

metasearching at NC State

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DLF April 20, 2004

background

MultiSearch service developed using
BlueAngel MetaStar APIs and local
JSP/perl scripting
Released August 2002

Two interfaces offered:
detailed subject groupings ...

Databases by Subject | [Off-campus Access](#) |
| [Conditions of Use](#) |

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

These databases are core resources for this subject area:

LINGUISTICS & LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR ABSTRACTS
Index and abstracts to journal articles, books, and dissertations covering the study of language, linguistics, as well as speech, language, and hearing pathology. Index goes back to 1973. ([catalog record](#))

LITERATURE RESOURCE CENTER
Database includes excerpts of literary criticism, as well as biographical information on literary authors. ([catalog record](#))

MLA INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY
Index to periodical articles, books, and dissertations in the area of literary criticism, literature, language, linguistics, and folklore. Index is produced by the Modern Language Association of America, and goes back to 1963. ([catalog record](#))

These databases cover related or narrower subject areas:

[20TH CENTURY AFRICAN-AMERICAN POETRY \(1901-1998\)](#) - ([catalog record](#))
[20TH CENTURY AMERICAN POETRY](#) - ([catalog record](#))
[AFRICAN-AMERICAN POETRY \(1750-1900\)](#) - ([catalog record](#))
[AMERICAN POETRY \(1600-1900\)](#) - ([catalog record](#))
[BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ASIAN STUDIES](#) - ([catalog record](#))
[ENGLISH POETRY \(600-1900\)](#) - ([catalog record](#))

MultiSearch
**Search databases shown
for this subject**
([More about MultiSearch](#))

Any Keyword ▾

☒ All of these words
☐ Any of these words
☐ Search Library Catalog?

[Search additional databases](#)

[Send us your comments on this service](#)

background

and broad subject groupings w/option
to select across groups

MultiSearch

Note: Not all databases are available on this page. Access additional databases through the subject and alphabetical lists. ([More about MultiSearch.](#))

([Advanced Search](#))

☐ All of these words ☒ Search Library Catalog?
☐ Any of these words

<u>Agriculture & Life Sciences</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Select All <input type="checkbox"/> AIDS and Cancer Research Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> ASFA Aquaculture <input type="checkbox"/> ASFA Marine Biotechnology <input type="checkbox"/> ASFA: Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Agricola <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural and Environmental Biotechnology Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Algology Mycology and Protozoology Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Animal Behavior Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Bacteriology Abstracts	<u>Humanities & Social Sciences</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Select All <input type="checkbox"/> ATLA Religion Database <input type="checkbox"/> Anthropological Literature <input type="checkbox"/> Art Index <input type="checkbox"/> Art Index Retrospective <input type="checkbox"/> Business source elite <input type="checkbox"/> Communication & Mass Media Complete <input type="checkbox"/> Dissertation Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> ERIC <input type="checkbox"/> Econlit <input type="checkbox"/> Findex <input type="checkbox"/> GPO monthly catalog, FirstSearch database	<u>Physical Sciences & Engineering</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Select All <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminium Industry Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Applied Science and Technology Index <input type="checkbox"/> Ceramic Abstracts/World Ceramics Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Computer and Information Systems Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Conference Papers Index <input type="checkbox"/> Corrosion Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> Dissertation Abstracts <input type="checkbox"/> EIS: Digests of Environmental Impact Statements	<u>General</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Select All <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Search Elite <input type="checkbox"/> Expanded Academic ASAP <input type="checkbox"/> Funk & Wagnall's New world Encyclopedia <input type="checkbox"/> General Reference Center Gold <input type="checkbox"/> General Science Full Text <input type="checkbox"/> InfoTrac Onefile <input type="checkbox"/> MasterFILE Premier <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper Source <input type="checkbox"/> OmniFile Full Text Mega <input type="checkbox"/> Readers Guide <input type="checkbox"/> Readers' Guide Retrospective
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what we like about it

the ability to customize and
post-process results

- create OpenURLs for citations
from databases that are not
OpenURL sources
- embed results in webpages

cross-domain searching

- support for various metadata schema

concerns

Collection:

many core databases are not cross-searchable

Technical:

implementation is expensive

- poor documentation
- inconsistent vendor implementations of Z39.50

Usability:

does the tool meet user needs?

