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Web Pages for Training and Reference

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Background:

Location: Orange County is located in Southern California, south of Los Angeles, north of San Diego and west of Riverside. Though often considered a county of wealthy conservatives, the County government went bankrupt a few years ago due to some bad investments. Many public services, such as schools and libraries, felt the ensuing cutbacks.

Libraries: There are 2 large depositories in the county, California State University, Fullerton and University of California, Irvine (UCI). There are 5 much smaller depositories in libraries throughout the county. Two Congressional districts are without a depository at this time. The whole southern part of the county has no depository library, and many users tend to come to UCI rather than their public libraries. They think of UCI as their large public library, which we are not. In the last few years, libraries in the county have been working to get community users into their local libraries first, with UCI being a second or third option. Development of business collections in 3 public libraries has helped, but some public school teachers still make inappropriate assignments and encourage students to come to the university library for research and/or primary source material.

A cooperative system of referrals and some increase in public library budgets has helped improve the situation. However, Government information still needed to be addressed as a part of this countywide cooperation. The advent of the Web, with all the increasing number of free government resources there, provided an opportunity for a type of collaboration not available when the only choice was tangible documents. Training and assistance for public library staff was one missing ingredient.

Similar needs for Web pages: UCI Libraries has had a home page for several years. During the past year, however, the whole staff worked to create a major change in both content and format for that Web site. Work was not complete when the new format was unveiled, and one of those areas under construction has been a guide on how to find government information on the Web. The initial intent was for this section to be most useful to UCI students, faculty and reference staff. Our reference staff has been requesting more help with government Web resources, especially with the initiation of a shared reference desk.

I have also been involved with the School of Social Ecology in the development of the

Russian-American Cyberlibrary. One of the areas we have wanted to improve was a guide to finding free Web sites that contained quality resources. Thus, UCI reference staff, the public librarians, Russian librarians and users of our Web site could all use a Web page to help them learn **methods** to locate resources. For those who want it, a way to practice finding these resources is also made available.

- **Plan:** Eventually, it became obvious that I could combine several projects and use the various products in a variety of ways. Some editing would be needed for each use, but the idea of consistently using the UCI Government Information home page as the initial source to begin government information searches was appealing. I decided to create a workshop and mount it on my own home page to use as a draft. Experience and comments from users could help provide insight into how to format and improve the final product that will be added to the UCI Libraries home page.

Procedures

Organizing. Library administrators from UCI and Orange County Library System and one large city library, Newport Beach, met and agreed to the idea of workshops. Judy Horn, UCI Government Information Department Head, and I were assigned the task of getting the team together and developing the workshops. We formed a team together with librarians from public libraries. Teri Garza is in charge of training for the Orange County Regional Library System. Jody Brewster, from the Garden Grove Regional Library, joined the group as the representative of the largest public library depository in the county. Susan Warren, from the Newport Beach Public Library, represented the largest city library contingent. We had several meetings discussing what should be presented, and how. The team worked very well together and I personally learned a great deal about these libraries, their users and the services they perform. What I most wanted to know was what kinds of questions they were asked to answer at their reference desks. This would be useful in designing any workshop for their reference staff.

Introducing the project to public library staff. Judy Horn had prepared a PowerPoint presentation, which she had recently used, for a variety of purposes to inform people of the types of government information available via the Web. We used this to go to meetings of library staff organized by the public library members of the Team. The audience was invariably amazed at how much was available that they could use. What seemed to attract many of them was how many of the standard reference tools were available via the Web. Statistical Abstract of the United States and Uniform Crime Reports were just two samples. Combined with California Statistical Abstract and the Orange County Budget staff from small branches with little budget could see their access to quality information expanding. There was much enthusiasm for the project expressed from those sessions.

Planning the workshops. This proved the most difficult part of the project. We spent too many meetings discussing topics like how do these people who do not work daily with government information even recognize a reference question that could be answered by what is available on the Web. We did not want to create workshops that would, in the end, not be useful. What information would be useful to them? Do they have enough training in how to navigate the Web? What type of equipment and how much of it do they have

available? In the final analysis, this is how we proceeded and why:

- All the library systems were providing training in how to use the Web, and there were a couple of workshops that included some government information. Thus, it would not be our job to provide any training in how to search the Web. We just needed to be aware that the skill levels were broadly distributed.
- For real learning to take place, attendees needed to be able to each have a terminal to use during the training sessions. We wanted active participation. This meant that for the Orange County Regional Library System librarians, they would need to come to UCI to utilize our teaching facilities. Because of the lack of parking and available classrooms when classes are in session, this meant scheduling classes during UCI's intersession.
- As for the curriculum, after many discussions the group finally said, "You do it. Then we can discuss details." The real problem with this was I had a full schedule that put it off a little longer. However, the extra time allowed the librarians to become more Web literate and to think about questions they fielded over the desk that might be governmental in nature. At the same time, more and better equipment was installed in some of the libraries for use with their public and affording them some equipment to use for practice.
- Once the design was in place, we arranged the first 2 workshops. Each was given in a 4-hour block. Individuals were required to sign up to make sure each attendee was able to use a computer terminal. Each class was filled with 25 students.

