Everything is Not on the Web, Doggone it:
Remembering the Library in Your Research Process.

by John Boyd and Allan Scherlen

I. INTRODUCTION

Students are entering the university far more savvy than ever in using computers and online activities. They often already have established email accounts, downloaded music, played games, purchased gifts and made online auction bids well before their first university class begins. It shouldn't be too much of a surprise then, when confronted with a research assignment, that the natural inclination of many web-wise college students is to turn to Yahoo, Excite, or some other Web search engine, as their gateway to information.

When students turn to a Web search engine, they may often find frustration rather than information. The source of the frustration is manifold– the solution, though, is simple: the reference librarian! This article 1) details the pitfalls of relying exclusively on web-based research, 2) highlights some of the Appalachian State University Library's special electronic resources, and 3) identifies ways students and faculty can better use the library.

As we move further into the information age, everyone must realize that research skills are increasingly vital and important to master. Reference librarians are professional researchers who can work with students and faculty to transform someone from a web-savvy person to a "research savvy" one.

II. FRUSTRATION OF WEB-ONLY RESEARCH

> "Excuse me. I've been looking for two hours on the web over there but I can't find nothin' that's really related to my topic. Do you know where else I can look..."

It is not uncommon to see a student walk up to the Belk Library Reference Information Desk with a case of web-frustration. That's the look a person gets after becoming overwhelmed, even exhausted from a long, seemingly futile struggle through countless Web sites in an attempt to find substantial, in-depth information that will satisfy a professor's assignment.

The common wisdom among many college students today is that everything they need is somewhere on the web. You only have to be determined enough with the keyboard and the mouse to dig it out–right? And asking for help with searching for information, I guess, is less than cool; librarians are supposed to know about books, not the web. College students, so the lore goes, assume themselves to be self-reliant experts when it comes to navigating the digital universe. What could a librarian possibly have to add?

Librarians, when they are not on patrol among patron computers, must often wait for a student to finally approach the library reference desk in their last desperate act to discover someone who can cut through the miasma of the Internet to a wealth of electronic and tangible resources. Surprise often follows, when the student discovers the variety of electronic resources

available through the library rather than HotBot or Excite. Thus, the "Web-only" student begins to realize the value of library resources and can begin the process of efficient and effective research.

III. ELECTRONIC SOURCES VIA THE LIBRARY

"I can't find this case in FindLaw.com and my professor assured me it's there."

The library currently subscribes to (i.e. spends a substantial chunk of change on) more than 100 online electronic databases. Some are general periodical indexes, such as Ebsco's *Academic Search Fulltext* and Proquest's *PA Research*, which together provide access to more than 3,000 journals, many in full text. Others are more specialized periodical indexes, such as *Biological Abstracts* with bibliographic access to nearly 6,000 international journals.

Students thinking "electronic," often search web sites of individual newspapers for newspaper articles. A more efficient, less frustrating, strategy involves searching one or more of the Library's electronic resources, like our online newspaper indexes, such as *Newspaper Source, North Carolina Newsstand, or Lexis Nexis Academic Universe,* all of which provide full-text access to millions of newspaper articles.

A query on a Web search engine, such as InfoSeek, now Go.com, about a legal issue can result in a thousand hits, ranging from legal institutions to personal homepages crusading some legal injustice. A more scholarly and useful approach to legal research is to tap into the Library's subscription to Lexis-Nexis *Academic Universe*. Although there are excellent free law sites available on the Web, such as *FindLaw,* they do have their limitations. The student quoted above was asked to find a Supreme Court case from the Civil War era using *FindLaw* but Supreme Court opinions from this Web site start in 1893; in contrast, access to opinions from Academic Universe begin in 1790. Not only are Federal and State court opinions available to students in Academic Universe, they can also research over 200 law reviews and journals--all available in full text.

IV. HOW STUDENTS CAN BETTER UTILIZE THEIR LIBRARIANS

"I am sorry to bother you but a friend of mine said you have ..."

Students benefit from getting to know their reference librarians at Belk Library. Librarians are continually refining their skills at searching for and evaluating online information, compiling guides to resources on various topics and teaching others effective methods for finding, evaluating and using relevant resources. Furthermore, they enjoy getting to know students. Librarians love being asked questions, even the common "this is a really stupid question" type, and there are many different ways for students and faculty to take advantage of their help; it's why they are paid for this service.

A. The Reference Information Desk

The center of the reference librarian's work is still the Reference Information Desk. From that location students, faculty, and the community at large, can walk up without an appointment, to ask for help on almost anything. The purpose of the librarian at the desk is to help guide the way– to show possible avenues to search, key resources to try, and even to help the searcher

refine the nature of the search. Reference librarians do even more: They answer phone and e-mail inquiries, assists patrons in the reference area with printing, downloading, e-mail and other computer questions, and serve as general advisors on questions related to the Web and other resources. Librarians at the Reference Desk love this kind of work and welcome any question regardless of how complex or how silly the patron fears it to be. There should be a sign over the Reference Desk that reads, "Don't say 'Sorry to bother you.' We are here for you"

B. R.A.P. Sessions

   A more in-depth way of tapping into help from a Reference Librarian is to schedule a R.A.P. (Research Advisory Program) session. The librarian will meet one-on-one with the student or faculty member delving into much greater detail into the research subject than is possible at the Reference Desk. Often the lack of time or the nature of the question requires more than a cursory exchange at the Reference Desk. The R.A.P. session provides a unique opportunity to get to know your librarian by working with him or her extensively on a your topic..

C. Instruction Classes

   An efficient way the Library has for communicating resources to students is through library instruction classes. (Over 300 instruction sessions have been conducted by librarians for students and faculty in each of the past three years.) Professor's can work with librarians to specially structure the class, tailoring it to the type of research and subject matter needed by the class. The Electronic Library Lab (ELL) provides the opportunity for hands-on instruction and help in selecting, using, and evaluating information resources.

VI. CONCLUSION

   Professors and librarians alike must communicate to their students that Internet savvy does not equal research savvy.

WHAT WE, LIBRARIANS HOPE TO DO
A. Help students frame questions and focus their research process
B. Help them expand their repertoire of research sources
C. Help them find the right source.
D. Improve their search strategies and techniques
E. Assist students in their critique of sources

Knowing how to search the web does not translate into knowing how to effectively research a term paper. The web is not the entire universe of electronic information; a useful portion, yes, but only a portion. Where and how to search, choosing library subscription databases vs. general

web searching, developing search strategies, and discerning quality information from the chaff, are all areas a reference librarian can assist. Students can look upon their librarians as sort of "information brokers" to guide and advise them on their quest through their every more complicated array of information confronting them.

"A Cautionary Note"

   The dangers of solo research using just the net is clear. However, there are problems that emerge from overreacting to this situation. Some students are instructed by their professors to avoid the Internet– no Internet sources allowed. Students who follow this dictum are soon at a standstill when they discover that virtually all periodical databases are accessed online and on the Internet. The librarian must work with the student to understand if the professor who forbids use of the Internet *really* means for their students to avoid all online sources, including databases and electronic scholarly journals the University pays thousands of dollars to subscribe to. The paper versions of these scholarly journals are often discontinued.