- are users successful in interacting with it?
- does it lead users to relevant articles?

key questions

- what information needs are best met by metasearching?
- is cross-searching more databases better?
- which is the better place for a user to start, the smaller or larger result set?

log files

questions :

Is it used?

MultiSearch: ~7000 searches/mo.

Ebsco: ~ 25,000 searches/mo.

log files

questions :

What type of searches
do users do?

any keyword

(default): 76%

subject kw: 9%

author kw: 8%

title kw: 5%

log files

questions :

What do the searches look like?

networking

european integration

coyote eating habits

appreciation for the earth

Sunday v. Stratton Corporation 390 A.2d 398 (Vt. 1978)

plato

assisted housing discrimination

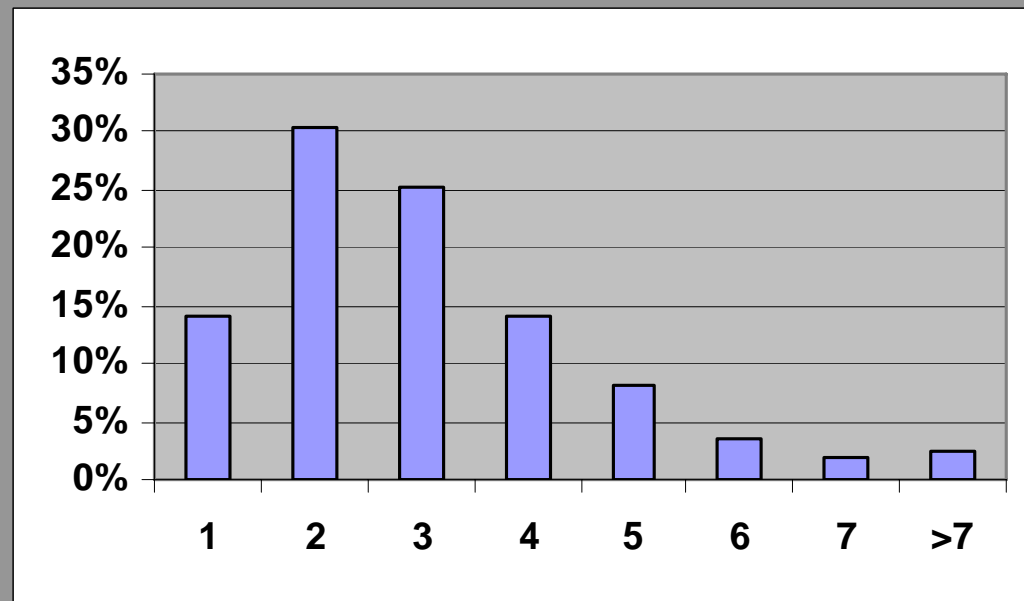
television news

habituation of birds and human closeness

log files

questions :

How many terms do
users enter?

