bates Information Services, advised at the Online Information Meeting that "it is important for librarians to roll [Scholar] out to our clients and teach them about what else the library has."

Google Scholar does not make the library obsolete—it is intertwined with collections by linking to OCLC member libraries for books and to subscriptions for journal access. It does not replace the library collection. It expands access. The impact on abstracting and indexing services remains to be seen.

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