

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of Criminal Justice Periodicals Index
November, 2001**

Selected members of the California Community College Libraries, Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of the Criminal Justice Periodicals Index.

Offered on the Web via ProQuest, the Criminal Justice Periodicals Index offers information on criminal justice and related topics, including corrections administration, law enforcement, social work, industrial security, drug rehabilitation and criminal and family law. Its intended audience is students and professionals in any criminal justice field.

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated Criminal Justice Periodicals Index from ProQuest. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member(s) only and not transferred to others. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

Attributes of the information resource were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the "least value" and 4 representing the "most value". The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE

Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

SEARCH INTERFACE

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?

USER SUPPORT SERVICES

If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone help line available?

COST

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

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

- #1 --- No Support
- #2 --- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon enhancements noted below in Comments Section.
- #3 --- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in Comments Section.
- #4 --- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries for their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review as well as comments taken from the individual Review Reply Forms.

INFORMATION DATABASE - (3,3)

This is a comprehensive periodical database of 190 journals in a broadly defined criminal justice field. Indexing dates from 1981 and is updated weekly. In addition, abstracts began in 1999. Currently there are approximately 40 of the most popular titles offered in full text with graphics.

Libraries with a correctional science and/or a law enforcement program will find this particularly useful but there is also excellent coverage for many of the hot contemporary topics always in demand at the community college.

The database provides indexing and abstracting only for 140 periodicals, and ASCII text, image and Text + Graphics coverage for about 50 additional titles. Indexing begins in 1981 for most titles, in 1994 for the ASCII text articles, in 1988 for full-image articles and in 1996 for Text + Graphics articles.

Titles in the database are appropriately specialized; they do not appear to include popular titles which might duplicate those already included in the more general databases in a library's collection. Titles range from newsletters and digests (Security Law Newsletter, Organized Crime Digest, Police Department Disciplinary Bulletin, etc.) to scholarly journals (American Journal of Criminal Law, Canadian Journal of

Criminology, Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, etc.). A fair number of special topics periodicals are also included (Employee Testing and the Law, Polygraph, Alternatives to Incarceration, Overcrowded Times, etc.).

As with most ProQuest databases, it is not possible from within the database to see the years of coverage for each individual periodical. Nor is it possible to determine which issues of a "full text" title are actually full text in the database. (The full text icon indicates only that some full text content is available for that journal.) One title which I checked turned out to have only six issues included in the database, and no full text available at all, despite its full text icon. According to ProQuest Tech Support, they have probably lost copyright permission on this title, and the icon is still there due to a known software glitch on which they are working. Two additional titles also seem to fall into this category.

To see the complete and more accurate list of titles, formats and dates of format availability, a user must leave the ProQuest database or open a second browser window, go to <http://tls.il.proquest.com/hp/Support/Titles>, click on "ProQuest Databases," select "Criminal Justice Periodicals Index" in the "Products" box, click the boxes next to "Title," "Format Availability" and "First/Latest Dates," then click "Get Information Now." It would be *much* more helpful if this list were accessible from within the ProQuest database so that searchers would know exactly what they're searching.

The dearth of full text will be the biggest problem for libraries needing a database on these topics. Since today's student wants full text, full text and more full text, it's unfortunate that only about 26% of the titles are included full-text (and even then not all issues of some titles), especially since the titles are so specialized that community college libraries will not have most of them in their collections in print format. In many of the searches I did, most results were not available full text AND over half of the results were articles of one page or less (sometimes only four or five sentences), merely brief news items or announcements in many cases.

None the less, since there aren't a lot of online databases available for these disciplines, the indexing, combined with a good deal of ILL or document delivery, might be of value to some colleges with active criminal justice programs. And there are some solid, scholarly articles in the database as well, depending on topics searched.

SEARCH INTERFACE - (4,2)

The interface works very well. The instructions are clear and straightforward. The novice user should have few problems using this database and should find it easy to navigate among the categories. The Training Resource Center is particularly useful for students who are more in need of help formulating searches and finding articles but all students could pick up helpful hints for more successful research results.

Although this is a third party database, the ProQuest search interface allows users to search it either alone or along with ProQuest's own proprietary databases, a handy feature since some topics in this area are

cross-disciplinary and others warrant a narrower focus.

The ProQuest interface offers five search modes: Basic, Advanced (Boolean with field codes, with sample searches right on the search page), Guided (i.e. menu driven), Natural Language and search by Publication. For some reason, Natural Language searching does not always find the articles for topics on which a Basic or Guided search found *numerous* articles. For example, a Guided search for "criminal investigation" AND DNA in the subject field pulls 40 articles, but a Natural Language search for "How is DNA being used today in criminal investigation?" (and every variation that I tried) got no hits at all.

