

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review of  
EBSCO'S *MASTERFILE PREMIER*  
September, 2002**

In April 2002, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians—Electronic Access and Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a ‘hands-on’ study of EBSCO’s *MasterFILE Premier*, a general subject research database that covers a broad range of topics including general interest, health and multi-cultural issues. This database provides abstracts and indexing for over 2,800 titles from 1984 to the present and full-text of over 1,899 titles from 1990 to the present, with some backfiles extending to 1975. It also provides PDF coverage for 1,100 journals; primary source documents from *Essential Documents in American History*; 5,000 *Magill’s Book Reviews*; and full-text for more than 100 reference books, including travel guides, *Complete Idiot’s Guides*, the *World Almanac*, *CIA World Fact Book* and the *Columbia Encyclopedia*.

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with *other* qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated *MasterFILE Premier*. Assessments were submitted on a Review Reply Form specifically designed by the Committee for this purpose. 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: 3, 3

EBSCO has continued to enhance this database in recent years. The addition of PDF images, extension of the full-text backfiles, and the addition of full-text reference resources have added to the database's utility. PDF images of many articles are now provided, but when PDF is not available, charts and graphs are still provided in ASCII text format. Another enhancement is the Images Collection, which contains more than 91,000 images from archives and news agencies.

The embargo period (the time period during which full-text is not loaded due to contract restrictions) for specific titles is listed on the title list. Embargo periods range from 0.1 to 12 months, and affect about 11% of the titles.

In comparing *MasterFILE Premier* with *Academic Search Elite*, I found that both products contain peer-reviewed titles, but *Academic Search Elite* contained more peer-reviewed titles. However, *MasterFILE Premier* had more titles in the areas of business (management, accounting, and marketing) and career and vocational areas (health, fire technology, hospitality, food service, farming and forest products.) Community college libraries therefore need to decide if they need a product weighted more towards peer-reviewed titles or more heavily balanced to include career and vocational information.

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I was at first confused when trying to differentiate between full text and full text image (PDF) icons but differences were clear once I experimented by clicking on each image. In searches I conducted (for example, Physical Therapy Assistant since this career is popular on our campus), I found that results from *Elite & MasterFILE* were almost identical.

I also did find the Images Collection option useful, but results varied widely depending upon subject.

### SEARCH INTERFACE: 3, 4

The search interface is clean and uncluttered, and intuitive to use. There are a number of search options. The Basic Search is simple and offers both limiters and expanders. This option allows the user to choose between "Standard Search," "Any Words," "All Words" or "Exact Phrase." The old Guided Search has been replaced by "Advanced Search," and allows for searches using field codes. Users can also search for subjects, but I found this to be the least useful of all the

options. There are not a lot of cross-references, and it was very difficult to use for some subjects. The Publication Search option has been improved in that a user can now browse by issue.

A definite plus to this database is the ability to limit a search to peer-reviewed publications. Our students and information competency instructors find this to be a valuable feature of this interface.

The Results List is clear and easy to use. Pop-up descriptors appear to explain the display options, and a user can choose display settings by selecting the Preferences link at the top of the page. The Results List can also be configured to show local holdings information.

Print options have been improved since we first starting using the database. Users can print, email or save articles. It is also possible to print multiple articles from the retrieval list at one time by adding them to your folder; and the software will estimate the number of pages to be printed.

Perhaps author searching could be improved. In order to find articles written *by* an individual, a user must use the Advanced Search with the field code for author (AU) AND be sure to invert the name (last name first). I guess our students are used to being pampered by our ILS and don't have to think about last name or first name order.

	SUBJECT	BASIC SEARCH ALL HITS	BASIC SEARCH FULLTEXT HITS	ADVANCED SEARCH (SUBJECT) HITS	SUBJECT SEARCH PERIODICAL HITS
1	Campaign finance reform	1718	1168	5	3898
2	Terrorism and racial profiling	32	29	13	96
3	Global warming	4707	2647	2696	2126
4	Windows XP	758	645	554	46
5	Great Depression	851	498	119	71
6	Kids in prison/ Trying teenagers as adults	33	7	0	0
7	Novel <i>Sula</i> by Toni Morrison	23	16	16	12
8	Black holes	826	389	575	456
9	Dropout rates for minority students	10	7	10	496
10	George Bush and the Kyoto Treaty	19	15	0	0

#### Search Comments:

1. Subject search difficult to use. Cross-reference from "Campaign finance" to "Campaign funds." Numerous subdivisions were cumbersome to page through. Not a separate heading or subheading for "Reform." Keyword would seem to be most useful approach here.
2. No subject heading that combines the two concepts. Must use Boolean search to connect subject "Racial Profiling" to terrorism.
3. Obviously too many hits. In this case, subdivisions listed in a subject search would be helpful to narrow it down.
4. Using subject search retrieves much narrower, more focused list of articles.

