

# MINITEX *Reference* NOTES

A Program of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

December 2007

## Inside This Issue

Discovering Collection's New Interface and Functionality	1
A Nightmare or an Opportunity?	3
Institutional Technology Barriers to Teaching Internet Literacy	4
NEW MINITEX Webinars	5
December M.O.R.E. Webinar Training Participants	5
Opinions from Youngish Professionals	5
"We've outsourced the innovation."	6
Best Free Reference Web Sites	7
Homeschooling Educators	7

## Discovering Collection's New Interface and Functionality

*Beth Staats*


Cengage Learning's (formerly Gale) Discovering Collection, available via ELM, has recently undergone several changes including a new platform, a new interface, and several new features. The new platform has expanded the database's search capabilities, and content has increased as twenty-three reference volumes have been added. As an avid Discovering Collection user, I was at first taken aback by the new interface which lost some of my favorite search modes, but after adjusting to the new look and functionality, I've found some great new features that make up for the loss of others.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Discovering Collection, it is aimed at middle- and high-school-level students. Its content is focused on five core curriculum areas including literature, history, biography, science, and social studies. One of the great things about this database has always been its rich and comprehensive literature collection that includes author biographies, literary criticisms, character studies, thematic essays, and even analyses of Shakespeare's four most frequently studied plays – Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Romeo and Juliet. The Discovering Collection contains thousands of primary documents, hundreds of full-text plays and poems, video and audio clips, images including maps, flags, and seals, and more than 1,700 study guide questions to promote understanding.

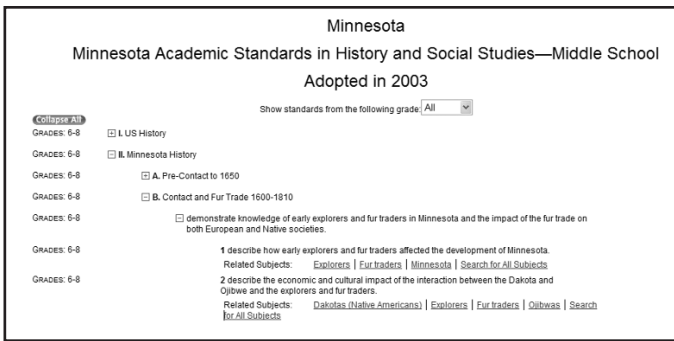
One of the new search features available in the Discovering Collection is a national and state curriculum standards search. This search is correlated to the database content and it lets educators locate material by grade and discipline. You can select a national or state standard and then drill down by grade and specific subject area to find specific linked materials that relate to that standard and subject:

State Standards > Minnesota > Minnesota Academic Standards in History and Social Studies—Middle School > Minnesota History > Contact and Fur Trade 1600-1810 > demonstrate knowledge of early explorers and fur traders in Minnesota and the impact of the fur trade on both European and Native societies. > describe how early explorers and fur traders affected the development of Minnesota. > Related Subjects: Explorers, Fur traders, Minnesota or Search for all subjects. In this example, if we select "fur traders," our results display eleven reference documents ranging from a narrative biography of Jedediah Smith to an overview of traders and missionaries encountering the Plateau Indians.

*Continued on page 2*



Best Wishes  
in the  
New Year!



Another new search feature in the Discovering Collection is the curriculum “topic trees.” These are located on the home page and offer one-click access to the “hottest, most searched topics in each major curriculum area.” The down-side of these topic tree searches is that when you click on them you are not offered a search box but only an alphabetical list of the most popular topics relating to that curriculum area. For example, when I select the curriculum area **Literature**, I can then choose from **Authors**, **Literary Works**, **Literary Topics**, or **Genres and Movements**. If I select **Literary Works**, I’m then shown an alphabetical list of approximately fifty of the most popular novels, diaries, and plays. This is great if what I’m looking for is listed, but if it’s not, I’m not given an option to search for a specific work.

If you are looking for a specific work or would like to search by a specific document type, subject area, content level or type, or publication format, then the Advanced search is the place to go. The Advanced search makes up for the lack of keyword searching in the topic trees by allowing you to search by author, document or publication title, and subject. You can even limit your search to over fifty different document types including a chart, sermon, or folktale. (Granted there are only two folktales in the Discovering Collection, but this Advanced search limiter allows you to run the search with just a document type limiter selected). The Basic search offers some of the same search options as the Advanced search. Be aware that the Subject Guide search offers subdivisions that take you nowhere. Apparently this is something that Gale/Cengage is aware of and currently working on. If you remember the Timeline search, unfortunately, it is not available in this new Discovering Collection interface.