As with other ProQuest databases, the biggest drawback of the search interface is its dependence on keyword searching. This results in way too many false hits (an article which mentions a search word once appears near the top of the search results list.) Apparently, the only place a "sort by relevance" option which might compensate for this problem is available is in the Natural Language search mode. This option should be available in all search modes.

The addition of a subject authority or "Browse Topics" search would hugely improve the usefulness of this database (and all other ProQuest databases) to community college students who often begin with very broad topics ("criminal investigation," "violence," etc.) and who don't have ideas about how to narrow those topics. (Yes, they can add additional words to their searches, but they very often don't know which words to add. A subject authority search which displays subtopics would help them focus their search.)

Mercifully, articles are assigned broad subject headings (not LCSH) which are hot-linked (for most articles) so that at least if a user finds an article which is exactly what s/he is looking for, s/he can jump quickly to similar articles. Some articles are also assigned codes indicating business categories, article types and geographic areas, but these do not appear to be searchable in CJPI.

A useful ProQuest option: If libraries who currently license other ProQuest databases would like to send their users directly to CJPI, rather than make them go to the ProQuest "Collections" menu and select the database, they can use ProQuest's Local Administrator Module to generate a custom URL which links directly to the Criminal Justice Periodicals Index.

If your college uses iMac computers, be forewarned that there are some usually minor but really annoying problems using the recently released ProQuest interface on iMac computers with Netscape 4.7. (I didn't get a chance to try it on our other Macintosh models.) They include some shimmying and shaking when making selections from the Collections and the Help menus, inoperable up and down arrow keys in some of the pop-up windows, text that disappears from pop-up Help windows and so forth. The problems do not seem to occur on Windows computers or on iMacs running Internet Explorer 5.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES - (3,4)

If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone helpline available? Rationale for rating:

The online help is easy to understand and follow . The section containing the in-depth lessons are clear with very good directions and features.

ProQuest's online user support has greatly improved over the years. Online help is now extensive (sometimes even a bit overwhelming). It can be accessed via a table of contents, an index or via a keyword search. A separate "Search Guide" is available, with non-context related tips and examples of search features such as truncation/wildcard, Boolean operators etc. (It's not clear why this information was not simply incorporated into the online Help.) In addition, ProQuest offers a series of "Quick Print Guides," one-page documents which users can print and keep at their sides while searching, and a Training Resource Center, complete with canned lessons on finding articles, building a focused search, and so forth. In addition, they offer a Technical Resource Center with information for ProQuest administrators.

Many community college students, always in a hurry, will never take the time to read the vast online Help, but for librarians and or those students who are diligent enough to do so, ProQuest has provided a rich set of self-instructional tools.

Contact information for customer support, tech support and search assistance is readily available in the online Help. Tech support is available seven days per week, but stops at 9:00 PM West Coast time. Search assistance unfortunately stops at 2:00 P.M. on the West Coast. The only phone call I made to ProQuest tech support was answered promptly.

COST (3,3)

The cost is well worth it for the broad subject matter. It is really a bargain for for those with Research Library.

The consortium price is *considerably* discounted. However, given the limited amount of full text, individual libraries will need to look carefully during the trial period at the cost effectiveness of the database for their own criminal justice programs.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE - (4,4)

This database connection was reliable all the time and always accessible.

I experienced no problems with access or connection other than network delays which affected our other databases as well. The use of multiple pop-up windows and the refreshing of the Collections menu page after *each* selection from it do slow down the search process though during periods when there is already heavy network congestion.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT - (3,3)

Very good quality containing the material often needed by the criminal justice student. It is easy to use with very good in-depth lessons, both for the students and the faculty, in the Training Resource Center. This product would be greatly improved with a larger percent of full text articles.

For community college libraries who have active administration of justice and criminal justice programs and who are willing to deal with both the frustration of students over the absence of full text and the volume of interlibrary loan requests which will be generated by a database which is only about 26% full text, this could be a useful database, particularly since there does not appear to be a wide selection of databases available in this field. I believe it should be given a trial for all the California community college libraries.

Rating for home campus only (4,2)

This really fills a gap for us, but it really would be more useful with a larger full text database.

Our Administration of Justice program does not currently appear to be looking heavily for the type of information in this database; however this could change as our aging faculty retire and new faculty begin to move into the program. At our college, we would probably want to wait a bit, hoping that this database would greatly increase the amount of full text it offers by the time that occurs. In addition, our students already complain about the number of false hits they get with ProQuest. The addition of a subject authority search or at least the extension of the "sort by relevance" option to all the search modes would also go a long way towards increasing the desirability of this database for us.

Last Updated: February 25, 2002