CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
CQ Researcher
April 2005

In April 2005, selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of CQ Researcher.

The CQ Researcher provides in-depth reports on current and controversial issues, with lengthy discussion of the issues, pros and cons, background information, a chronology, future outlook, a bibliography and relevant organization contacts.

Each reviewer independently, or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staff, reviewed and evaluated (database name). Though other faculty and/or staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member only and not transferred to another. 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.

The following attributes were examined:

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

SEARCH INTERFACE
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?

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

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

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

OVERALL ASSESSMENT
Based on the attributes listed above, is the product suitable for community college students?

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review.

INFORMATION DATABASE 4, 4

The print CQ Researcher has long been considered a core reference resource for public and academic libraries. Its strength lies in providing in-depth information on a variety of contemporary and controversial topics. As such, the CQ Researcher is a useful resource for multiple disciplines including political science, communications, sociology, criminology, law, and science. The editors of the CQ Researcher "identify the topic, and then the writer prepares the report after reading background materials." The online report appears one day before the print publication. Once these reports are published, they are not updated. Each week's report focuses on one issue and averages 20-25 pages. Each report typically features the following sections: Abstract, Overview, Background, Current Situation, Outlook, Special Focus, Chronology, Pro/Con, Bibliography, Next Step, Contacts, and Footnotes. The Special Focus and Pro/Con section can be particularly useful in helping students focus on a subtopic. The Bibliography and Next Step sections give students citations for relevant books, reports and periodical articles. The Next Step section is conveniently divided by subtopic. This database is essentially an online version of the print periodical. The main advantage to the online version is that it allows for off-campus access, faster updating, as well as the ability to e-mail reports.

SEARCH INTERFACE 3.5, 3

The home page of the CQ Researcher is attractive, simple and clean. The current report is highlighted in the middle with a color photograph. On the right hand side is a list of the eight most recent reports, followed by a few recent news stories. If you select one of the news stories, you will be directed to related reports. Beneath the news stories, upcoming reports are listed with brief annotations and a date of when they will be published.

The CQ researcher goes back to 1991 and provides multiple ways to search for reports: Quick Search, Advanced Search, Browse by Topic, Browse by Date, and a PDF alphabetical index listing broad topics.

From the homepage, there is a quick search box on the left hand side. Users may enter keywords and will obtain a list of reports and their date of publication in relevance ranking. While I normally prefer to use most other databases' advanced search options, with the CQ Researcher, I find that I am usually satisfied with the results I obtain from

the quick search. This is probably a result of the CQ Researcher searching hundreds rather than thousands of articles. While the default is for the search results to display in relevance order, results can be resorted alphabetically by report title or chronologically.

There is also an advanced search option. This option allows you to search for keywords in either the full text or report title only or topics only. You can also set date limits and request that only specific sections of reports be searched (abstract, overview, background, chronology, current situation, pro/con, outlook, bibliography, next step, contacts footnotes, and special focus). Finally, you may select a different sorting option (either relevance, date or title) before the search is submitted, and may display as many as 30 results on the page.

The Advanced Searching allows you to utilize full Boolean operators and phrase searching. Using the Advanced Searching and looking for "Capital Punishment" as a phrase, in both "topic only" and "report titles" retrieved no hits. The best result was looking for the phrase "Capital Punishment" in "Keyword/All Text" search. Looking up the same subject alphabetically in the PDF index directed me to "Death Penalty."

In addition, users may browse reports by date or topic. While the "Browse by Date" is straightforward, I find the "Browse by Topic" to be problematic, especially in comparison to the pdf index. The "Browse by Topic" does not include cross-references as the pdf index does. For example, if you look up "logging" in the pdf index, it refers you to "forests & forestry" where numerous reports are listed. However, if you look up "logging" in "Browse by Topic," there is no entry and you are not referred to "forests & forestry." Sometimes, "Browse by Topic" will have both a term and the cross-reference from the index listed, but not link the two headings. For example, if you look up "Latinos" in the index you will be directed to "Hispanics." Under "Browse by Topic," there is an entry for "Latinos" which links to one report; however, there is no see also reference to "Hispanics." This is unfortunate as there are 20 reports listed under "Hispanics." I think it would be much better if the pdf index was formatted with live links and replaced the "Browse by Topic" option. Alternatively, the cross references could be added to "Browse by topic."

A second search for "Arab Countries" in Browse by Topic listed 11 reports, the most recent one dated 1/24/2003. Two recent reports "Democracy in the Arab World" dated 1/30/2004, and Exporting Democracy dated 4/1/2005 were not listed under that heading, yet are extremely relevant.

Users may search their subject using the PDF cumulative index. This index goes back to 1991 and is updated monthly. A search for "Stem Cells" in the PDF index listed two reports while a quick search for *Stem Cells* using the "Quick Search" pulled 31 articles, with "*Auto Industry's Future"* report placed seventh in the list of search results. *Auto Industry's Future* mentions cells, fuel cells, cell research but wasn't related to stem cell research. This article seems to be a false hit. Users who want better results might want to resort to searching the PDF cumulative index for their topic. Another option would be to search InfoTrac to locate CQ article citations by topic then go to the CQ for the text. It is

unfortunate that subject indexing was not done on this database as a supplement to the keyword search. The ability to search by subject would be a welcome feature.

