CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of Project MUSE
February, 2000

The California Community College Libraries, Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of Project MUSE. Launched in 1995 by the Johns Hopkins University Press and Johns Hopkins Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Project Muse now offers online access to the full text, full image and full audio of over 100 scholarly journals in the arts and humanities, the social sciences and mathematics. Johns Hopkins has expanded the holdings; in addition to its own journals, it now includes journals from the presses of Carnegie Mellon, Duke, Oxford, MIT and several other notable universities. Project Muse offers unlimited access for subscribers and perpetual access to the archives for purchased journal issues.

Attributes of the information resource were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the "least value" and 4 representing the "most value". The following attributes were examined:

INFORMATION DATABASE
Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its 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
If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone help line available?

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

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE
Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

#1 --- No Support

#2 --- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon

enhancements noted below in Comments Section.

#3 --- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California

       Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection.

       Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in

       Comments Section.

#4 --- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal

       be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries

       for their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review as well as comments taken from the individual Review Reply Forms.

INFORMATION DATABASE - 3, 3, 4, 3, 2, 3, 3
Titles included are pretty clearly oriented towards four-year college and university users (Chaucer Review, Oceanic Linguistics, Late Imperial China, Journal of Speculative Philosophy, etc.). However, a number of the titles are currently subscribed to in at least some community college libraries (Africa Today, American Literature, Modern Fiction Studies, MLN (Modern Language Notes), TDR/The Drama Review, etc.), and a number of other titles appear to be titles community college libraries might be happy to have. The level of many articles will prove to be above the level of the majority of community college students, and will be a stretch for others, but will be accessible to enough students that a trial by the community college libraries is definitely in order. I suspect that most faculty would also be happy to see a scholarly database added to the mix. ******** A list of the journals included in the database is easily accessed, and also a list showing which issues of each title are available. Coverage varies by title, some holdings going back to 1993, many others only to 1995 and some only to 1999. While the number of titles included in the database (113) is impressive, a fair number of the titles have only one or two issues included so far. ******* I appreciate the library-friendly, non-commercial nature of Project Muse policies. For example, once a library licenses specific years of the database, it maintains ownership of the titles included for those years, even if the library decides to cancel its Project Muse subscription later on. And unlike many aggregators' databases, copyright permissions are not withdrawn and restored and withdrawn at a moment's notice for issues already in the database; if an issue appears in the database it will stay there in perpetuity.

This is the sanest database I've seen, ever. ---I love: -- the way each article has a set of cascading links up the chain from table of contents of that issue, through the journal itself, all journals, and the search screen; -- the way the article is displayed ready to print, no special clicks, or keystrokes; -- the way that footnotes within the text are hypertext; --the inclusion of a short notation of when a physical print page

ends and the next begins; -- the way a hard URL is given to that specific article to aid in citation. Some things I would change: -- the top pages are too graphic-intensive and the cute little moving image at the bottom took a while to download even over my ethernet connection, can't imagine waiting on these pages over a modem.

This database focuses on the university/academic presses with the emphasis on arts, culture, history, literature, philosophy and politics. It was hard to determine the coverage (back to issue one?) since it appears that this is a a trial database with only some of the content available. I tried a variety of searches in the literary, historical, and general interest and found a wide range of hits for each search.

The only downside is the high level of ability required to understand articles for the community college student. The coverage is good and growing. Access is guaranteed for backfiles. Quality of journals is very high and so is the quality of the images.The journals are peer reviewed and would be valuable for students and faculty. Certainly honors and transferring students would benefit.

Project Muse is an online full-text database accessing over 100 scholarly journals from ten university presses in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences and mathematics. Although I think this database might be potentially useful in the future, I currently consider it to be a "work in progress" not yet ready to be offered to community college libraries due to its lack of functionality (see below).

Project muse is a periodical index/database of selected titles from Johns Hopkins University press and 10 other academic presses. It offers full text access to 112 titles from these publishers in the areas of the social sciences, humanities and mathematics. Most of the titles go back to the mid 90's. The interface is straightforward and the product does not have a lot of bells and whistles. Once nice feature of this product is that the page numbers are embedded in the article for easy citation and note numbers are linked to the references at the end of the article. Graphics can be enlarged. From the home page one can click on the publishers name and go to a page that describes the publisher and lists their titles on Muse.Clicking on a title allows the user to select (through pull-down screens) a volume and issue number and view the all the contents of that issue.This can also be done from the document page. Titles in the collection can be accessed by title, subject, and collection. These are very scholarly titles that are probably not available in most community college collections.

This database of full-text, full-image journals is an excellent supplement to the less scholarly material normally available to the community college student. While the back-file is not extensive, this database does provide access some scholarly opinion. A feature of the database many of our faculty would enjoy is the ability to view the table of contents (which includes an abstract and Library of Congress subjects for major articles) and browse individual issues of each journal. A disappointing feature is that not all the journals listed in the search by journal section are actually included in the collection, i.e., Black Renaissance.

