

**CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW**  
**Elsevier ScienceDirect Health & Life Sciences Journals (College Edition)**  
**October 2011**

*ScienceDirect Health & Life Sciences Journals* is published by Elsevier, one of the world's largest providers of scientific, technical and medical information. Elsevier's ScienceDirect is a modular package: it offers colleges the possibility to subscribe to one or more of the three subject collections. There is also the option to choose online access to journals, pre-1995 journals content and/or books. Content areas include:

- Health & Life Sciences
- Social & Behavioral Sciences
- Physical Sciences

This review refers specifically to the Health & Life Sciences collection.

**OVERALL RECOMMENDATION for COMMUNITY COLLEGES: 3, 3, 3**

- #1 --- Not recommended
- #2 --- Recommended with reservations as noted
- #3 --- Recommended
- #4 --- Outstanding offer

This collection offers community colleges affordable access to high quality, full-text peer-reviewed research journals in the health and life sciences disciplines at a price and subscription model that is amenable to community college library budgets. Community colleges requiring in-depth coverage of science titles for transfer-level academic coursework are unlikely to find a comparable package elsewhere, so if providing this specific journal content is important to an institution, a subscription to this database may be a cost-effective way to obtain this content.

The database may not, however, meet the needs of community college students who may be inexperienced database searchers. Several idiosyncrasies associated with the interface covered below may frustrate even the most experienced searcher and present instruction and reference problems for library staff. Because the emphasis of this collection is on scholarly, peer-reviewed literature, this collection may not be suitable for vocational studies programs requiring more practical or applied literature.

**RATINGS FOR SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE DATABASE:**

The following features were examined and rated on a four point scale (1=Poor; 2= Needs Improvement; 3=Good; 4=Excellent):

## **DATABASE CONTENT/FORMAT 3.5, 4, 4**

*Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.*

*ScienceDirect Health & Life Sciences Journals/College Edition* offers searchers online access to approximately 900 full-text research journals published by Elsevier. (Title counts are based on vendor-supplied title lists and because numbers vary over time, reviewers recommend that subscribing libraries confirm title coverage with the vendor prior to subscribing.) Although the collection is most useful for upper-division studies and research, it is appropriate for some advanced transfer-level academic coursework taught at the community college level. The database comprises a comprehensive range of subjects in scholarly, peer-reviewed titles in subjects such as medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, midwifery, dentistry, veterinary medicine, biology, environmental science, agricultural science, horticulture, and other life science subjects.

Additional subject coverage is provided for in areas such as geographic information systems and engineering. Examples of titles include *The Lancet*, *Nursing Outlook*, *Plant Science*, *Water Research*, and *Ocean Engineering*. For a full title list see <http://www.info.sciverse.com/techsupport/journals/colhealthlife.htm>.

Coverage dates from 1995 to the current year. (Elsevier offers a pre-1995 back-file of the same and discontinued titles as a separate subscription. The title list also includes titles that appear in the pre-1995 back-file.) Unlike other Elsevier online journal collection subscriptions that are based on a perpetual access purchase model, this collection is available on subscription model that is familiar to and desired by community college libraries. The ScienceDirect College Edition is an access only model (no archival rights after cancellation of subscription) and is based on a calendar year subscription.

A subscription to the Health and Life Sciences collection in ScienceDirect includes access to the publisher's entire citation and abstract database of journals and books, including those included in the other content collections you may not subscribe to. Having access to the vendor's other collections poses challenges to researchers and students that are noted below.

## **SEARCH INTERFACE 2, 2, 2**

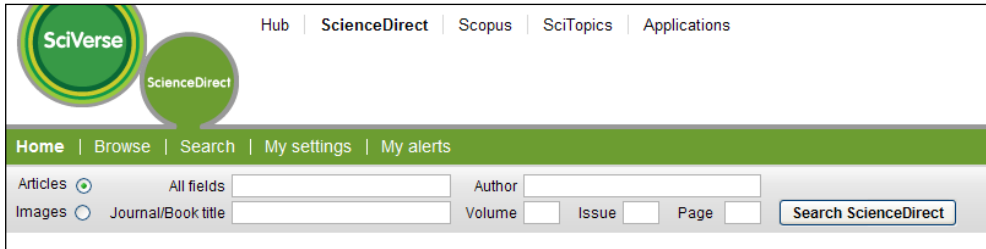
*Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?*

Searching is divided into familiar modes (*Quick*, *Browse*, *Advanced*), but getting to desired results using any of these options may not be intuitive for either a novice or an experienced searcher.

