

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of Ebsco Academic Search Elite
March, 2002**

In March 2002, selected members of the California Community College Libraries, Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of EBSCO Host's Academic Search Elite.

EBSCO Host's Academic Search Elite provides full text for nearly 1,560 academic, social sciences, humanities, general science, education and multi-cultural journals. In addition to the full text, this database offers indexing and abstracts for nearly 2,750 journals. Nearly 1,800 journals are peer reviewed. Full text backfiles go as far back as January of 1990, while indexing and abstract backfiles go as far back as January of 1984.

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and of EBSCO Host's Academic Search Elite. 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)

Academic Search Elite has around 1,560 full text journals and abstract and indexing for a total of 2,750 journals. The backfile goes back to 1984 with full text available from 1990. Academic Search Elite has a good mix of periodicals from scholarly peer reviewed journals to popular magazines and newspapers. For two topics on "terrorism and racial profiling" and "campaign finance reform" the results retrieved more than enough full text articles from journals, not including newspaper abstracts, to write a well researched paper. Around 70% of the results were full-text. Most of the articles that were not full-text came from newspapers. Newspaper abstracts made up around 20% of the results with popular magazines providing 30% of the articles. Both reviewers found the content from major newspapers the least useful since it is abstracts only.

Other searches on "global warming" and prosecuting teenagers as adults retrieved both scholarly peer reviewed journals and magazines and provided enough full text articles from journals and magazines to complete a research paper. Nearly 80% of the results were full text. Results that were not full text again came from newspapers.

In addition to full text format, many current articles are available in PDF and XML. This is a valuable addition to the database. The PDF version allows the user to view a reproduction of how the article appears in the journal. This includes pictures, graphs, and charts that are not available in the full text format.

An image collection is available that can be searched by word in the title or caption of an image

SEARCH INTERFACE - (3, 3)

Both reviewers found the search interface for EBSCO simple and intuitive to use. Databases users would not feel intimidated by the interface. The "All Words" search retrieved better results than the default "Standard Search". The "standard search" is a type of phrase search, whereas, the "all words" search is a Boolean AND search. One can also choose an "Any Words" search (Boolean OR) or an exact phrase search.

One reviewer using the "All Words" option searched on the keywords "terrorism racial profiling". By default this searches only citations and abstracts. This search returned a result list of 14. The same search was done again using the option

to search the full text and received 179 results. The results from the first search while being far fewer were more on target than the second search.

Another search using the "ALL WORDS" option for "global warming fishing" returned a list of 14 citations. Each abstract includes hyperlinked subject heading. The first article included subject headings on "coral reef ecology" and "coral reef conservation".

In the basic search window you have the option of using the Standard Search, or Match All Words, or Match Any Words, or Match Exact Phrase. Using the Standard Search you can use an AND, OR and NOT. The default in the Standard Search without using any Boolean operators is a type of phrase search. A "standard search" using the same terms "terrorism racial profiling" and received the dreaded message "no results were found".

A second search was done using "terrorism and racial profiling" and retrieved 13 results. A third 'Standard Search" using the terms "juveniles get tough policy" received the "no results were found" message. Redoing the "Standard Search" and adding the Boolean operator AND to the search retrieved six citations. Only two of the results were full text unfortunately.

Additional searches were completed using a "standard" and an "All Words" search on the topic "Campaign Finance Reform". The results were remarkably similar for both searches. The "All Words" search retrieved a few more articles. Overall, EBSCO does not have the option of doing a subject search. The only way to search by subject is to bring up an article and then click on one of the hyper-linked subject headings, in doing so, bring up a result list of all the articles with that subject heading. It is a clunky way of doing a subject search.

One reviewer noted that about 50% of their full text article results were also available in Adobe® Portable Document Format (PDF) or XML-formatted.

A search of the Image collection for photographs related to "Global Warming" retrieved one image, showing icebergs breaking free due to global warming.

At the top of the search interface are options that include New Search, Subject Search, Publication Search, Searching the Image Collection, Choose another Database, On-line Help and Exiting Academic Search Elite.

Users can also limit their search results to full text articles, or scholarly (Peer Reviewed) journals, or by periodical title, or by publication date range. You can also expand your search from the beginning search interface page by searching within the full text of the articles.

Search results are displayed in descending date order. Academic Search Elite indicates the format that an article is available by visual icon and in print. The icons for full page image and full text need to be more distinctive. It was hard to tell the icons apart. Academic Search Elite uses the phrases "full page image", "full text" and "XML full text" next to each icon in the results list this feature was very useful in identifying the format for each article. A small camera icon is also used to indicate a graphic within an article.

The search interface is simple and from the beginning search screen a user can limit or expand their keywords very easily. One reviewer found the publication search located at the top portion of the search interface a very easy way to locate articles from a specific periodical. A user can search a periodical title by a few letters of a publication title or by a single word or an exact phrase match. The search results include the date range of the publication and if it is available full text. Each title is hyperlinked to a publication overview. The articles are arranged and viewed by page number.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES – (3, 3)

Help screens are available at every screen from the top navigational bar that includes an icon for online help. The Online Help section includes a link "Reaching Technical Support" a page on how to contact the technical support department. Listed on this page were email and phone numbers including hours of operation of EBSCO Technical Support.

The help information opens in another browser window. Novice users might find this disconcerting and might get lost getting back to the original window. One reviewer felt that it would be preferable if the help screens didn't open another browser window. Unfortunately, the help information is not context sensitive. The user must scroll through the help topics to find specific information. The help information was easy to understand and to follow.

The Help screens in Academic Search Elite are arranged so that a user can search them by keyword, use a directional index or locate help information by the table of contents.

Other technical services links connect to the Ebsco technical support webpage that provides additional troubleshooting tips and support.

COST – (3, 3)

Costs seem reasonable, especially compared to its competitors.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE – (4, 3)

I accessed the EbscoHost site several times over a period of three weeks. I found the response time very good and had no problems connecting. The email delivery feature was almost immediate for the one test email I sent.

Overall I experienced a good response time while using this database. I had no problems with the connection or access to the database.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT – (3, 3)

EBSCO Host is a solid all around database. The inclusion of subject searching would put it at the next level of usefulness.

It contains information useful across many disciplines in the community college curriculum, and it seems a good choice for libraries needing a general periodicals database.

Overall, EBSCO's content is comparable favorably to the products offered by Gale (InfoTrac) and Proquest (Research Library Complete).

Rating for home campus only – (3, 3)

I rate this product quite high and I think it would be of great value on my campus.

My campus subscribes to EBSCO Host. It was the most cost effective resource available.