Creating the Web pages

About the same time we were developing the workshops, two other projects converged on my desk. It was very obvious that all three projects had similar needs that might be met by utilizing much the same Web pages.

2 parts of the Government Information home page <www.lib.uci.edu/rjsc/gimain.html> were not completed: *Locating Government Information on a Topic* and *Useful Databases and Searches*. Our existing Web pages addressed parts of those topics, but needed to be expanded and pulled together in one place for the user. For use in the workshops, these were all placed together, rather than being separated out. They will soon be added to the UCI Libraries Web pages.

UCI Reference staff was requesting more help locating information when an experienced GID staff member was not working at the Reference desk. The creation of a **methods** page seemed to hold potential for this group as well. Librarians have expressed how much the existing sites help, but they want more. Additional training for them will come at a later date as well.

For the last few years I have been working with Russian librarians, University of Moscow students and other users to provide links to useful free sites of information. We are at a point when major revisions need to be made. Librarians need resources that would help

them learn *methods* of locating information. We want to add more sites with educational information for librarians to the Russian-American Cyberlibrary <<http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/racyberlib/>>.

Locating Government Information on a Topic was one of those areas designated "under development." What we needed was a more comprehensive guide for finding government information to **supplement** the already developed pages, where users first went to the level of governmental jurisdiction and then clicked on specific topics. Once to this point, the user then had to select another way to find the information from the choices offered. It was the first cut at helping faculty, students and Reference staff locate most used government information and had met with some success. More was needed, however.

In looking for simplicity and in trying to create Web pages that would be helpful, I worked with an idea I had thought about earlier. There are similarities between a reference question received at a public desk and types of questions people using the Web might have. These questions can vary from a request for a specific title, to information on a broad or specific topic, to just knowing that a specific agency has done some work on a problem and the newspaper just mentioned it. So, you **start with the information you have and use the method most suitable to that type of information**. It may not make much difference *who* you are, the method used would be the same.

The methods I used centered around the phrase, ***Select a method to match the information you have***. The methods offered for selection are:

- **FAQ's:** Divided into broad subject areas, then specific questions asked and answered. Takes a user right to a specific site where the answer should be found. Less frustrating than making other choices. But, this method only covers selected topics.
- **By selected major topics and level of government:** If the major topic (e.g., environment or statistics) is a match with subjects on the Web page, then the user must select level of government. This links to existing Web pages created by subject at the different governmental jurisdiction levels. The searchers may still have to do some searching of the listed sites to which they are linked in order to find the answer.
- **By broad subjects on major search sites:** The first choice offered is INFOMINE where level of government is not always as important as the subject is. After INFOMINE, then the choices are for various major search sites by level of government. User may have to make choices and search on more than one site before finding the needed information.
- **By search engines:** Another way to search by subject. We suggest selected search engines that lend themselves to governmental searching. Also links to all major search engines, directories, and meta-search sites are provided.
- **By level of government:** Linked to a combination of sites already collected on the UCI Libraries Government Information home page and others such as at the

University of Michigan. Many home pages are formed around this concept.

- **Finding full text Web publications:** Many people are looking for a specific title in Web format. Locating a place to look can be a challenge.
- **Databases to identify publications and information sources:** Many of these are simply the Web version of bibliographic indexes that identify publications on particular topics. Some link to full-text sources, many do not. Probably of more use at the university and research level than the small public library.

So, in summary, I developed Web pages that could be loaded onto the Government Information home page and the Russian-American Cyberlibrary and could also be used to help with the training of the public librarians. With the training, I introduced the concept of beginning searches for government information from the UCI Libraries home page, trying to make it familiar and useful to them through the workshops and beyond.

Additional pages were developed specifically for the workshops and for later practice if someone wanted to practice or teach someone else. The tools for self-training and helping others would be available for workshop participants and others such as other public librarians or users of the Russian-American Cyberlibrary.

The first drafts were not placed on the UCI Libraries home page. Instead I placed them on my Web pages to use with workshops and discover those areas which would need improvement. This proved to be a useful strategy because I did find areas that need changing or improving.