The Discovering Collection is available on the Thomson Gale PowerSearch platform. This offers a few more Advanced search features like a new translation feature that lets you translate documents with one click into Spanish, French, Japanese, German, Italian, Portuguese, and simplified Chinese and Korean. The Publication search allows you to search for a single edition, volume, or issue of a particular publication and lets you retrieve all of its available documents. The How-to-Cite feature lets you generate an MLA citation and export it to reference software. This platform also offers a “breadcrumb trail” so users can see where they are in a search by displaying the previous pages navigated.

Gale has a lot of helpful information like Navigation Guides and Search Tips at <http://gale.cengage.com/DiscoveringCollection/>. If you’re interested in more specific information and training on the Discovering Collection and/or PowerSearch go to <http://www.minitex.umn.edu/events/training/webinars.asp> and sign up for an upcoming webinar.

---

## A Nightmare or an Opportunity?

Jennifer Hootman

It is the second-most-visited education/reference site on the Internet, 400 million answers and searchable archives, natural language recognition – also dubbed “every middle school teacher’s worst nightmare about the Web.” What is it?! It’s *Yahoo! Answers*. Have you heard of this Internet answer board?

In “A Librarian’s Worst Nightmare,” Jacob Leibenluft recently produced this exposé revealing the scarier side of an answer board site that seeks to provide community responses to queries in a matter of minutes and most times in seconds. While some of the more positive elements of *Yahoo! Answers* might be that it provides one with some insight into how people search for information online or a sense of popular topics, Leibenluft is quick to point out the multiple, confusing, misleading and often wrong answers that snap back in reply to the user’s question(s). For one question, a user may get a hundred different answers – literally!

Though some topics fare a better chance at receiving more accurate replies than others, the user is still left with having to wade through the multiple answers and decide which one is the “best answer.” If the user does not select a “best answer,” community vote will select which one is “best.” *Yahoo! Answers* also employs a reward system by giving two points to anyone who posts an answer and awarding ten points to the one whose answer is selected “best.” Furthermore, *Yahoo! Answers* closes out questions after one week not allowing any new answers which deters users from revising and building more quality answers over a period of time.

Leibenluft also takes time to compare *Yahoo! Answers* with the much debated, number one visited education/reference site on the Internet, *Wikipedia*. Though it is not a perfect tool, Leibenluft emphasizes the fact that *Wikipedia* is a self-editing and self-correcting tool whose creators make great efforts to consolidate pages so as not to be repetitive, remove entries that are insignificant or immaterial, and drive user’s energy to revising rather than adding. Where with *Wikipedia* there is a community interested in reliability and accuracy, with *Yahoo! Answers* there is a community interested in immediacy and quantity.

There has been a fascinating movement in librarianship to infiltrate, en masse, the Internet answer boards, provide quality answers to questions, and promote/market libraries and library staff as a source of accurate, “best” answers. This movement has been called “Slam the Boards.” It started on September 10, 2007, and has continued each month on the 10th. The point is for library staff to flood the answer boards with accurate answers specifically stating that the answer was provided by a library staff member. Additionally, there is a wiki available (<http://answerboards.wetpaint.com/page/Slam+the+Boards%21?t=anon>) where library staff can check out some good tips about how to participate, remote library resources, and some suggestions by Jessamyn West. It appears that this movement is not about “beating” or even “bettering” the answer boards but about providing accurate answers wherever the questions are posted while promoting the library and library staff as a resource for answers.

So, are these answer boards truly a nightmare and/or are they an opportunity for discussion, debate, raising awareness, participating, and promoting libraries and library staff? What do you think?

Read the complete articles:

Leibenluft, J. (2007). *A librarian’s worst nightmare: Yahoo! answers, where 120 million users can be wrong*. Retrieved December 11, 2007, from Slate Web site: <http://www.slate.com/id/2179393/>

Kearns, A. (2007). *Slam the boards! Predatory reference and the online answer sites*. Retrieved December 10, 2007, from WebJunction Web site: <http://mn.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=18985>

**Congratulations SELCO on receiving a “Smart Investing” grant from the American Library Association (ALA) and the FINRA Foundation!**

---

# Institutional Technology Barriers to Teaching Internet Literacy

Jennifer Hootman

An op-ed piece in December's issue of *American Libraries* is sure to get many talking. In "The Freedom to Be Literate: Teaching Literacy Under Technological Constraints," Michelle Boule, social sciences librarian at the University of Houston, addresses an issue that has been and continues to be a barrier to teaching and learning in the K-12 classroom – filtering software.