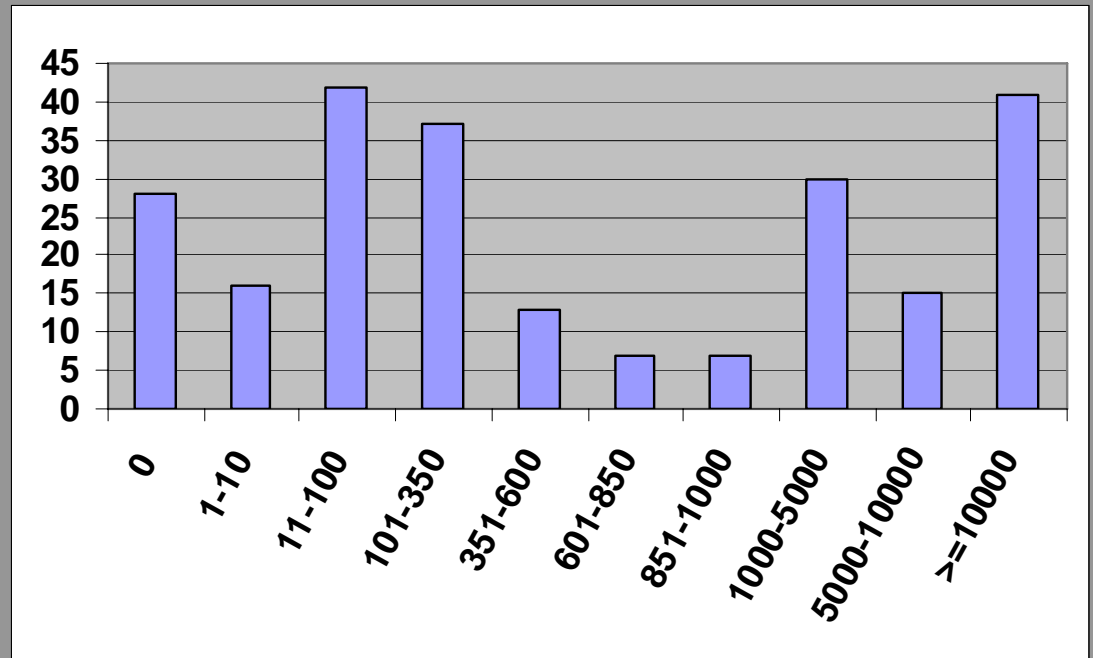


mean=3.12; n=4329

log files

questions :

How many hits are they getting?



n=236; mean > 51,000; stdev > 51,000!

log files

questions :

For large result sets, does it reduce the set size if the search is resent as keyword in subject?

It can.

sets > 10,000	62% fewer (0% nulls)
sets > 350	91% fewer (21% nulls)
sets < 350	81% fewer (49% nulls)

n=39, 72, 95

usability testing

Tasks:

- think of a topic and do a search using MultiSearch
- look at some results and tell us if they “look good to you”

Ask them:

- was it easy or difficult to select the databases you wanted?
- which subject interface do you prefer?
- what did you think was happening?

usability testing

questions :

Do they think the results
are useful?

Mostly yes.

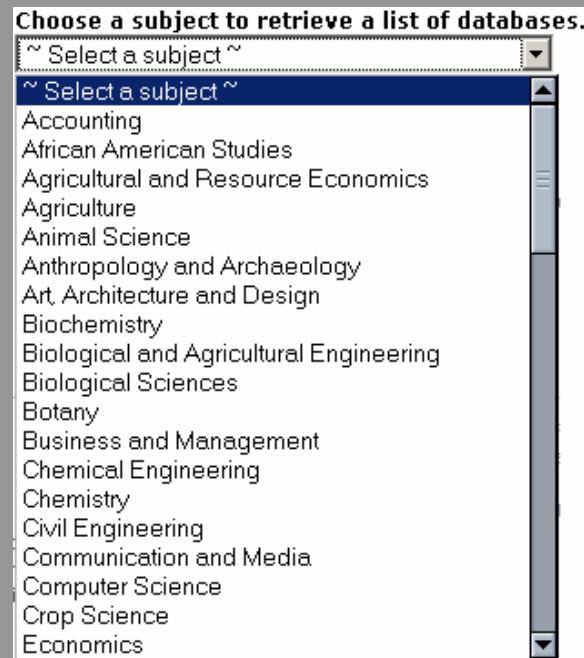
- almost anything “works”
- general level of confusion does not affect satisfaction with results
(also it’s sometimes hard to tell “good” from “bad” in quickly scanning brief records)

usability
testing

questions :

Which is the better subject
grouping?

64



OR

usability testing

10

questions :

Which is the better subject grouping?

2. Select Databases

☒ Show All | Subject Area (#databases)

- ☐ ☒ Agriculture & Life Sciences (19)
- ☐ ☒ Design (6)
- ☐ ☒ Education (3)
- ☐ ☒ Engineering (11)
- ☐ ☒ Humanities & Social Sciences (25)
- ☐ ☒ Management (4)
- ☐ ☒ Multidisciplinary/General (11)
- ☐ ☒ Physical & Mathematical Sciences (8)
- ☐ ☒ Textiles (4)
- ☐ ☒ Veterinary Medicine (6)

usability testing

questions :

Can users navigate the interface?

Do they understand what it is doing (or at least sort of)?

Many don't. They think...

- the databases are subjects
- the databases search all types of materials
- they are searching the full text

Complex interfaces are intimidating

→ **serial failure**

next steps for NCSU

1. search for a new metasearch tool
2. improve the current interface and experiment with ways to lead searchers to the next step
3. explore other approaches to getting users to appropriate databases

e.g., send searches to local data source,
such as Ingenta tables of contents