



Evidence Summary

Further Research is Required to Determine Which Database Products Best Support Research in Public Administration

A review of:

Tucker, James, Corey. "Database Support for Research in Public Administration." Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian 24.1 (2005): 47-60.

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Abstract

Objective – To examine the extent to which six commercial database products support student and faculty research in the area of public administration.

Design – Bibliometric study.

Setting – Academic library in the United States.

Subjects – Six commercial business-related database products were examined: Proquest's ABI/INFORM Global edition (ABI), EBSCO's Business Source Premier (BSP), Gale's General BusinessFile ASAP (GBF), EBSCO's Academic Search Premier (ASP), EBSCO's Expanded Academic Index (EAI) and Proquest's International Academic Research Library (ARL). Three of

the databases (ABI, BSP, GBF) were chosen because they address the management, human resource, and financing elements of public administration. The other three (ASP, EAI, ARL) were included because of their multidisciplinary coverage.

Methods – A list of journal titles covering public administration was assembled from the Institute of Scientific Information's *Social Sciences Citation Index* and previously published lists of recommended journals in the field. The author then compared the compiled list of journal titles against the journal titles indexed by the six database products. He further analyzed the results by level of journal coverage (abstract only, full-text, and full-text with embargo) and subject area based on categories described in *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory*.

Main Results – The study found that three of the six database products --EAI, BSP, and ARL -- provide indexing for the greatest number of public administration journals contained in the compiled list. EIA and ARL cover the greatest number of those that are full-text journals, while BSP and ASP cover the greatest number of those full-text journals limited by publisher embargoes.

Conclusion – The author concludes that of the six databases examined, EAI, BSP, and ARL are the best for public administration research, based on their strength in the subject areas of public administration and public finance. The author also recommends that librarians in the field of public administration “carefully evaluate each database to see which one best fits the needs of the library and patrons” (56).

Commentary

Although this comparison study of six commercial databases has potential, it does not deliver strong enough supporting evidence to advance our knowledge of the extent to which databases support research in public administration.

The biggest flaw with the study is that it does not measure what it purports to measure. The study claims to examine “the extent to which databases support student and faculty research in the area of public administration,” yet journals were not selected based on any identified research needs. The author does not make a connection between the databases and the research needs of undergraduates, graduates, doctoral students, or faculty, despite discussion of the importance of distinguishing between the needs of these different groups.

In assessing the database products, the author conducted only a quantitative journal count and did not consider other issues such as pricing, years of back file

coverage, user interface, or percentage of peer-review journals. Presumably, this study was intended to aid librarians in database product selection in the area of public administration. Without consideration of these additional issues, the study’s usefulness is limited, and the proclamation that certain database products are ‘the best’ cannot be supported.

Using *Ulrich’s* subject classification scheme appears to have been an unfortunate choice for this study, because it resulted in too many journal titles falling into the ‘other/miscellaneous’ category. One database, for example, had 80% of its full-text journal titles fall into that subject category, making it very difficult to assess its usefulness.

The study is at times inconsistent in the way it refers to the various database products – often switching between their abbreviations, full names, product names, and vendor names; sometimes even using different acronyms for the same product. There is also some confusion between the terms ‘criteria’ and ‘categories’; the study states that the databases were analyzed for content based on three criteria: ‘abstract only, full-text, and full-text with embargo’.

Although the author conducted a detailed literature search, there is no clarification of how his study differs from previous ones, or even an explanation of why this study needed to be done. One of the study’s conclusions was that public administration librarians should undertake their own evaluations of the databases. It would have been a more effective study had one of its goals been to reduce the need for individual libraries to conduct their own independent studies of the databases.

Had the different research needs of the various library client groups been first identified and issues such as pricing, user interface, and back file coverage, been

considered, this would have been a much stronger study and would have been able to aid librarians in selecting database products in the area of public administration. As it is, the research from this study does not lend itself to be used in decision making.

Works Cited

Institute for Scientific Information. Web of Knowledge. Social Sciences Citation Index. Journal Citation Reports. 15 Feb. 2006
<<http://scientific.thomson.com/products/jcr/>>.