Boule argues that

"Literacy can be taught in our schools, but teaching technological literacy in our educational system is nearly impossible. Most school districts have such strict filters that students are able to go almost nowhere on the Web. How can we teach the next generation to make good information choices when they are given no choices at all (p. 42)?"

Boule continues to illustrate her argument with a comparison that has been done on the use of filters in communist China with filters in Oklahoma. She also describes her frustration in teaching an online course about Library 2.0 to a class of media specialists who are blocked from using a variety of web tools and sites pertinent to the course goals and learning outcomes.

To further explain, however, that the issue is not merely a simple one about locking horns with school administration, but that it also points to federal legislation. Boule states that "Many libraries must have filters in place to receive money they cannot do without. The Children's Internet Protection Act has done more to disenfranchise library users and schools than any other recent legislation (p. 42)."

On a more positive note, Boule is quick to make reference to school programs that are working hard to break through the barriers and offer a combination of technological and traditional literacy. Furthermore, the author jumps to the academic setting to make a parallel argument stating that academic librarians, too, face barriers to technological literacy as they teach students to "navigate confusing lists of databases," "explain whatever system we

have in place for actually finding the resource they [students] need," and "Sometimes we are lucky if that is the only time a student interacts with a librarian for their entire four years of college (p. 42)."

Boule ends her challenging and timely op-ed piece with a statement urging librarians to question what we accept as literacy.

Discover how one Minnesota library system and its member libraries are striving towards greater technological literacy despite the barriers at <http://metromili.blogspot.com/>. Metronet, a Minnesota Multitype Library Cooperation System servicing all library types in the 7-county metropolitan area, has embarked on a new project for their second year in collaboration with the St. Paul Public Schools on integrating information literacy skills. This year's project or initiative is incorporating the concept of "23 Things" (<http://plcmcl2-about.blogspot.com/>) which helps teachers and media specialists become more familiar with technology and how it can be applied to libraries and the K-12 classroom.

Are you participating in or implementing a library program that's pushing beyond the technology barriers to teach Internet/web literacy? If so, tell us about your program by e-mailing [mtxref@umn.edu](mailto:mtxref@umn.edu) or calling 1-800-462-5348.

[Read the complete *American Libraries* article: The Freedom to Be Literate. (2007). *American Libraries*, 38(11), 42.]



---

## NEW MINITEX Webinars

MINITEX Reference is offering many webinars in January and February including a new webinar: [Best Practices in Online Reference Services](#). Here is the description of the session:

The field of reference services has been rapidly evolving over the past 10 years and growing even faster in the arena of online reference services. Be it email, chat, instant messaging, text messaging or another format, libraries continue to incorporate and research online reference services as new ways to provide access to information and their services to their immediate community and beyond. Meeting the demands of an online community while providing a quality service is an ever-present priority for libraries. Join MINITEX Reference staff as we discuss Best Practices in Online Reference Services and look at the goals, policies, training, assessment, and more that make for an exemplary reference experience for both the patron and the librarian.

Currently, there are four sessions scheduled for January with more planned for February and the spring. Check the training website regularly for updates!  
<http://www.minitex.umn.edu/events/training/webinars.asp>

Other sessions being offered in January and February include:

- Gale K12 Resources and PowerSearch
- ProQuest Newsstand Complete
- WorldCat Advanced
- WorldCat Basics
- Minnesota Opportunities for Reference Excellence Series

## December M.O.R.E. Webinar Training Participants

*Kristen Mastel*

The six participants led energetic discussions and demonstrations regarding the reference interview, ELM databases, online searching, virtual reference and many other topics. Each completed thorough pre-work and post-work for every session; often participants brought the readings up in class discussion or tied them into their demonstrations. This class was exceptional because one participant completed M.O.R.E. training a few years back and participated as a refresher, and another is an instructor; both of which gave excellent feedback and commentary, along with the rest of the group!

