CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
On Facts.com
October 2006

In October of 2006, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a mini-review of Facts.com.

The Reference Suite @ Facts.com provides access to World News Digest, Issues and Controversies, Today's Science, and World Almanac

Each reviewer independently, or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staff, reviewed and evaluated Facts.com. Though other faculty and/or staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the mini-review was the responsibility of the CCL-EAR Committee. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the service to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

RANKINGS

#1 --- No Support
#2 --- No Support at this time. Future support conditional, based on enhancements noted below in Comments Section.
#3 --- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campuses for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below.
#4 --- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campuses for their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's mini-review. Unless otherwise indicated, all comments are for FACTS.com only.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 3.5

Is the product suitable for community college students?

Since the committee last reviewed this database in 2000, significant changes have occurred in content and interface. The Reference Suite @ Facts.com is still a convenient one-stop shopping for students. It includes four databases: The World News Digest, Issues and Controversies on File, Today's Science, the World Almanac and the World Almanac Reference Database. Libraries may subscribe to individual databases or the entire Reference Suite. All four databases have the same look and consistency in the design. The Reference Suite offers ease of use and written material in easily readable form, appropriate

for the community college. Users will appreciate the special features. All articles contain background information and suggestions for further research.

INFORMATION DATABASE 3.5
Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

The **World News Digest** includes the full text of Facts on File World News Digest since 1940 and is updated every week, a live news feed from Reuters which provides hourly updates of international headline news with archives kept for two weeks, images, maps, photographs, editorial cartoons, historic documents, and charts. The information is edited every week and comes from major newspapers and magazines, such as the New York Times, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, BBC Summaries of World Broadcasts, Business Week, Congressional Quarterly, the Economist, Chronicle of Higher Education, and others. The database also includes Editorials on file from 1979 to the present. World Press links includes links to newspapers on the website. A list of leading newspapers with websites is arranged by country of origin. Where it is not obvious what language services are provided, the language name is given in parentheses.

The **World Almanac Encyclopedia** portion of the World Almanac Reference Database contains the full text of articles taken from Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia, with monthly updates, and a collection of special reports and links to the content of the World Almanac and Book of Facts.

The World Almanac database contains the full text of the World Almanac since 1999 with the exception of third party material licensed for print only, monthly cover stories, and updates to the content and links to websites outside of the Reference Suite. Special features include "Find it Fast", "Born This Day", "Did You Know", "This Day in History" and a one question "Test Yourself" with answers provided. One change in the World Almanac from the previous review is the change in some of the tables. The table of the 10 most populous U.S. cities is now arranged by size and not alphabetical by state. The table for median price of existing single-family homes is still the same listing alphabetically. An option for a ranking list would be helpful.
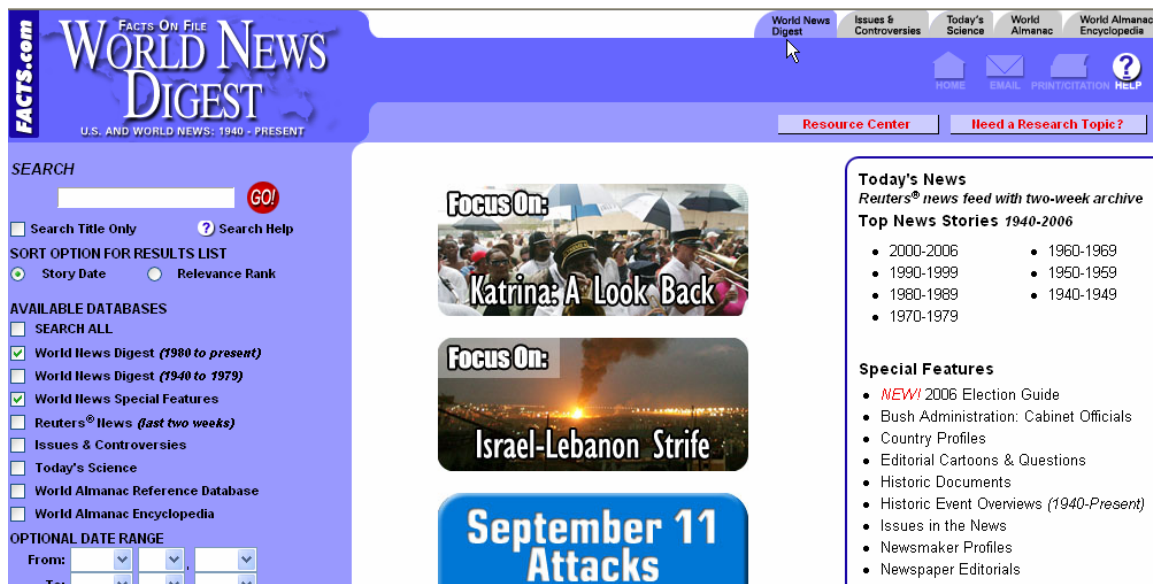
Today's science draws on reports from conferences, government Internet sites such as the National Aeronautics, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, United States Geological Survey, Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institute of Health. In addition to the reports, Today's Science relies on major scientific journals, newspapers and magazines such as American Scientist, Archaeology, Audubon, Smithsonian, Technology Review, Discover, Nature, Popular Science, Science, Science News, Scientific American, New York Times, and covers topics on health, the environment, technology,

