

Ross' Rave: Ga-ga over Google

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I have an e-mail buddy at a college not too far away. He's not a librarian, but like me, he's spent most of his waking life in higher ed. He's also a bit bonkers. Every day we message each other with the silly fodder of our workday. He told me last week the college is moving him to a real building. He's been in a PTU (Portable Temporary Unit, aka trailer) for 15 years! I replied with that old joke: "What do a tornado and a red-neck divorce have in common? No matter what happens, someone is going to lose a trailer."

Late last November I messaged him that the slamming sound he was hearing was libraries around the country, closing up shop. Chapter 11. The fat lady had sung. Google decided to stand on the shoulders of giants.

I'm not sure what giants Google was referring to. Jolly Green, perhaps. Google's trading at a tad under 200 bucks a pop. Google had decided to give back to the academic community by offering a new product called Google Scholar. According to their P.R.:

"Google Scholar enables you to search specifically for scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, preprints, abstracts and technical reports from all broad areas of research. Use Google Scholar to find articles from a wide variety of academic publishers, professional societies, pre-print repositories and universities, as well as scholarly articles available across the web."

Uh-oh!

I had heard the news on NPR's Morning Edition on my way to work. I wondered whether the pink slip was already in my mailbox. The night before I had spent two hours (and about 2,000 calories) with 25 grad students explaining the value of controlled vocabulary and the importance of SFX in their lives. It was a struggle. This database does this. That one

does this. This link goes here. Sort this like this. Don't email links. Save PDFs and send them as attachments. I felt like the clean-up guy at the end of the circus parade.

"Why aren't these on the web? It would be so much easier," one student asked.

"The web is like a big yard sale," I said. One of my usual responses. "There may be a gem or two out there, but you've got to dig through a lot of crap to find them."

She smiled.

"Besides, the academic publications you need to read go through a rigorous review process before being published. The databases you are searching a very, very expensive and proprietary. Publishers invest millions of dollars in this side of the scholarly information business, and they aren't about to give it away on the web." Also one of my usual responses.

I had about an hour before my first class. I went to scholar.google.com and typed, "hispanics depression."

Uh oh!

I know, I know... this was still yard sale territory, but we were in a pretty good neighborhood; the pickins were hot.

Quite honestly I knew that the students I saw last night, this morning, and pretty much from now on, would be very satisfied with the list I was looking at. Furthermore, I was pretty confident that the faculty who send us their spawn would also be satisfied. (How many of the faculty at your school even use the databases they ask you to teach?)

Of course, the beauty of the thing was that it was Google.

When Google (proper noun) became google (verb) the trans-

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Featured Web Site, continued from p.3

especially appealing. In addition, the website offers a serendipitous array of online resources for the fugal traveler.

As a resource that specifically addresses the needs of educators engaged in Web-based teaching, MERLOT comprises a body of modules that ideally contribute to the "social presence" of learners in the online environment. Social presence is "the ability of learners to project themselves socially and affectively into a community of inquiry." (Rourke, et al., 2001) One of the principles of an engaged learning community is that reflection and interactivity develop a sense of cohesion among group participants. Reflection is supported by response networks, discussion forums and analytical points of inquiry, whereas interactivity is critically enhanced with assignments and associated explorations that incorporate learning objects and "unit" modules such as those found in the MERLOT repertoire.

There are numerous other resources of serious value in the MERLOT collections focusing on aspects of learning that are unique to specific disciplines. The value to LOEX librarians is the "hidden exploratory" that MERLOT represents.

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mogrification was complete. Images, shopping, phonebooks, maps, directions, groups, directories and now legitimate research. Type, click, done.

I know, I know... there weren't loads of full-text articles, some of the citations were dated, and we had seined the pond with a net full of holes. But, damn, I was finding real stuff.

Start with www.findarticles.com, add Google Scholar and fold in noodletools.com or citation machine and we are pretty much out of here. The last one to leave, shut out the lights.

Naturally, the listservs lit up. There was hubbub all around, protective and predictably party-line in nature. I knew the lyrics.

I know, I know... libraries are about learning and critical thinking and evaluating information. Libraries are about identifying reliable sources, making meaning and using information effectively. But, for the student carrying 18 units, with an ex who doesn't make child support payments, a car that won't pass next month's smog inspection, a boss who expects overtime, Google Scholar looks much better than the convoluted system we offer them.

Don't get me wrong. I still think we've got the goods, and we've got the big picture. What we don't have is a level playing field.

On my way to class, one of the basic English 1 sections, I decided I'd be guilty of professional malpractice if I didn't talk a little bit about Google Scholar. The students were clawing their way up Maslow and their assignment was the typical 8-10 persuasive piece. They needed newspaper and journal articles, some reputable web sites and books (of course!) Between Academic Index and the web, I told them about Google Scholar, briefly explained how it worked and some of the advantages and disadvantages to it.

"Remember," I said, "this is still in beta and like everything else you use, you have to be very critical of the information you find, regardless of the way you find it."

"Now, for books, the library catalog..."

"Can't we use Google to find books?" a student asked from the back row.

"No, Goog...", I started to say.

"Yeah," a student chirped, "have you heard of Google Print?"

Uh oh.