Other noteworthy features:

A link to the Spanish language edition of the CQ Researcher in Espanol for subscribers

Your Profile: Users may create a profile in the *CQ Researcher and* save their favorite searches for future reference and retrieval.

Document History: The search history links to the titles of the last 25 documents visited in the CQ Researcher starting with the most recent document visited.

How to Cite: Each search result page has a CiteNow icon at the top of the page which generates a citation based on a choice of four styles: APA, Bluebook, Chicago, and MLA. A Cite Notice alert is provided explaining how the editorial staff used the different guidelines for citing CQ Researcher.

Favorite Documents: Users may bookmark their favorite documents to retrieve at a later time after setting up a profile with CQ Researcher.

Report display is easy to understand and navigate. Choices for emailing and printing are available. Users may sort their search results from a pull-down menu by relevancy, alphabetical by title, or by date.

Each search result page includes at the top right hand corner an option for emailing the report, and another option for printing. Users may choose the html version or black and white PDF version. PDF files are available in black and white for reports dated from January 1996, and in color for reports published since January 2001.

Also provided on each search result page are links to save the report to *favorite documents*, a *CiteNow* link which allows the user to generate citations for the listed report in APA, Bluebook, Chicago, or MLA styles, and a *Find Keyword* icon.

The *"Find Keyword"* link will take the user to their 1st search term(s) occurrence in the text surrounded by double arrows on both sides. Clicking the left arrows will take the user to the previous occurrence of the search term. Clicking the right arrows will take them to the next occurrence.

Reports opened directly from the homepage or "browse by topic" only load the first section; to access the full report, the user must click on the "full report" link on the toolbar. Reports opened as a result of a search load in their entirety. It would be preferable if all reports loaded in this way.

The database was tested on both Windows and Mac platforms. For Windows, Internet Explorer 6.0, Netscape 7.1 and Mozilla FireFox 1.0 were the browsers used; on the Mac

side, Internet Explorer 5.2, Netscape 7.1 and Safari 1.2.4 were used. The html versions of the reports opened easily and quickly. As would be expected, the pdf versions (when available) took a little bit longer. Sample reports were e-mailed from all browsers and all opened with no problem. It is the html version that is e-mailed. It would be an added benefit if the user had the option of sending the pdf version.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES 3.5, 3.5

Online help is available in several places. Within the CQ Researcher, there is a FAQ link at the top of the page. Questions (and answers) such as "What is *The CQ Researcher*?," "What do the features in the document window do?," "How do I cite the *CQ Researcher Online*?," and "How do I contact CQ Press technical support?" are addressed. An *"About"* link is also available providing contact information (phone and email) for technical assistance and for subscribing to CQ Researcher in Espanol. Information is also provided along the left bottom corner of the page for "Find a Topic," "How to Cite," and "What's New with the CQ Researcher."

CQ Researcher also has a new tool called "CiteNow!" It allows the user to generate citations for individual reports in APA, Bluebook, Chicago, or MLA styles. However, the MLA and APA citations generated do not appear to conform to current standards. I am not sure about the other two styles.

There is also a help center located on the CQ Electronic Library (library.cqpress.com), which is the website for all CQ Press online databases. The "Administrator Resources" includes online forms to fill out on IP access and referral URL. The contact information of technical support is also listed here. Technical help is available via phone, e-mail or an online form. The hours are 8 am-5:30 pm EST, Monday-Friday.

User training support is available at no cost. Visual support material, such as research pads and tabletop posters, may be obtained. CQ Press can also provide web-based training sessions. They are currently updating a training/support site at www.cqpress.com; at this point, however, there does not appear to be much available other than an online form to request assistance. It would be an added benefit if training materials were available for librarians to download from the web.

CQ Press also provides an e-mail notification service of updates on their products.

Usage statistics are available and may be accessed by a designated person in the library.

COST 4, 4

Considering that this database is likely to be used frequently by multiple disciplines, the cost is very attractive. There is also an option for libraries to purchase Perpetual Rights

Pricing. This option allows libraries to continue accessing CQ Researcher back files from 1991 up to the point in time when their subscription lapses. If this option is purchased, then the subscription cost for subsequent years is significantly lowered.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE 3, 3

The connection from both the campus network and home access through DSL was always reliable and stable with no problems. Response time was a little slower retrieving the PDF version of the report from my home computer.

Remote access is available via IP, referring URL, or password. CQ Press defines authorized users as full and part time students, faculty, staff, and authenticated library cardholders. Patrons not affiliated with the library but who are physically present at the library are also allowed.

The CQ Researcher is not ADA/Section 508 compliant and does not have a specific timetable for that.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 3.5, 3.5

Given the favorable cost of this database and the likelihood of its use by many disciplines on a college campus, I would consider this to be a core resource for most colleges whether in print or online. While it is slightly less expensive in print than online, I believe the advantage of providing remote access is worth the extra cost.

The CQ Researcher database is a must for community college libraries. It is heavily used in our library and our students appreciate the detailed report, the colored charts, the statistical information, the pro/con feature and its ease of use. One suggestion for improvement would be to provide cross references to the "Browse by Topic."

Other reviews of this database:

> Quinn, Mary Ellen. "CQ Researcher en Espanol." <u>The Booklist</u> Apr. 15, 2004: 1474-1475. (note: While this review covers the Spanish version of the database, it is still relevant for the English version, as well.)