physical science, earth and space science, science and society. . This database presents the back file of today's science on file, which is published monthly since 1992. A special feature is access to "Science in the Headlines" and "Hot Topics," and special features which include "Biographies," "Crossword puzzles," "image gallery", "Editorial Cartoons", Internet Sites and special content for educators.

The **Issues and Controversies** database presents controversial topics in the news going back to September 1995. Included in each search article, are sidebars, key news events, and related articles. Articles included chronologies, illustrations, maps, tables, bibliographies, and contact information. In addition, Issues and Controversies offers the following special features: Key News Events, Sidebars, Related Articles from the Reference Suite, "Issues: Pro and Con" menu, "Bill of Rights in Debate" menu, "By the Numbers" a statistical snapshot of key issues, "Groups to Contact" for more research, "National High School Debate Topic" since 1997, Editorial Cartoons and questions, Newspaper Editorials and a section for educators with suggested activities for classroom use.
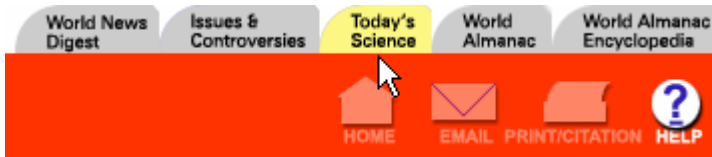
SEARCH INTERFACE - 3

Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?
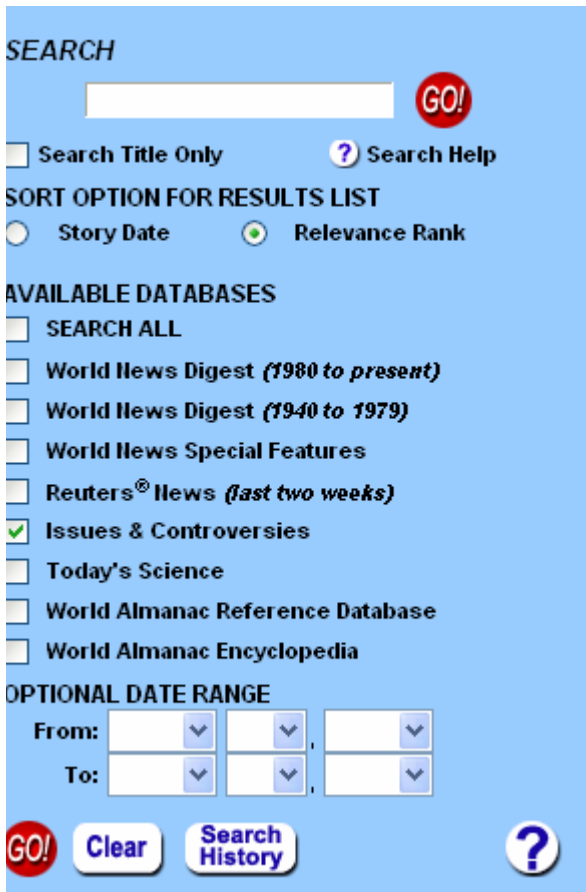

The search interface has changed since the committee wrote the review in 2000. The layout is much easier and more intuitive to use as well as visually attractive. The interface makes it easy to search a single database or checking other databases. There are multiple search options available within each database. There are two primary access portals to search information in Facts.com.

The first one is to click any database tab from the top right navigation bar. The highlighted tab will link to the home page of that database.