Creating the Workshops

Though it may sound obvious in retrospect, the biggest hurdle we had to overcome was the fact that we were not going to make these people experts in government information. That takes time. What we could do was provide them with some of the **methods and Web sites** which government information librarians use most. Then the largest decision was developing an educational process that we hoped would maximize the learning experience for attendees. The basic principles I applied were those we have found to work fairly well at UCI:

- Each participant has access to a computer terminal so that they can do searches and put into practice what they are learning.
- There is both a Web page and printed handouts <<http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/workshoptoc.html>> for each participant. Those include:
 - Workshop Outline
 - Locating Government Information
 - FAQ's about Government Information
 - Evaluating Web Pages and Search Engines

- Form for evaluation
- Topics used for the class are tried out by the instructor prior to the class to make sure they work and that the instructor is prepared for questions which might arise. The instructor can also prepare other helpful remarks about searching specific Web sites. For instance, I explained about patent searching and patent applications.
- Proceeding in stages, the instructor goes through each method of locating information. Attendees are encouraged to use their terminals and follow along.
- Then, for each stage of the class, students are given a topic to search. For these classes, I suggested they each pick one of the topics supplied in the FAQ section and use that same topic throughout the workshop. In this way they could compare each method and site against the same question. Attendees then use each method to try to find the answer or some useful source of information.
- We discuss what they did or did not find, problems they encountered, etc., as they go along. Because they did not all use the same site or same question, many key points were made on how to search Web pages and what may or may not be at the site they searched.
- Make sure there is at least one break and, if possible, have people stand up and stretch periodically.
- Get them used to starting from a home page, such as UCI's, to use as their "anchor" or home base. This had more of a positive impact than I had anticipated. They felt more comfortable with a familiar starting place.
- Provide them with information about some of the sites or subjects that they would never know without some help, e.g., for many subjects, there may be more than one site with the same answer.
- Provide them with information on how to evaluate Web pages and search engines <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/evaluating.html>. Apply that throughout the workshop through discussion and providing a worksheet <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/formevaluate.html> for participants' use with each search to help them note and evaluate what they find. This gently forces or assists participants to evaluate the method and the site.

First, I created the Web pages Locating Government Information <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/locating.html>; and FAQ's <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/faqs.html>. They formed much of the basis and outline for the workshop that used the methods in place on the Web page. Then I developed the principles and design for the workshops.

The Workshop Outline <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/methods.html> was discussed at the beginning of the class so that they all understood what we would be doing, why we would be doing it and how we would be doing it. At the end of the

workshop, I again stressed that they could use the same information and continue to practice with different topics. For topics, they could either use the ones in the FAQ's which would reinforce comparison of different methods and may help users repeat visits to some sites, or, they could always use questions that came to them at the reference desk. It also gave them a tool to use when demonstrating to others how to find government information on the Web.

Follow up to Workshops

A follow-up workshop is planned at one of the regularly scheduled training sessions held by Orange County Regional Library staff. At that session, a computer and projector will be used to answer questions which attendees may have encountered since the training session. They can also provide information to their colleagues on what their experiences have been. At the time this paper is being written, we have not yet finalized the time for that meeting. I anticipate learning a good deal about the session, its methods, results, etc.

Attendees were encouraged to send comments on the workshop and the Web pages directly to me. The handouts and the Web pages contained my address, phone number, FAX, and e-mail.

For assistance with difficult questions, I also invited them to contact me or the UCI reference desk staff. I encouraged them to first try their own depository librarian who attended one session. This is opening up a continuing working relationship with these public service people. The best comment I received was from a woman who said she has always been afraid of, intimidated by, and avoided government publications and information. She commented that after the workshop, she felt as though she had achieved a breakthrough. Government information was now a little more understandable and she knew where to go if she needed further help.

Lessons learned, relearned or reaffirmed

- Plan and prepare ahead of time so you can relax and enjoy the workshop
- When using a large computer lab, have someone available to "rove" around and assist with computer glitches, help those who may have fallen behind, or, answer questions.
- Go slowly enough that people can keep up. Make sure they are up with you and help those with a problem.
- Give attendees time to search on their own. This is when discoveries often occur.
- If you are going to be coming back to the same site again and again during the workshop and it is not the browser "Home" button, have everyone bookmark that site. It makes the workshop go much more smoothly. It can be removed at the end of the session if necessary.
- One person per computer was very important. These groups wanted to search and learn. I soon found that as soon as they finished searching the assigned method or primary topic, they tried something else.
- Be willing to learn from your pupils. They can be amazing.

- Encourage students to help each other.
- INFOMINE <<http://infomine.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/w3-mysql/search/govpubsearch.html>> was a hit because the level of government was not always important to their choice and they usually found what they wanted faster through INFOMINE than with some of the other ways they searched. It also located sites they had not found through other means. The new improved version is even better than before.
- Selected search engines are sometimes better than expected. For instance, when using FAQ's we got right to the site for information on California propositions. Searching some of the other ways found official sites and partial answers. Northern Light went right to the best site first.

URL'S

This paper: <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/dlcpaper.html>

**Table of Contents for the workshop with links to all parts used:
<http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~kcollins/workshoptoc.html>**

**UCI Government Information home page:
<http://www.lib.uci.edu/rrsc/gimain.html>**