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## Back to School Know-How

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# LJ INFOTECH

## □ ONLINE DATABASES □

BY CAROL TENOPIR

## Back to School Know-How

MANY OF TODAY'S new students in library and information science (LIS) programs enter graduate school with online searching experience and self-confidence in their knowledge of cyberspace. A recent study reported in *USA Today* found that 84 percent of today's U.S. college students surf the web, 71 percent go online more than once a day, and 61 percent spend one to four hours a day online. But, with a few exceptions, "online" to this generation means just the World Wide Web, and it means only those portions of the web that can be accessed without a fee.

Professors and commercial online vendors face a challenge: not only introducing fee-based online products but also convincing Internet-savvy students that commercial online is a necessary and valuable resource. To do so, commercial online services provide a variety of instructional materials, free online practice time, and training classes to LIS graduate schools. In the past few years some online services have stepped up their efforts with free training and enhanced password management.

### Lexis-Nexis Faculty Institute

Although for years Dialog set the standard for educational programs, now Lexis-Nexis courts future information professionals most aggressively. This summer I attended the third "Faculty Institute for Library and Information Science" at the Lexis-Nexis headquarters in Dayton. Thirty-five of my teaching colleagues and I spent four days meeting Lexis-Nexis staff, touring the facilities, and learning the ins and outs of search strategies, databases, and new initiatives, with the ultimate goal

of better incorporating Lexis-Nexis into classes.

Carol Johnson, manager, LIS education, is the energy behind the institute and the expansion of its instructional programs. Since 1989, Lexis-Nexis has had a limited library school instructional program, providing free passwords for 25 selected schools plus some instructional materials. This was expanded in 1995 to all American Library Association (ALA)-accredited schools, but Johnson soon discovered that faculty at most library schools felt they didn't know enough about Lexis-Nexis to teach it. According to Johnson, the institutes were developed to enable "faculty to learn about Lexis-Nexis products and how to use our services in a low-key, nonthreatening environment, surrounded by their peers."

The institute approach is working. Johnson tells me that "in the three years we've offered the faculty institute, we've seen a substantial increase in the use of Lexis-Nexis in library schools, both in the number of schools using the service and the amount of use." The first advanced institute, for alumni of the previous Dayton Institutes, was held in May in conjunction with the Mid-Year Meeting of the American Society for Information Science. Lexis-Nexis hopes to offer another Advanced Institute in 2000.

### Student/faculty incentives

Beyond faculty instruction, each student in classes that teach Lexis-Nexis is offered a workbook specifically tailored to LIS graduate schools, as well as free individual passwords for class-related assignments. Lexis-Nexis software may be downloaded ([www.lexis-nexis.com](http://www.lexis-nexis.com)), so students can complete assignments at home. Lexis and Nexis regional consultants will visit LIS schools in their territories for classroom presentations.

From a faculty member's perspective, attendance at an institute greatly boosts confidence and builds knowledge of how Lexis-Nexis can be used in courses. Currently, many of my fellow

teachers at the institute and I use Lexis-Nexis in a variety of courses including online searching, business sources, competitive and business intelligence, legal reference, and the information industry.

Such ongoing programs are a smart investment for Lexis-Nexis. The proof of success comes when students graduate and use the service on their jobs. Since expanding the instructional program and starting the faculty institutes three years ago, Johnson says she is "seeing significant anecdotal evidence that students graduating from library schools have a heightened awareness of Lexis-Nexis and better skills in using our service when they start careers as corporate or legal librarians."

Corporate and law librarianship are its traditional target markets, but Lexis-Nexis is hoping faculty will expose all students to its products, including those for academic libraries (Academic Universe) and high schools (Scholastic Universe).

Why would Lexis-Nexis spend the considerable effort and expense to reach faculty and all students? Clearly, the company believes that the online systems that students learn well and freely in graduate school are the ones they will stick with as paying information professionals. Dialog's experiences over the past two decades seem to bear this out.

### Dialog's programs

Dialog's past prowess was due in large part to the efforts of Anne Caputo, who led its classroom instruction program for 20 years. Dialog's training programs began with the Online Training and Practice files (Ontap), created by Charlie Bourne and Barbara Anderson at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1974-75.

