Educating the data user

Introduction

Finding information today need not mean going to a library. One can put a data diskette into a microcomputer, dial a remote mainframe through a modem, or turn on a CD–ROM drive from a desk at home, from the office, or from a college lab. And the information sources accessed can be as varied and as complex as the collection of a college library. But has the ease of access to information sources increased "information literacy", the ability to define a search strategy, identify good access sources, retrieve appropriate materials, and evaluate sources located. Probably not. Information skills in use today are too often identical to those used when the gateway to information was the library's card catalog and the Reader's Guide!

New information access skills must be developed. Retrieval skills which can fully exploit the potential in contemporary information access by combining traditional print sources with electronically generated media in an innovative synthesis. To meet this challenge, a growing number of American colleges and universities have added modules on electronic information access to their bibliographic instruction programs. Many articles in the literature describe their successes and failures. But an examination of this literature indicates that no specific attention is given to public data in machine–readable format.

Despite the growing importance of datafiles in business, public administration and academia research, public data is still discussed primarily in its print form in bibliographic instruction. Obviously this doesn't mean college students don't learn about data. Quite the contrary. College courses in business and the social sciences are very quantitative in keeping with the reality of the way business and research is conducted today. But the objective of most quantitative courses in these disciplines is the development of technical and analytic skills, not the acquisition of information proficiency. Often instructor–created, the datasets used in course–work offer analytic problems but bear no relation to actual public data sources. Data sources which these same students will surely use on a regular basis in their careers in business, in public agencies or in academia. The failure to teach them to design search strategies which include numeric datafiles, to evaluate the usefulness of these files alongside the same information in other formats, and to acquire these files in the most efficient manner possible, leaves a large gap in their training. Identifying and locating good numeric data sources and choosing among the storage formats available are important information skills.

At Baruch College, City University of New York, the objective of the Library Instruction Division is to educate faculty and students, graduate and undergraduate, to the vast possibilities of the contemporary information

environment. We have included all the varied sources the Library presently collects, including machine-readable datafiles. We treat datafiles as an as an information resource, leaving to others the analytic training of data users. The purpose of this panel is describe the efforts that have been made at the college to incorporate numeric datafiles into a very varied bibliographic instruction program and to underline the importance of bibliographic instruction in the training of data users. The panel consists of members of the Library Instruction Division each of whom, besides their instructional responsibilities, has responsibility for another data-related library function. Each of the panelists will discuss their individual roles and the work they have done in developing the methods being used in this program. But first some information about Baruch College.

Baruch College is a four-year college, predominantly undergraduate. It is part of one of the largest public university systems in the United States: the City University of New York. It consists of three schools, Liberal Arts, Education and Educational Services and Business although its primary strength, and the majority of the student body, is in the business fields. Most of the graduate programs, which include a Ph.D. are in business fields. To meet the needs of its students and faculty, the Library began an instructional program more than 15 years ago. Its goal was and is the improvement of the level of "information literacy" among Baruch graduates and faculty.

The Baruch programs emphasize the responsibility of the researcher or information consumer to develop appropriate strategies for finding information, to become knowledgeable about major sources in a field, and to choose access methods most appropriate to the problem at hand. Extremely sophisticated and complex, the course offerings have responded to changes in the information environment students are expected to work in. The program offers levels

of education and training suitable for students and faculty with differing needs and differing backgrounds. The offerings include

- Library Orientation Exercises

- Library Research Workshops — one or two lecture modules given within another course to meet specific information objectives within that course

- Bibliographic Instruction Courses — 3 credit courses designed to teach the conceptual aspects of information access as well as the specific skills of information retrieval

- Computerized Information Services Training Seminars — Programs designed to teach online information access;

- Data Resources Seminars — seminars devoted to machine-readable numeric datafiles

- specialized Study Center to provide resources and training for graduate business students.

The most recent addition to this multi-faceted program is a curriculum, currently under development, for an information studies major and minor intended for those students in liberal arts, business or education who are interested in pursuing information, not necessarily library, careers.

The papers presented as part of this panel will detail how numeric datafiles, public data sources, have been incorporated into the varying parts of this program.◻