

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of ProQuest's *Psychology Journals* database
January, 2002**

In January 2002 selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of ProQuest's *Psychology Journals* database.

ProQuest Psychology Journals covers subjects related to: psychology, psychiatry, psychopharmacology and closely related disciplines. The file contains 303 publications. All are peer-reviewed and nearly all are full-text. (This compares with 138 periodicals in the Psychology module of ProQuest's *General Reference Collection*.) Most articles can be printed or downloaded in Text+Graphics™ format and/or Adobe Acrobat PDF.

Selected members of the CCL-EAR Committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated Psychology Journals. 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".

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.

The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE 3, 4

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

ProQuest Psychology Journals (PQPJ) covers all the topics mentioned back to ca. 1980. As with most aggregate database products, full-text coverage begins mostly in the late 1980s. Prior material consists solely of citations and abstracts. PQPJ contains a great deal of information, but most of it is beyond the needs of lower-division students in psychology and related fields.

SEARCH INTERFACE 4, 3

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?

Psychology Journals uses a standard ProQuest search interface with five options: Basic, Advanced, Guided, Publication [titles] and Natural Language. All methods except Natural Language allow Boolean operators. User options include date range, full-text materials only, and/or peer-reviewed materials only. The student may limit search terms to Citations and Abstracts or may search Article Text. S/he may also limit searches to a particular subject module, such as Psychology Journals.

At my college, most students use the default Basic search method and search the entire database. They enter a word string and hit Enter. Fortunately, ProQuest interprets spaces as logical ANDs. Also fortunately, the default settings call for the most recent articles (1999-present) and searching through Citations and Abstracts. This assures that the novice user will likely retrieve recent, substantive stories.

If it were possible to alter these settings, I would initially restrict the output to full-text articles only. The purpose of ProQuest, after all, is to provide instant bibliographic gratification. Few of our students will copy paper or microfilm articles. Even fewer will use interlibrary loan. Our mantra is "full-text, full-text and more full-text".

Indexing: PQ PJ offers excellent alpha subject indexing of psych materials. However, many documents have no controlled thesauri subject terms at all. A search for "twins" as a subject returned 27 full-text articles, all substantively about identical and/or fraternal twins as test subjects. The same free-text search in "Citations and Abstracts" yielded 79 full-text hits, nearly all on point. Subject searching cannot be relied upon exclusively in this file. The distinction between an article that is primarily about a topic, and an article that includes a topic might not be significant to the student who is seeking information for an elusive / narrowly focused topic.

The search type is a pull down menu on the initial screen. Unfortunately to most users the difference between Basic and Advanced will not be clearly evident. The choices and limits are essentially exactly the same. What is different is the presence halfway down the page on Advanced Search of links to powerful tools such as the Thesaurus, help screens to introduce the function of Operators and truncation, Classification Tools, a listing of all stop words, and more. This information should be available from every search screen, not hidden halfway down a miss-named "Advanced" search screen. Again, to the casual eye there is no difference between the Basic and Advanced Search pages, especially if one has set the browser to a large or assistive font.

Basic search is essentially Advanced search without any visible guidance. You have to choose Help to find any information about how to refine a search. Advanced has excellent Help visible but hidden halfway down the page. Natural Language Search results provide the user with a visible ranking of relevance based on number of stars the article has. This is becoming common in the online world and 5 star articles in most sample searches were significant for the search.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES 2, 3

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?

Online help screens are available. The help screens are of average quality. The vendor supplies training to library staff as requested.

The online help and detailed information is actually quite extensive and better than most databases provide. ProQuest has 8 am to 5 pm ET (Mon-Fri) search help available by phone at the main technical support number option 2. One assumes this search help is primarily for librarians with search questions as the

phone number is not readily findable from the online screens.

COST 1, 3

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

For a community college audience, the extra coverage in Psychology Journals compared with the General Reference-Psychology module might not be cost-ineffective. PQPJ would be a better choice for a research institute or a large university with psychology and/or medical schools.

For a community college with a strong transfer program, the cost would be worth it for the greater depth of coverage.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 4, 4

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

Access is reliable and stable, with quick response time.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 3, 3

In an ideal world the typical Community College Library would have the resources to support a broad selection of databases with the broadest appeal as well as specialized databases like PQPJ. Information literacy efforts on a local campus with a strong Psychology Department and a strong Transfer program would result in extensive use of the PQPJ for the targeted audience and enhance the role the college can play in preparing students for the transition to the expectations at a 4 year institution.