Full-Text!
As Far as the Eye Can See
By Randle Gedeon

The past several years have seen the University Libraries acquire numerous electronic (i.e., accessible online) databases with a rapidly increasing number offering full-text options to the library patron. This full-text option links the patron with the actual text of an article, and delivers it via the World Wide Web, thus making it available for on the spot printing, perusal at the terminal, or, in some cases, delivery to an E-mail address.

The benefits of full-text are many, making their popularity so understandable. The database indexes are usually searchable by keyword, source, title, and author, and the actual article content is delivered on screen through the WWW. Access is almost always assured, seemingly instantaneous, without chasing down a print volume, locating the article, and then copying what is needed. There, on the screen, is the article itself, arriving in a genuine and readable form—no dog-eared or torn out pages found here. An individual with Internet access and a browser configured to go through the University Libraries proxy server (directions are found on the Libraries' homepage: http://www.wmich.edu/library/) can access these databases from literally anywhere. Hypertext links allow the searcher to navigate within the databases, in some cases within citations, allowing the reader to pursue references or related subjects. An additional appeal is timeliness since, many times, the electronic version of an article is made available before the print equivalent.

The University Libraries subscribe to more full-text databases than can be elaborated upon here, but I have chosen to highlight a few so as to pique your interest. Databases (i.e., searchable collections that include multiple journal titles) chosen for elaboration are: two databases offering broad coverage in the social sciences, JSTOR and Project Muse; Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, a large news and legal database; and ScienceDirect a scientific database.

JSTOR

JSTOR is a unique database offering full back files of over one hundred core scholarly journals, with several of the titles dating back to the nineteenth century. Presently, the database contains over four million pages of text. A back file contains no current issues; these are available, as in the past, by subscription to the University Libraries in traditional print format. Maintaining the backfile status involves the operation of a database “moving wall” that establishes a two to five year range of non-accessible (i.e., online) recent issues. This agreement between JSTOR and its publishers secures the integrity of the archive and protects the publisher's current journal revenue stream.


JSTOR allows searchers to browse the collection by individual title or search the database in a basic or advanced mode. The basic search is reminiscent of the “Guided Keyword” search in WestCat with three “search for” boxes, while the advanced search presents an open dialog box similar to straight “Keyword” searching in WestCat. Both searching options allow for searches limited by date, record type (article, review, or opinion piece), and offer the option for sorted results. Searches may be restricted to a given subject area(s) and also by individual title(s) simply by expanding the journal title option.

Project Muse

Another full-text social science database is Project Muse. This database offers over one hundred titles in the fields of Literature, the Visual and Performing Arts, Cultural Studies, Education, Political Science, and Gender Studies. A selective list of titles found in Project Muse includes, Diacritics, The Henry James Review, The Journal of General Education, The Lion and the Unicorn, and Victorian Poetry. This service does not provide an archive, but begins with the most current issue and moves backward for a number of years. Coverage of selected titles begins with volumes as early as 1993. Muse allows users to search the entire database or limit searching to selected titles. Boolean operators are available along with near, adjacency, and proximity operators, and the ability to limit in the following fields: title, author, subject, and notes and citations.

Searchers will find the Project Muse interface easy to use: (1) links are available for navigation within records; (2) page numbers from the print articles are embedded in the electronic text for ease of citation; (3) images presented are larger and cleaner than print equivalents, and can be displayed in up to four sizes; and (4) Library of Congress subject headings succeed each article title in the table of contents, and are also found in the article files for more accurate searching.

If you wish to search either of these collections, click on Research Resources on the Libraries' homepage, then click on Full Text Journal Articles and scroll down to JSTOR or Project Muse. That process also permits you to scan the Libraries' list of online collections for other useful collections such as the next two databases, Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe and ScienceDirect.

Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe

Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe is an absolutely mammoth database well known for legal and topical news coverage. Indeed, it provides all of that and much more. Many might not be aware that Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe is also a good source for business information including SEC filings, industry profiles, parent company listings along with their subsidiaries, and of course, up to the minute business news. Also, from this "did you know" category is the Reference Section of Lexis-Nexis making readily accessible almanac and biographical information, polling and survey data, quotations, and country and state profile information.

Lexis-Nexis is perhaps best known for its extensive legal coverage, and this reputation is well deserved. Searchers can use the "Name & Cite" search form to find a case, and search across Federal and State Courts. The "Law Reviews" search form is

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used to find analytical viewpoints and background information. The “Federal Code” search form allows for popular name searching of cases and laws. Finally, the “State Case Law” search form allows for searches at the state level by subject. On top of all that, additional searches can be run to find information on tax law, patents, and the contents of the Martindale-Hubbell Corporate Law Directory. The legal resources are fully archived so that Supreme Court decisions, laws, and other documents date to their beginnings.

Lexis-Nexis also offers one-stop shopping for local, regional, national, and world news. The “General News” category is searched for national news, “U.S. News” is the category for local and regional news, while “World News” is for both domestic and international sources. Additionally, Lexis-Nexis is a ready source for transcripts of your favorite news programs like “The McLaughlin Group” and “Hardball.” The archive is for two decades, much broader than many full-text sources. And, remember, what you get is often the full text of whatever document that you have searched whether newspaper or magazine article, a federal or state law, a court case, an encyclopedia entry, a news release, or whatever. That information can then be printed or E-mailed.

ScienceDirect
Billing itself as the “world’s largest full-text scientific database,” ScienceDirect makes available over eleven hundred journals in the sciences, with a few social science titles thrown into the mix. ScienceDirect offers full-text articles and browseable tables of contents, and abstracts from journals in these largely scientific areas: Chemistry, Materials Science, Engineering & Technology, Environmental Science, Economics, Business & Management Science, Neuroscience, Pharmacology & Toxicology, Physics, Mathematics & Computer Science, Earth Sciences, Social Sciences, Biochemistry, Microbiology & Immunology, Biological Sciences, and Clinical Medicine. Currency is key and the archive for full-text may only be two to three years online. However, this coverage is constantly changing so that older items should still be searched.

ScienceDirect presents the searcher with a very functional computer interface. Searchers can browse table of content information, construct a personal journals list, and view the “Summary Plus” of an article. “Summary Plus” is an article outline containing an abstract with linked references, images and tables. Ranked search results and the ability to limit searches to a list of journals by specialty or to journals in your personal journals list, combined with the internal navigation of ScienceDirect records, makes this a powerful research tool. If that were not enough, searchers have the ability to save searches for later recall and retrieval of updated information.

All of these databases can be located through title searches of its name (JSTOR, Project Muse, Lexis-Nexis, or ScienceDirect) in WestCat, or by following the Research Resources’ link on the Libraries’ home page (http://www.wmich.edu/library) to Full Text Journal Articles, and then scrolling down to the desired title. In either method, you will be able to click on the title or URL and link directly to the searchable database. These online databases put amazing resources with full-text right before your eyes and as far as the eye can see!