**Congratulations on a fabulous collaborative learning experience! December 2007 participants include:**

*Allison Quam* (Winona State University)

*Anne Ryan* (Minneapolis Community & Technical College)

*Jesse Leraas* (Argosy University)

*Karen Hamer* (St. Paul Public Library)

*Mary Christie* (Red Wing Public Library)

*Sarah Batesel* (Mayville State University)

Space is limited to 8 participants per series. Slots are still available for the April M.O.R.E. webinar series. To register, visit: <http://www.minitex.umn.edu/events/training/>

## Opinions from Youngish Professionals

*Kristen Mastel*

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* in their October 19, 2007, article "Young Librarians, Talkin' 'bout Their Generation" features eight professionals discussing the future of libraries. The article focuses on the individual's opinion on the future of libraries in the face of fast-paced change.

*Continued on page 6*



---

Nick Baker, a reference and Web services librarian at Williams College was asked, “What is the future of the book?” Baker discusses the stability of the book for the reader and that he does not see it being replaced in his lifetime. However, academic research is relying less of the book and more on electronic information. This brings up the need for preservation and copyright discussions regarding electronic mediums.

Associate Dean for public services and collection development at the University of Rochester, Susan Gibbons, discussed in reaction to, “What information services will be performed by libraries in the future, and what information services will be performed by companies and nonprofit groups?” Gibbons discusses how libraries have lost the fight to search engines on the discovery piece of information through searches, and instead what libraries need to focus on is the “value added.” Library staff know their community and can be proactive in providing materials that match research interests.

Well-known blogger, Jessamyn West, from the Randolph Technical Career Center commented on, “Should the relationship between libraries and publishers change?” West overwhelmingly agrees that the publishing industry needs to change, and that libraries play a critical role in this, since we have a “crazy amount of purchasing power.”

Sarah Kostelecky, Director of Library Programs at the Institute of American Indian Arts, was asked to comment on, “Does the library profession need to diversify and draw from different populations?” Kostelecky discussed

current efforts by ALA to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. She stressed the importance of this to remain “relevant, because of the cultural competencies people bring when they are from different backgrounds.”

Char Booth, the youngest interviewed at age 26, a reference and instruction librarian at Ohio University, discussed the future of the reference desk. Booth discusses the hope for a physical reference desk down the road, as many people prefer or need this service. However, efforts need to be spent on digital reference services, such as Skype, chat and video which allow contact with users all over the world.

Another heavy blogger, Brian Mathews of Georgia Institute of Technology, responded to the provoking question, “What is one thing that libraries are doing right, and one thing that libraries are doing wrong?” The right part is “the shift towards a user-centered approach.” The wrong part is “play[ing] nice with others.” He discusses the importance of collaborating between units in the library, institution and community.

Casey Bisson, Information architect at Plymouth State University, chatted about library-science education in preparation for today’s jobs. Bisson is quick to acknowledge that he has an IT background and has been working in libraries for a while. Based on listserv and other observations he states, “library science is not as technically demanding as it should be for the challenges that new graduates will face.”

**“We’ve outsourced the innovation.” –  
Casey Bisson**

Doctoral student and assistant instructor in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin, Joe Sanchez, remarked on academic libraries of the future. Sanchez states, “[It won’t be] limited to just providing access to materials but also providing access to the *creation* of different types of materials.”

Above are summaries from the eight librarians featured in the article. Read the full-length article in *Academic Search Premier*, an Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM) resource, at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=27229529&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live>

---

## Best Free Reference Web Sites

Kristen Mastel

The Reference and User Services Association's (RUSA) Machine-Assisted Reference Section (MARS) has announced their ninth annual list of best free web sites for reference work. For a list of criteria and the complete list you can read the article in *Reference & User Services Quarterly* in *Academic Search Premier*, an Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM) resource. A persistent link to the record can be found at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=27350255&loginpage>Login.asp&site=ehost-live>.

Below are a few highlight entries from the list.

### **Gethuman**, [www.gethuman.com](http://www.gethuman.com)

The Gethuman Web site, run by volunteers, is part of a project to improve customer telephone support by companies in the United States. Aimed at consumers, the Gethuman database of five hundred companies includes customer service telephone numbers, specific instructions for reaching a human being at each company and quality of service grades.

