

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of *Ethnic NewsWatch*, *Alt-PressWatch*, and *GenderWatch*
Spring, 2002**

In Spring 2002, selected members of the California Community College Libraries, Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" rereview of *Ethnic NewsWatch*, *Alt-PressWatch*, and *GenderWatch*.

Ethnic NewsWatch, *Alt-PressWatch*, and *GenderWatch* were originally Softline products and are now owned by ProQuest. *Ethnic NewsWatch* is a comprehensive full-text database covering newspapers, magazines and journals of the ethnic, minority and native press. It includes local, national and international news, culture and history in the areas of politics and political science, education, sociology, Spanish, journalism, arts and media, environment, ethnic and cultural studies. *Alt-PressWatch* is a full-text database comprised of the newspapers, magazines and journals of the alternative and independent press in the subject areas of general reference, government, history and politics, humanities and social sciences. *GenderWatch* is a full-text database comprised of periodicals and other publications that focus on how gender impacts a broad spectrum of subject areas. It supports programs in business, education, literature and the arts, health sciences, history, political science, public policy, sociology and contemporary culture, gender and women's studies. Publications include academic and scholarly journals, magazines, newspapers, regional publications, books, conference proceedings and government reports.

REVIEW PROCESS

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated *Ethnic NewsWatch*, *Alt-PressWatch* and *GenderWatch*. 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 or 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: 4, 4, 4, 3

The best part of all three databases is the information. The three databases cover information that is typically missed by the larger aggregators. These databases fill in the gap left by other mainstream databases. All three databases are full-text with good backfiles.

Ethnic NewsWatch has a wealth of information from small circulation ethnic studies journals, newsletters, and regional magazines. In addition to English language content, *Ethnic NewsWatch* has a wealth of Spanish language material. *GenderWatch* includes scholarly journals, conference proceedings, newspapers, and pamphlets. Much of the information included is geared towards the upper-division or graduate student. The information may be at a higher level than many community college students; however, if any students were doing in-depth research they would use these databases. If you want access to detailed information from non-mainstream and scholarly sources, *Ethnic NewsWatch* and *GenderWatch* are for you. *Alt-Press* covers the independent press newsweeklies available in most US cities. Once again the content is often not found in other products. This information gives students unique perspectives of local and national issues.

Ethnic NewsWatch contains full-text content from small circulation ethnic newspapers, magazines and newsletters,

including materials in Spanish. Besides the obvious Black, Hispanic and Asian categories, the user may access information on many European-American ethnicities (e.g., Italian- American, Irish-American). In the post-September 11th era, material on Americans of Muslim, Arab and South Asian origin has assumed greater importance. This, too, may be researched in ENW. *GenderWatch* contains an interesting mix of content from specialized newsletters and journals. Anthropological, political and social aspects of gender issues are well represented, although the file appears a bit lacking in psychological perspectives. The products of men's studies as well as women's studies programs are plentiful (for example, research on child support/custody issues from both sides).

Alt-PressWatch consists of text from alternative (usually weekly) publications around the United States. These are the free papers one usually finds in bookstores, coffeehouses and other places where left-leaning people congregate. Many well-known and obscure sources are represented. (One of the former that is conspicuous by its absence is the LA Weekly.) APW also contains material from feminist and environmental journals, although there is little overlap with *GenderWatch*. There are no right-leaning publications that this reviewer could find (try "gun control", for example).

Over all these three databases seek to collect in one place material with content and perspectives that are perceived to be under-represented in the mainstream press. College students are particularly interested in these sources. The search **globalization and human rights** has a significantly higher return of fulltext articles (297) than the same search for fulltext articles in EBSCOhost Masterfile Premier (41). *Ethnic NewsWatch* contains fulltext articles culled from local, national and international news sources. Although topical coverage predominates issues related to culture and history with respect to ethnic concerns are well represented.

These databases primarily include social topics as covered in ethnic and local press arenas in the areas covered: ethnic, feminist/gender issues and general alternative press.

