

Discovery

By Kurt Wagner



“I like Google because I just type in my question or keywords and I get results.” “I just don’t know where to start looking on the Library web page.” “I usually take whatever results are at the top.”

These are three things we hear at the Cheng Library Reference desk regularly and they clearly summarize one of the problems we face with more and more of our resources becoming available online. There are too many options and confusing results. It sure would be great if the Library page could be more like Google – simple and easy to search.

Over the summer the Library will be implementing a new search interface that will do almost exactly that – offer a single search box that will retrieve books, e-books, video, music, articles, and other library information. This tool is an example of “web scale discovery.” To achieve this, we point this tool at all of our resources: the online catalog, our subscribed article databases, other online content, and our database of digitized collections. Almost anything we have that is online or in electronic format can be included.

Who is this intended to serve? Just about any library user can benefit from this new search tool. Trying to narrow down a topic or see what’s out there on the subject you’re interested in? Just type in a few keywords. You’ll be surprised at the variety of results. The results list will clearly indicate, on each of the items as well as on a side list, how many of the results represent books, journal articles, or other types of sources. From this list it will be quite simple to further narrow the results by date range, articles available in full-text, just scholarly publications, or specific collections within the library. This tool will be especially valuable to the student who is taking a 2000- or 3000- level research course and doesn’t know which of our 130 databases to search within. Type a few keywords and you’ll notice that, along with your results, you’ll see several suggested databases. This is because the web scale discovery tool is not meant to replace searching in our databases directly. This new tool is meant to get you initial results quickly.

Web scale discovery will also be valuable to those searching for material in interdisciplinary topics. For example, a search for “asthma in children” might retrieve results from the medical literature, but it might also retrieve results from the sociology and economics databases. This new interface will help users conduct a more comprehensive search across all of the library’s varied resources.

Despite all of this, we do not propose web scale discovery to be the best way or the only way to search for library materials. We are hoping that this will help simplify your searching and improve the quality of your results. The Cheng Library staff is still committed to providing outstanding service and assistance. Stay tuned this summer for an improved library search!