

“SHOW ME THE ARTICLE!”

Helping Students Understand the Library’s Role in Accessing Scholarly Information

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Background and Objective

A fundamental concept that students need to understand about performing research at the college/university level is that, contrary to what they may believe or have been accustomed to thinking, the entire sum of human knowledge is not (yet?) openly accessible to anyone for free via the Internet. Often times, students need to "see it to believe it" –or, more importantly, *grasp* it–by experiencing first-hand how the library and free web intersect. We should not assume that the divide between what is available freely on the Internet and the content provided by, and only accessible via campus libraries is automatically or commonly understood by first year students. In fact, for many students there is likely no perceivable divide at all, but rather a blurred grey area of simply “online.”

This presentation introduces a simple hands-on exercise, implemented during a first year student library session that can be very effective at driving home the point that, despite the ever-increasing presence of open access scholarship on the "free web," post-secondary students simply cannot rely solely on this option when conducting research at the level that will be expected of them. By the end of this short exercise students have been given the often needed proof that the resources provided by their campus library/libraries will inevitably play a critical role in their research.

“Show Me the Article!” (Can You Google it?)

During a library session, Google is introduced (somewhat jokingly) as the "Omnipotent Portal to Information" and an image of the homepage is put on the screen. A handout simply titled "Can you Google it?" is distributed to the class and the librarian/instructor challenges students to search for any or all of the articles. Without fail and with little effort, students will begin locating the articles via publisher websites or other sites in which they are indexed or cited, believing they have found them. None of the articles provided, however can be accessed full-text without paying a fee, logging in with a subscriber username and password, or setting-up a one-time trial (even on campus, these chosen examples can only be accessed full-text from within library database search results). The librarian explains how the library provides access to these types of sources and students have now seen with their own eyes that there is a connection between what can be found on the Internet and what can only be accessed via the library. It should be noted that this exercise is not intended to discourage students from using the Internet for their research (librarians and scholars actually *love* the Internet!), but rather clearly demonstrate that they will be highly disadvantaged if

they depend solely on the "free web" for all of their academic research. This is especially evident when students are required to use and cite the full-text of scholarly journal content - something they will inevitably be faced with as a fact of life during the course of their studies. In addition, it is worth mentioning that although major strides have been taken in the realm of open-access publishing of scholarly literature, at present, this only makes-up a small piece of the pie. Learning Opportunities: Additional Suggestions

- Many libraries are set-up with links to their electronic journal holdings from Google Scholar. This can help show the two worlds colliding (the search was free, but the content came from the library).
- Further reinforce the library's role in providing access to information by "Googling" some examples that go to electronic journal publishers that will seamlessly identify users as being on a campus that subscribes to their content. Highlight on the page where it shows "Access provided by _____ College or University" (JSTOR, SpringerLink, Project MUSE, etc.).

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