Alternative-Press Watch currently consists of 130 titles, mostly from the United States, although there are a few titles from Canada, Australia and Israel. Coverage is mostly current with 15 titles available prior to 1995. *Ethnic NewsWatch* (ENW) is a comprehensive full text database of the newspapers, magazines and journals of the ethnic, minority and native press. According to ProQuest, *Ethnic NewsWatch* is now a collection of nearly 700,000 full-text articles from 200 publications. An average of 7,500 new articles is added each month. The title list shows it includes 253 titles, 15 published outside the U.S. (in the U.K. and Canada). The earliest publication is 1967 with 18 titles available prior to 1990, however my searches of the database did not retrieve any articles prior to 1991. Sixty- four have ceased publication and 22 are available in Spanish. *Gender Watch* consists of 203 titles, approximately 90 of which have ceased publication. The earliest publication is 1970, with 44 titles having articles prior to 1990. The majority is in English. Twenty- seven titles are published outside of the U.S.

Search Interface: 2, 3, 3, 3

For my first search I did a keyword search on "black feminism" in *GenderWatch* and retrieved a good result set. Most of the retrieved articles were on topic from scholarly journals. On the summary of search results page I found the icons along the top of the page less than useful. Most of the icons had no text or rollovers explaining their function. Additionally, the email button is nowhere close to the print/export button. The print/export button is in the left-hand side navigation column, whereas, the email button appears at the top of the results page.

My second search I did a keyword search on "Armenian genocide" in *Ethnic NewsWatch* and retrieved a poor result set.

Most of the articles retrieved were not directly related to the issue of the Armenian Genocide. The default setting is relevancy ranking. I found under sorting the option to rank results by date. I found this ranking more useful. However, when I tried the same search with the keyword of "genocide" and "Armenian" in the ethnic group field, I retrieved zero results.

For my third search I chose the terms "terrorism racial profiling" in *Alt-Press Watch*. Those terms brought back zero results. I altered the search string to "terrorism and racial profiling" and received an adequate result set. About half of the results were from a single periodical "The People's Weekly".

The search interface and subject indexing are the weakest elements in these databases. The basic search screen is too complicated for novice users. It is confusing to have the "more search criteria" feature below the "words in article" search box. It would be clearer if it stated that the "more search criteria" searches were optional. Also at times there are navigation icons on the left-hand side and long the top of the screen. The icons on the left-hand side are labeled, whereas, the icons along the top have no descriptors. It's confusing to have basic navigation icons located in two different parts of the screen. The subject indexing is very basic and rudimentary, i.e., anthropology (man).

Ethnic NewsWatch--For this reviewer, the question must always be asked of any database service: can a novice user enter a simple search phrase and get meaningful results? Boolean searching may be the "holy grail" of librarians, but it will never be extensively used by the general public. By this criterion, ENW serves the user fairly well. "Slavery reparations" retrieved 59 articles, nearly all on point. This subject is of relatively recent vintage, however, and one might therefore expect a "tight" result set. To test the database on a broader subject with a wider time span, I entered "Los Angeles riots". This yielded 493 hits, in descending order by relevance. (The user may choose reverse order by date if desired.) There were many articles on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc. anniversaries of the riots, but not the 10th anniversary just passed. This may indicate somewhat slow updating. By restricting the search to title words, only seven articles were found. So--a full-text search gets too much and a title search gets too little. ENW makes no provision for a headline-lead paragraph search. This method is used in many newspaper databases to retrieve substantive articles in lieu of precise subject indexing. It works because of standard journalistic style: who, what, when, where and how in the first 'graph. Adding an "hlead" feature would greatly improve ENW. *GenderWatch/AltPressWatch*--the above observations apply equally to GW and APW, as they use the same basic interface. All three allow (in advanced search) the ability to choose "journals" as a limiter. The student may think that she is limiting her research to peer-reviewed material, but such is not the case. All three services index specialized newsletters whose articles are undocumented (i.e., contain no works cited list). Guidance from librarians and instructors will be needed here.

Students regularly confuse "subject" searching with the concept of keyword searching and it is refreshing to have the subjects fully available in a thesaurus. This makes it much less likely for the searcher who does not know the correct subject to be frustrated with a less than adequate return of material for the search (a perpetual handicap in most catalogs and databases.) Unfortunately the HELP screen has not been updated to the reality of the searching results in effect today. The HELP screen informs us that the "the system does an automatic OR search within fields and an automatic AND search between fields." In fact the default appears to be to automatic phrasing and there is no hint evident on the main search page.

charter schools returns 992 (with or without quotes, the result is the same)

schools charter returns 34

schools AND charter returns 2045

schools OR charter returns 71999

All the Softline interfaces have a pleasing and clean-cut appearance and are for the most part consistent throughout the three databases. On the left is a column of buttons for search, sort, moving through the "hits", print/export/ pick for search, help, home and exit. The central section of the screen gives the search text boxes and has tabs for both a basic and an advanced search. Both *Alt-Press* and *Gender Watch* use the same interface in both basic and advanced search screens. It has been somewhat adapted for *Ethnic NewsWatch* with the addition of check boxes for date periods (1990- 1995, 1996-1997, or 1998+) and the addition of the ethnic group search in the basic search and the substitution of ethnic group and language for type of publication in the advanced search.