When Caputo joined Dialog in 1976 she expanded the classroom program by providing access to full databases (rather than just the sample Ontap files), purchasing the rights to the manual, and expanding its content. The success of the program and increasing



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## ONLINE DATABASES

competition among online services led teaching faculty to have higher expectations and Dialog to improve services. Dialog was the first to offer no-cost educational passwords to ALA-accredited schools, to have a training workbook for library school students, and to have a staff member dedicated to developing academic initiatives. Those efforts paid off—by 1989 all ALA-accredited schools taught Dialog, and generations of searchers considered Dialog their number one online service. In 1998 I participated in a session at the Online World Conference in Washington, DC, where corporate librarians actually berated library educators for training students so completely in the Dialog system that they didn't want to use other services.

Dialog is still the most frequently taught online system at schools, although others are gaining ground. It includes databases on the widest range of topics, making it appropriate for online searching classes that are not subject-specific. Its command-based system still spotlights the most powerful software, offering a variety of items such as good set building, index display, and advanced output features that are useful for illustrating searching concepts. The most popular online searching textbook for library school students (Geraldene Walker and Joseph Janes's *Online Retrieval: A Dialogue of Theory and Practice*, 2d ed., Libraries Unlimited, 1993) features the Dialog command language.

### Expanding its commitment

Dialog promises to continue and expand its commitment to instructional programs. It now offers free access to Dialog for LIS programs worldwide and has recently added access to the *Profound* service and the *Intranet Toolkit*, along with complementary instructional materials. A new web page was created especially to communicate with library schools (<http://training.dialog.com/cip-lis>).

This fall Dialog has reinstated the Roger K. Summit Scholarship, a \$5000 award made to a graduate student in library or information science who has demonstrated outstanding interest or performance in electronic information services.

In November, Dialog and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, SLIS are cosponsoring a faculty seminar that will examine online searching curricu-

la in light of changing technologies and information environments. The seminar promises to address topics on knowledge management and online course curriculum, merger and acquisition search needs, Dialog for intranets, and "generating information for demand-driven, deal-focused requests."

Brigitte Wilds, the new manager, academic program at Dialog, explains that Dialog decided to cosponsor the

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## Learning how to search a system should not focus solely on specific commands or features

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seminar because it "wanted to do something to support faculty members" as well as students. Dialog hopes that "the participants are able to enter into a discussion that advances innovation in the field of information studies and that enables them to be better scholars and better teachers."

Dialog has also recently appointed a "teaching advisory board" of distinguished faculty and information professionals who will investigate how to prepare the next generation of information professionals. According to Wilds, Dialog will publish the board's findings.

### Dow Jones Interactive

Dialog's educational programs are just now recovering from Caputo's departure in 1998. In her first full year as Dow Jones Reuters Business Interactive's (DJRBI) director of information professional and academic programs, her touch is already evident. Although DJRBI had a small presence in "a couple of dozen" schools of library and information science in the United States, her "mandate is to make that presence much larger and to make it truly global," she says.

To accomplish this ambitious goal, DJRBI set up a library education advisory board and will be offering a version of its "power searcher bootcamp" for library school faculty and students. DJRBI personnel will visit schools and offer intensive training and curriculum-related training materials.

### State-of-the-art access

Barbara Burton, editor of the *Ask Dow Jones* newsletter, has just been appointed manager of library and information science education and will be responsible for creating training and curriculum materials, the first versions of which are expected early in 2000.

Caputo's recruitment by Dow Jones is an acknowledgement of the importance and success of programs targeted to library schools. "I've heard many, many stories from competitors about the loyalty of students who learned Dialog in library school and how hard it is to sell against that loyalty," she says.

The benefits of such programs are not just for the online services, however. As Caputo clearly articulates, "Given access to the wealth of capability, not just in the form of free access but also special materials...faculty training and even on-campus visits by information service representatives provide real state-of-the-art access to the power of these services. No school could afford to purchase this...even at reduced educational rates. The benefit of these programs clearly comes to both partners."

### Toward the future

As end users take over online searching tasks in many environments and more web-based products are developed, some might question the need for intensive instruction on any commercial service. But learning how to search a system should not focus solely on specific commands or features of any one service, nor simply getting to the information. Johnson of Lexis-Nexis echoed this belief when asked about the future of instructional programs in a web-based world: "Librarians are always going to want to know not only *what* they are searching but also *how* the service is obtaining a particular set of results. Faculty and students need to think critically about the sources they use."

To become knowledgeable information professionals, students must understand the search engines, interfaces, database loading, and content-building processes of a variety of online services. They need exposure to a wide variety of services while they have the luxury of no-cost access and time to learn. Programs such as these will only become more important to the curriculum of library and information science.