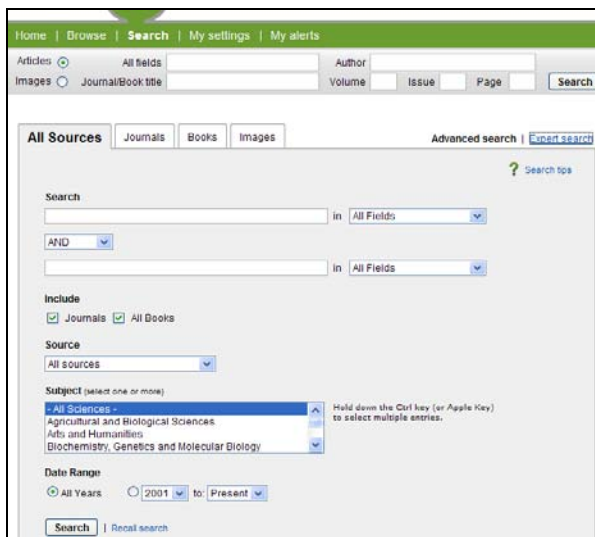
### **Quick Search**

The quick search form that appears at the top of the screen offers simple searching of commonly-used fields, including journal/article title, author, keyword, volume, and issue.

**Figure 1: Quick Search form**



This form is best used if a user already has a citation to a known item such as a journal article. Entering terms into the “All fields” box for topical keyword searching of the article, chapter, and abstract texts may be problematic: although phrase searching and Boolean operators apply, the inability to apply additional limiters may result in the retrieval of large and sometimes ill-defined results list. Furthermore, the Quick search form appears persistently at the top of the Advanced and Browse screens. This may be confusing to some users who choose to enter or select data in both the top (Quick) and bottom (Advanced or Browse) sections but end up with results that don’t reflect the entire search strategy.



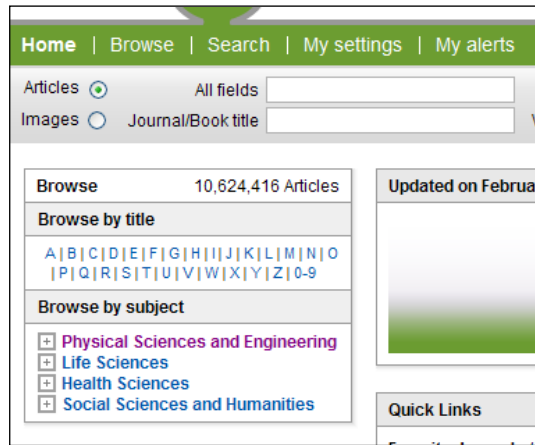
**Figure 2: Quick Search / Advanced Search Forms**

## Browse Search

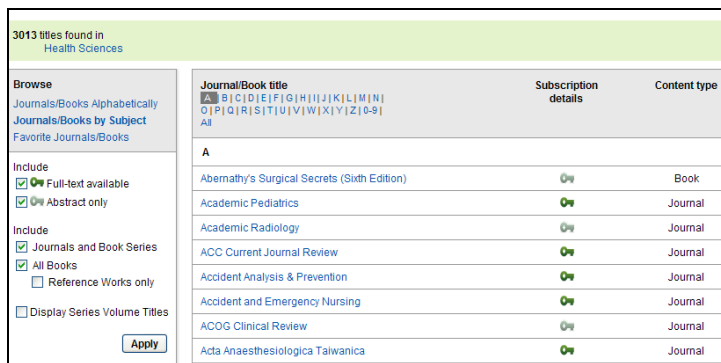
Browse searching allows users to browse content in a single broad discipline. Depending on which screen the user lands on, a browse search can be a multi-step process. “The “Browse” screen permits searchers to select one discipline at a time to search. From within that discipline

or sub-discipline a user can view a list of journals and book titles in that subject and limit displayed titles (to full-text content).

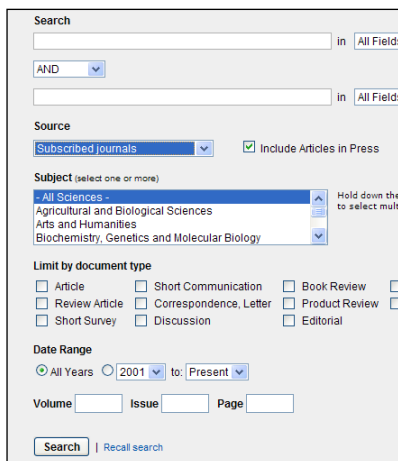
**Figure 3 – Subject Browse Search**



**Figure 4: Journal/Book Title Browse:** Browse journal / book titles in the singular discipline selected, limit to full-text, or choose more subjects



One inconvenience posed by the database is that there is no way to search one collection exclusively if a library subscribes to multiple College Edition collections. It is possible, however, to restrict searches to specified subjects or disciplines. This database would benefit from a set of clear instructions on how to limit to full-text content since users are unlikely to find this out on their own or without a librarian's assistance.



**Advanced search provides** seemingly clear and typical choices to narrow or define a search.

But limiting to full- text content from the advanced search screen is not as straightforward as this reviewer would like it to be. To limit searching to full- text, a user must first make the selection “**Subscribed journals**” under the **Source** menu then use the **Date Range** limiter to specify a date range *after 1995*. If a user fails to specify that date range the retrieval set may include content (citations and/or abstracts) from the pre-1995 collection of journals and reference books that is not included in the institution’s subscription.

