

**The California Community Colleges
CCL-EAR Committee
Review Update
Encyclopedia of Life Sciences
September 25, 2006**

The CCL-EAR Committee completed a full review of the database in November 2001, with an update on May 13, 2002. On December 3, 2004, the ownership of the database changed from The Nature Publishing Group, a division of Macmillan Publishers Ltd, to John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 2

The database has excellent content for users from undergraduate to advanced scholars. Much of the content is more appropriate for upper division to graduate and scholarly researchers. The cost is above average compared to other general or specialized online encyclopedias. The transfer from the Nature platform to the Wiley platform has resulted in a smoother search process, but there are some unique features that were lost. We cannot get clear responses from the publisher to our questions and there is no way of knowing if the database is being used by our students.

INFORMATION DATABASE 3

The *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences (ELS)* contains over 3700 signed, refereed articles in the 15 areas of biochemistry, cell biology, developmental biology, ecology, evolution, genetics, immunology, microbiology, molecular biology, neuroscience, plant science, physiology, structural biology, virology, and the history of life sciences. The Introductory articles are readable at the college level. The advanced articles are equivalent to "graduate level texts."

The *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences (ELS)* was last updated on 19th September 2006. This update comprises 252 new articles. In total, there are now 3,994 articles published in ELS online, of which 411 also include updated versions. Updates seem to be spaced at 2 month intervals, with over 200 new articles and over 20 updates at each posting. The updates are definitely "value added" over the static 20 vols. print source. Wiley is in the process of adding the entire contents of the *Encyclopedia of the Human Genome* (Wiley, 2003. 5 vols, print: \$1530), which might account for many of those new articles. Since Wiley acquired ELS in December 2004 to September 2006, 1595 new and updated articles have been added.

Each article has "further reading" suggestions. Most advanced articles have references. In the HTML format, both sections may have links outside the database to abstracts of the resources, many purchasable separately. The description under the previous interface alleged that there were 30,000 of these clickable, embedded links to articles outside the database and 26,000 clickable cross references within the encyclopedia. Many articles have glossary definitions after the article, but the glossary index is gone. Each article can be displayed with the table of contents on the left or full-width.

SEARCH INTERFACE 3

Browse-able searches may be performed by clicking "Article Titles A - Z" or "Topics." The latter arranges all articles into the 15 broad subjects, and then reveals the imbedded hierarchy if the user clicks on the plus signs to the left of each subject.

A keyword search on each page in the upper right corner under “Search this title” offers word search expansion using the asterisk * at the end or beginning. It searches the title, abstract and fulltext, including the references. Search term yellow highlighting in the abstract and article can be turned on or off. There is a new and welcome “Edit Search,” allowing refinement of the original search, and a new “Save Search” button.

“Advanced Product Search” allows the user to limit by 2 Article Types: “standard article,” which was never defined, or “keynote article,” defined as controversial topics. There are, however, three categories: introductory, advanced, and keynote, indicated by 1, 2, or 3 yellow diamonds after the article titles. Previously, when this database was on the Nature platform, all 3 levels were searchable, though there were problems with that search interface. In the Advanced Product Search window, a user can choose to limit a search within article title, section title, author, keywords, tables or figures, or full text. There are also limiters by date range and by the 15 broad scientific areas.

The Result List has a default arrangement by relevancy, called “Match %,” with options to re-sort by date or article title. The actual percentage of the relevancy is not revealed, though the Help screen said a score from 0.1 to 1.0 might be displayed, an example of the confusion in use of one generic help screen for multiple products. Since this encyclopedia does have dated articles, rare among encyclopedias, the date sort is useful. There is no function to sort by audience level. To go to the next article in a results list, one must return to the results list. A “Next” button would be useful.

The Search button “Search All Content” takes a user outside the *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences* and into the entire realm of products from Wiley InterScience, a bit confusing. Sometimes a click on “Home” returned me to the ELS home page; other times, I went to the Wiley home page. Perhaps a clearer identification of the “Home” buttons would help navigate the site.

Previously there were several helpful features that seem now to be missing:

- “Reference Search” which allowed one to search for the references which are listed at the end of most advanced articles.
- “Index Search” which offered a keyword search of the 180,000 term index, and also allowed “Go to a Keyword,” allowing a look at the structure of the alphabetic index, helpful for browsing.
- “Glossary Search” offered a search by the first few letters of the 4000 specially prepared terms, or a search for a keyword anywhere in glossary. Wiley InterScience does offer an “Acronym Search” outside of the *ELS*, but that is not a glossary search.
- 11 silent animated presentations (meiosis, mitosis, etc.) available under a “Browse...Multimedia” button.
- The original list of 5000 contributors with their affiliations. It had been impressive.
- A PowerPoint tutorial.

An “Article Navigation” panel on the left allows selection of the tables or figures for viewing. At the top of an article, there is a new “print this page” button, which reformats the html format to fit within a printed page, a vast improvement over the previous printing

method, which omitted the right margin of the text. There is a PDF format also and its print function works well from the Adobe Reader tool bar.

There is a new clickable e-mail button on the website for the HTML format, but use of it brought an error message "HTTP 404 - File not found Internet Explorer" every time. The e-mail functionality of the Adobe Reader browser now works fine for sending the link or the complete article. Previously I was caught in a loop that constantly asked for re-logins.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES 2

The Help button, in the top right corner, leads to the general Wiley help site, which subdivides by product type, such as "reference works," a source of confusion. Help screens and FAQ pages, with keyword searchability, are for all Wiley products, and finally result in the offer of a phone number: 800 825 7550 (option 4) (USA Toll Free). Online customer support offers a large FAQ list, and tabs for Search for Answers, Ask a Question, and Live Chat, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. I did not try Live Chat, but the FAQs were mostly pertaining to the journal content of the Wiley InterScience titles and did not directly address my questions about the search interface in *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences*. We sent two requests for usage statistics, but Wiley was not able to provide any usage statistics for the time period of their new ownership, December 3, 2004, to date.

The database description at "Reference Work Home" needs updating. It suggests a citation format that includes the previous web address, <http://www.els.net/>.

COST 2

The offer for the Community College League of California is a site license for unlimited simultaneous users at a cost that is 43% to 63% above the cost of similar specialized or general online encyclopedias, i.e. *Grove Art Online* and *Britannica Online*. Since the content is largely for graduate students, not community college students, the cost is too high.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 4

Service was accessible quickly both from campus computers and from remote site DSL workstations. It was available at every attempt to use with good interactivity speed and a quick response time. There are no simultaneous user restrictions (Unlimited User subscription via CCL) and remote access is available using both IP and User Name/Password authentication, which means that any of the California Community Colleges would be able to take advantage of this accessibility.