### **SeatGuru**, [www.seatguru.com](http://www.seatguru.com)

SeatGuru is "The ultimate source for airplane seating, in-flight amenities and airline information." This site provides users with detailed maps of commercial airlines.

### **WorldCat**, <http://worldcat.org>

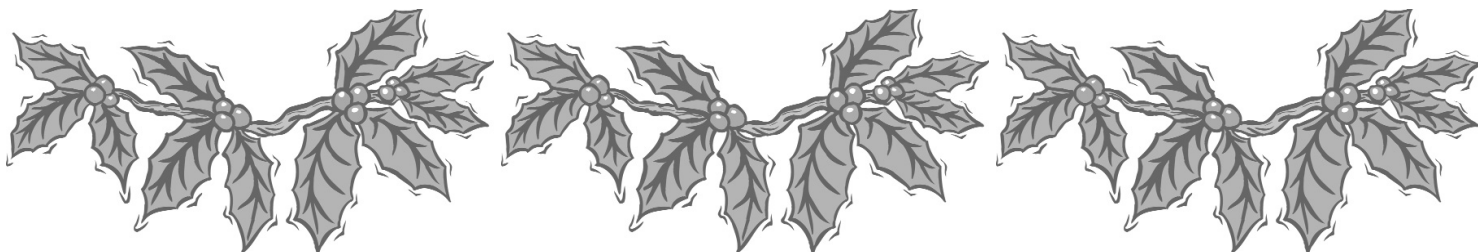
WorldCat promotes itself as "the world's largest network of library content and services." This wonderful Web resource is basically a megacatalog of more than a billion items from OCLC Libraries. **WorldCat is available through the Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM)!**

## Homeschooling Educators

Kristen Mastel

MINITEX presents at numerous homeschooling conferences, such as MACHE, Minnesota Catholic Home Educators Conference, and Minnesota Homeschoolers Alliance. During these events, our presentations are well attended and our exhibit booth is hopping with parents wanting to learn about free online resources to assist in teaching at home. On a cool November night a group of homeschoolers from Sibley and LeSueur Counties met at the LeSueur Public Library to learn about the **Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM)**. Nancy Steele, South-central Minnesota Inter-library Exchange (SMILE) Director, and I tag-teamed delivery of the presentation.

This was a great collaborative experience as we interjected comments and suggestions to the participants as we went along and took turns answering their questions. Many were familiar with some of the databases such as the *Discovering Collection*, but ones such as *Business Source Premier*, to research industries and companies, were unknown prior to the workshop. The LeSueur Public Library was very generous in letting us use their conference room for an hour after the building closed so we could teach the educators as much as possible on their meeting night. We used every minute of it to address possible uses for projects and answering questions! The group was so enthusiastic and excited about the resources that they asked us to come back in the spring and focus on a couple resources with the group again. A resounding YES was our answer! We look forward to working with other homeschooling groups and their local library systems to educate on the **Electronic Library for Minnesota (ELM)**.



---

## REFERENCE NOTES

MINITEX Library Information Network  
University of Minnesota, 15 Andersen Library  
222 21st Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0439

Reference Phone . . . . . 612-624-4150, WATS 800-462-5348  
Reference Fax . . . . . 612-624-4508  
Hootman, Jennifer . . . . . 612-624-2924, hootm001@umn.edu  
Parker, Mary . . . . . 612-624-1024, m-park1@umn.edu  
Pfahl, Carla . . . . . 612-626-6845, pfahl001@umn.edu  
Mastel, Kristen . . . . . 612-626-9843, meye0539@umn.edu  
Staats, Beth . . . . . 612-624-7873, fried004@umn.edu  
Main Website . . . . . www.minitex.umn.edu  
Reference Email . . . . . mtxref@umn.edu  
Office Hours . . . . . Mon-Fri., 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Reference Intake Form . . . . . <https://www.minitex.umn.edu/reference/refdb/index.asp>

*The Institute of Museum and Library Services, a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning, and State Library Services & School Technology, the Minnesota state library agency, supports MINITEX Reference Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).*

---

MINITEX Library Information Network  
University of Minnesota  
15 Andersen Library  
222 21st Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0439



*A Program of the Minnesota Higher Education  
Services Office at the University of Minnesota*

A large, decorative graphic in the bottom left corner of the page. It consists of several overlapping, curved, light blue shapes that form a partial circle or arc, creating a modern, abstract design.