## Results

Results list display citations in a format that is straightforward on first appearances.



Below each citation are links to the following article views: an article preview; PDF (if available); related articles; and related reference work articles. Article previews give an overview or summary of the article to help the user determine its relevance to their search. Some of the icons can be misleading or unclear. For example, if a user clicks the “PDF” link to articles that may not be part of the institution’s subscription, the user gets a login screen that prompts that user to enter a username/password to access which can be confusing to the user. Another misleading feature is the link to *Related reference works*. Related reference material will only lead to that additional content if the subscribing institution had purchased this content in addition to the set of journals comprising the *College Edition*. A preferred display option might be to mask or hide links to PDF content and/or related reference material or to clearly indicate what the additional material is available as a purchase option for that user.

A small green or grayed-out box next to the article title indicates full-text availability. (A key located approximately one-third of the way down from the top of the screen provides this information, but this may be easily overlooked on a busy screen). Researchers will welcome that citations to articles are hyperlinked to facilitate their retrieval. If a user does wish to purchase access to an article that is not included in an institution’s plan, that article can be purchased for a fee ranging from \$14-30. Emailing results sends a link back to the database, but those links do not include the subscribing library’s proxy mask for easy remote access reconnections.

## **USER SUPPORT SERVICES 2, 2, 2**

*What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?*

The “Help” and “Search Tips” include descriptions of content and explanations on how to navigate and search the database. There are tutorials on performing an advanced search and using alerts and a user will find explanations on how to use the “Search within results” feature. It is useful that “Help” and “Search Tips” are provided in several different languages.

In the opinion of the reviewers, however, the “Help” feature could be more intuitive. For example, it is only after some searching one can find that proximity search is supported. The “Search tips” link in advanced search contains instructions on how to conduct field searches and searching for images but there is no mention of search techniques like truncation.

Assistance from technical support via email or telephone is an option, but it can take several days or weeks to get a response (or follow-up to an existing request). Sales representatives, who handle order placement and other account management activities, may also be difficult to reach, in a timely manner which can lead to access delays.

For institutional or site administrators, ScienceDirect provides COUNTER-compliant usage reports through an Admin Tool. Usage statistics contain data for the current year and for the complete previous year and they can be generated for individual journals or an entire account. Usage statistics do not track separate usage for each collection if a library subscribes to multiple collections.

Reports can be downloaded to Excel, as a text file, or exported in several formats. Usage reports can reflect access to a variety of content type accessed including pay-per-view articles (articles acquired through transactional access); journal abstract views (for non-subscribed content only); access to reference works; and access to series books or handbooks. Usage statistics are also available for backfiles if a subscribing institution has purchased a backfile package.

## **COST 3, 4, 4**

*If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?*

*ScienceDirect Health & Life Sciences Journals/College Edition* is reasonably-priced for community colleges that need current, in-depth, full-text coverage of peer-reviewed research journals in the health and life sciences disciplines. While other publishers may offer comparable full-text journal collections in these disciplines, few offer these collections on subscription model that is preferred by many community college libraries.

## **AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE: 4, 3.5, 3**

*Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?*

ScienceDirect provides interactive (Flash) Tutorials which are available in a text version and available to users without Javascript. Other accessibility features of this database include:

- Alt-text for images
- Minimal use of frames
- Use of resizable fonts
- Ability to use keyboard-only commands
- Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to separate content from presentation.

For other features, see the vendor's Accessibility statement at

[http://www.info.sciverse.com/sciencedirect/using/access\\_article\\_display/accessibility](http://www.info.sciverse.com/sciencedirect/using/access_article_display/accessibility)

For remote access, ScienceDirect does support third party portals, such as EZproxy, Serial Solutions, Ebsco, Athens and Shibboleth. ScienceDirect also offers remote username/passwords (called Bulk IDs) that are available by request of the Admin and/or the account manager.

ScienceDirect supports the OpenURL industry standard, which can be used to create custom links between content items. Because articles have the Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) standard, links to content are persistent.

#### **OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT:**

Bengtson, Jason. "ScienceDirect Through SciVerse: A New Way To Approach Elsevier." *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* 30.1 (2011): 42-49.

Brimholm, T.L. "Science Direct." *Choice Reviews Online* September 2006, ALA/ACRKL.

Brynko, Barbara. "Elsevier: Accelerating Search and Discovery for Science." *Information Today* 27.9 (2010): 1, 49.

Gore, Rochelle. "ScienceDirect College Edition Brings Digital Full-Text Technical Literature to the Desktop." *Community College Week* 18.16 (2006): 10-21.

#### **SIMILAR PRODUCTS:**

- JSTOR Life Sciences Collection
- EBSCOhost HealthSource Academic