One difficulty I found with the interface is the small size and lack of prominence of the search button. This is a particular problem because the interface will not accept an enter/return to begin a search. I found myself clicking the tutorial button to submit a search because of its prominence and deeper color. The various search options appear to allow the user to enter their own term or choose from a list in the drop down. The links from the search criteria retrieve an appropriate list; likewise links from the drop down boxes retrieve a list of topics relating to the search criteria. It is not clear to me what criteria is used to develop the lists that appear in the drop downs and in the case of *Alt-Press Watch* the list is rather limited. My overall impression is that these interfaces give too many options and require that the student to be rather sophisticated to use them effectively.

Some of the effort ProQuest has made to enhance their primary interface (mouse over explanations for example) needs to be applied to the Softline interface.

User Support Services: 3, 3, 2, 4

A phone number and address for customer support was easy to locate. There is online help available however it is difficult to navigate. To find help about the sort feature one must click on the question mark next to the search, subject, publication, or ethnic group text box. After help pops-up, one must scroll to the top and select "sort" from the list. This is not intuitive. Once again the design layout of the page is the weakest aspect of the database.

Since these products were purchased by ProQuest, user support services have become more "corporatized". This is to be expected when a large company swallows up a small one. I have found the technical staff to be helpful and courteous. The online help search screens are of average quality. Already, ENW/GW/APW search screens are beginning to resemble ProQuest's. I hope that the Softline search interface is retained, but I fear it will be subsumed into ProQuest's less than user-friendly model.

Outdated directions are not acceptable. Librarians encourage students to click on HELP and read the material so that they will be prepared to search with confidence.

The technical support supplied by ProQuest quite good. Well-trained, knowledgeable technicians are able to assist in a timely manner. *Ethnic NewsWatch* includes a tutorial as well as context sensitive "help". The tutorial is excellent at guiding the user through the interface and moves at a usable pace on a modem, although it may move too swiftly with a faster connection. A better method, allowing the user to time the pace would be helpful. The "recorder" metaphor using a pause button did not work well for me. GW and APW would benefit from a similar tutorial.

Cost: 2, 2, 3, 2

Ethnic NewsWatch is a bit pricey for access to three simultaneous users. The price would be much more attractive for schools and easier to justify the cost if it were for unlimited users. With three simultaneous users, we could not use this database with students in a hands-on workshop.

A unique resource that is well within the reach of most colleges. The limitation to 3 users is not helpful for teaching in the library classroom but is certainly acceptable in the overall provision of a resource to a campus. (Additional access may be requested from the vendor for classroom instructional use.)

I am not aware of any comparable products. The cost seems somewhat high when considering some of the less elegant issues of the database's interface and the relatively small number of publication titles included.

Accessibility Of Service: 3, 4, 4, 4

The database ran quickly and reliably on my PC using both Netscape and Internet Explorer.

There are no comparable products to these three, therefore comparisons are difficult. Unlimited access licenses would be greatly preferable to the 3-user limitation now in force.

The products work well in a T1 line environment with either Internet Explorer or Netscape.

These products were available at every attempt to access them. The speed is acceptable both on a fast network connection and with a modem. They may be accessed remotely using a variety of remote patron authentication methods.

Overall: 3, 3, 4, 3

The strength of these databases is their information with the design layout and searching capabilities acting as their albatross. Many colleges will find it necessary to have access to these databases due to curriculum demands regardless of their technical failings. ***** The unique, multicultural content of this suite is well-suited to the California community college environment despite search engine shortcomings.

Because this is the only game in town, it should be considered for purchase by those community college libraries that need access to alternative and minority press materials.

Campus: 3, 4, 4, 3

We subscribe to *Ethic NewsWatch* because of its unique information, not for the search interface or subject indexing.

At our community college, we consider ENW, especially, to be of great utility and importance.

This product is very appropriate for our very diverse student population and has been used in our library research classes. Students enjoy the "different perspective". They have used the tutorial and found it pleasing and helpful, especially the dynamic aspect.

The relative cost per added title has discouraged us from purchasing this.