The second is to use the search text box located in the left frame of the interface for a basic search. The basic search options allow the user to narrow the search by selecting databases, limiting the search to words found in titles, limiting by date range, and sorting by date or relevance ranking. The terms entered in the box will be connected.   Cross-linking between databases is extensive and useful. A search for "global warming" in all databases pulls every article that mentions the topic. The user can read an article on global warming, and follow links on the sidebars from the left frame about key events in the history of global warming and use the section on "By the Numbers" to get statistical snapshots. In addition, the left frame offers a list of related articles to the topic arranged in chronological order, and each article links to a story on that event. Some articles on certain topics also include country profiles. Students by moving from one article to the next can gain insight into important events.

One change from the previous interface is that search terms are now highlighted in the results to make it easier for the users to see why an article was retrieved.

In each of these databases there is a lead story in its current issue, at the center of the home page. A new cover story appears each week. Each major article includes a bibliography and Internet sites, in addition to suggested keywords for further research.

Today's Science and Issues and Controversies provide interactive subject indexes arranged in a hierarchical list of broad topics further subdivided into narrow subject headings. Users can also browse by topic in pre-selected categories: "Historic Events," "Key People," "Newspaper Editorials," "Historic Documents," or search by keyword or phrase in the basic search box. Students who have no topics may browse the subject indices as well as clicking on the "Need a Research Topic?" button located on the upper right of World News Digest, Issues and Controversies, and Today's Science web pages.

Need a Research Topic?

Need a Research Topic? *CLICK HERE!*

Topics are hyper-linked and new topics are in red text. Each research topic results page provides users with additional links to related information to the topic as well as provocative questions for researchers to think about as the subject is explored.

A "Resource Center" button is also available from World News Digest search and results pages. This button is located to the left of the "Need a Research Topic?" button. The Resource Center has two hyperlinks: "Tools for Students" and "Tools for Educators". "Tools for Students" provides users with links to additional information on Research Tools, Presenting Your Research, and Analysis and Understanding. "Tools for Educators" provides users with links to additional information on Classroom Activities and Assignments as well as Teaching Aids.

Results

The results of a search in all databases will display a list of articles arranged either chronologically or by relevance depending upon the user's choice. If the search terms results in a large number of citations, links to other results page are listed on the bottom of the page. Each article or citation provides the title of the article, the date and which database it comes from. Clicking the title will bring up the full text of the document with possible links on the left hand side of the screen. Returning to the search results is not possible, except through the back button on the browser.

It would be helpful to have a link to go back to the search results initiated at the beginning instead of having to use the back button of the browser.

Printing and Emailing

Printing an article is done through the web browser. A message appears alerting the user to use the browser to print the article and use the back button to go back to the database. The printing includes the two citation styles for the article in addition to the instruction on printing.

Emailing the article is possible but attachments to the email do not include images.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES - 3.5
What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?

Facts.com provides extensive help throughout the database. There is a "Search Help" link below the search box, which provides information tips for quick searching.

Another help link in the form of a question mark is available on every page on the left navigation bar and on the top right corner of each page. The help menu contains three sections: The first section provides information on the contents of the database, sources, maps and photographs, credit licensing and contact information. The second section focuses on how to search the database. The third section includes citing the various resources in the database. Both the MLA and the APA style associations are provided with examples. This is useful for World News Digest since it contains cartoons, newspaper editorials, country profiles, Reuters, and other sources. The fourth section includes technical support and contact information. One can email, fax, or call Facts.com for inquiries. A toll free number is provided for Monday through Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 pm. Eastern Time.
The documentation about the contents of the database and the search instructions are easy to follow and well written.

COST - 3,
If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

Facts on File offer a variety of subscriptions. Libraries may subscribe to individual databases or may subscribe to the entire Reference Suite at a discounted price. Subscription is based on the college full-time equivalent. The cost of individual or the entire suite is very reasonable.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE – 3

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?

Access from off-campus was reliable and we never had any stability problems with the connection. Response time from technical services was excellent. In 2004, Facts.com completed a redesign of the database interface to address ADA/Section 508 compliance to make their products accessible to users with disabilities. Navigation instructions are ADA/Section 508 compliant. In a couple of weeks, the speech enabling plug-in software "Browsealoud" by Texthelp Systems Inc. will be available at no cost to Facts.com users with disabilities by downloading the software Facts.com from the subscriber information web page. Facts.com provides identifiers/descriptors of any non-text element that is accessible to speech software instead of text-only versions of Facts.com databases.

Reviews:

Golderman, Gail and Bruce Connolly. "The Reference Suite@Facts.com." School Library Journal (April 1, 2002): 48

"The Reference Suite@Facts.com: Facts on File News Service." Library Journal 127.7 (April 15, 2002): S48.

Sheets, J.E. "Reference Suite@Facts.com." Choice (June 2005): 1790.