5. Difficult to find correct subject heading; no cross-reference from Great Depression or Depression. Proper heading is actually “Depressions—1929—U.S.” Subject heading will obviously retrieve the most focused set of results.
6. Basic search retrieved a lot of false hits. Subject search not helpful at all. Took a lot of trial and error to find the right words. Finally found 7 hits by searching “teens’ and “tried” and “adults”, but only 3 were on target. Search for “tried as adults” as a phrase within the full text retrieved 270 articles. Keyword is definitely the key here!
7. “Sula” keyword alone resulted in many false hits. “Sula and Morrison”/peer reviewed only resulted in 15 articles.
8. Wide variation in hits among different search modes. Subject headings not easy to use—a lot of “Black Hole & ...” at beginning of list.
9. Most appropriate subject headings are “Dropouts—United States” and “Minority Students—United States” but using these exclusively will miss some good articles that have titles like “Student perceptions of teacher ethnic bias: A comparison of Mexican American and non-Latino white dropouts and students.”
10. Found many more articles by expanding the search to within the full text. Oddly enough, when I searched for “George Bush and Kyoto Treaty” and asked it to search for related words, I only got 1 hit—not the original 19!

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I particularly liked option of moving among types of searches (Basic, Guided...) by using "Refine Search" button to explore results.

I agree that it's useful to see red colored ink estimate of # of pages to be printed.

I really liked the Guided Search option as a means of leading student through the process of effective searching. I found no difference in results when I put search phrase in quotations or left it as group of words.

### **USER SUPPORT SERVICES: 2, 3**

Onscreen help is plentiful and easy to find and use. My experience with email support was less successful. I had a problem on my campus with not having the right screens showing up. An email to eptechsupport received an immediate confirmation of receipt, with a phone number to use if I required immediate help. A follow-up email response was received two days later asking for more information. However, the problem was only resolved a month later, with what was evidently a very simple profile fix.

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I agree that online screens are helpful and easily accessible, but I also had quick response to my e-mail support query and even received phone call back...all this without my revealing that I was doing a review.

### **COST: 2, 3**

The cost of a database is obviously only one factor to consider when making a choice among the various aggregators. *MasterFILE Premier* is among the most expensive if you compare the straight dollar cost but seems to fall in the middle of the pack if you compare the cost per full-text title (\$5.67).

## **ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE: 4, 4**

I did not experience any difficulties connecting to this product. Response time was good from both the library and my home, and there were no instances of crashes or being kicked off involuntarily.

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I did all my reviewing remotely and had no problems EXCEPT when I tried to use the "back" button after I had clicked on web sources, got to a web site (NOTE: the actual URL of the recommended web site did not show when web page was displayed) and then wanted to go back to the EBSCO list.

## **OVERALL ASSESSMENT: 3, 4**

*MasterFILE Premier* provides a good mix of subject matter. It has one of the largest databases in terms of number of full-text titles. There is better coverage of career and vocational areas than in *Academic Search Elite*, but peer-reviewed titles are smaller in number. The search screens are flexible and provide many options. They are simple enough for most students to use without difficulty. Local holdings can be added to the system. Print functions have been improved and are quite adequate. *MasterFILE Premier* has fewer PDF images, but the number is increasing.

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I really found this to be a useful database. Several faculty members commented that the directions are clear, especially for new student users and that the search screens help those who wish to become more efficient.

## **UTILITY FOR HOME CAMPUS: 3, 3**

After looking at this product again in great detail, I still feel it meets the needs of my campus better than other products. It provides a good mix of subject matter that fits both transfer and vocational students well. It is easy for the students to use, and offers a variety of search options; we especially like the peer-reviewed feature. It also allows us to add our local holdings to the search results.

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Our campus subscribes to *Academic Search Elite* primarily because the Collection Development Librarian feels its primary strength is in peer-reviewed resources that are in demand by faculty.