SEARCH INTERFACE - 3, 3, 2, 4, 2, 3, 3
The Project Muse look and feel is clean and simple. Users can search all the journals at once or any

combination of journals at once. Regular Boolean search expressions can be used, including adjacency indicators, field limiting, truncation and wildcard characters, thesaurus and concept searches. Although it's possible to search several or all journals simultaneously, I did not see a way to search several *years* simultaneously or to search a range of years. The query language appears to be quite powerful, though many of its fine points and complexities will be lost on the majority of community college students (e.g. author!=Seuss to retrieve records in which Seuss does *not* occur in the author field). CC students are used to more straight-forward, user-friendly search engine features (pull-down menus, forms, etc. as opposed to raw Boolean queries) and will probably stick to single word or phrase searches. ******** It's unfortunate and probably confusing that a couple of search operators are not those commonly in use on Web search engines and in other databases. For example, *single* quotes, rather than double quotes, indicate phrase searching--'community college' instead of the more common "community college." ******** Search results are ranked in order of relevancy, and the degree of relevancy (100%, 90%, etc.) is indicated next to each hit. ******** One interesting feature is that the page numbers from the *print* version are noted in the online version of the articles for easier citing and matching. ******** Suggestions: It would be very helpful if the search buttons currently located at the bottom of the page appeared at the top of the page as well. Particularly, for someone who just wants to search all journals at once, the present arrangement requires an extra mouse click to get to the bottom of the page every time the user wants to click the search buttons, pretty annoying after you've done it once or twice, and lots of students won't even look to the bottom of the second screen so will miss the search buttons entirely. (Pressing the Return/Enter key will also initiate a search.) It would also be helpful if the date of each article were displayed in the search results list. (--much more useful than the article "Size"--What is size? # of words? # of bytes? # of lines?)

I love: -- the additional Boolean operators (especially the @, where the search automatically find thesaurus synonyms for the keyword); -- the way you can choose to view the list of journals by title, subject, and place housed (and that the pull down menus walk you through these choices --- could have made them a little longer to display more info at one time); -- the dictionary which goes beyond a subject word thesaurus to tell whether your exists at all in the database;
Things I would change: -- place the "search in" and "search types" (simple, fuzzy, dictionary) at the top under the keyword so I can see my choices right away on the first screen of the page; -- provide a browsable display of subject terms in your thesaurus and provide those subject terms as hypertext links with each article; -- the search results list seems a bit unfocused, this is a function of algorithmic searching I believe, I don't like a database reinterpreting my Boolean logic;

Easy to use natural language searching seems fine for a student who wants just that. The interface for more advanced searches requires study and training. I found I got bogged down by the help screens and explanations. Community college students would also find this to be true! After searching for a "Library of Congress subject heading" field search format, I gave up. It was not easily located! When I tried a natural language search GATSBY AND NICK AND JUDGMENT, I was surprised to find over 7,000 hits.

Interface is clear and easy to follow. Ability to search, download, and forward material is a model for other databases to follow. -- Very little training would be required by students to effectively use the

material. -- hotlink available form web page to on campus sites.

The opening search page presents the user with a list of all the full-text journals which may be searched individually or as a group and a pull-down menu allowing the user to select a particular year or all years. There is a link to searching tips. The search operators include Boolean, adjacency, proximity and field specific searching. Various wildcard operators are also available. Another interesting feature is the ability to do a search involving synonyms and like concepts. -- Another link at the top of the page directs the searcher to use "the old search engine." That link takes the user to a search limited to the John Hopkins publications only. Furthermore, a search using the old search engine produces a hit list of file names rather than journal article titles. To search the database for all 112 titles from the ten university presses, the user must know to go to the bottom of the page where there is a search button. Access to searching the entire database ought, in my opinion, to be right by the search query. Why feature the "old search engine" at the top of the page.The downloading of information resulting from a search request was consistently slow. I think a user would find the delay quite frustrating.

I was somewhat confused at first by the search interface. On the search screen (at the bottom) is the help message that gives extensive help with how to search, talks about the simple,concept, fuzzy, dictionary, and relationship advisor buttons and practically anything else one would want to know. But when one clicks on "return to homepage" it takes you to a different page, with the features described but when you enter a search you get an error message. All these explanations seem to apply to this page for searching and not the page that works. According to the help screen one can do phrase, Boolean, adjacency,and field searching and use 6 different truncation symbols along with the advisor buttons to assist with the search. But not all of the advisory buttons were available on the search page that worked. On this pages is a list of titles that one may choose to search,and the searcher customize by indicating everything should be searched in the database; only titles, author and subject' or citations and also choose the number of hits displayed in the result list. But all these choices are at the bottom of the screen not under the search box.There are also three buttons simple (to start the search), fuzzy(to use variant spellings in the search), and dictionary(to verify spelling for your search terms). Phrase searching and Boolean searching worked equally well. The search screen I used was adequate, but the customizing features and help should be at the top, not the bottom of the screen

The search interface is reasonably straightforward and simple to use. It may be used successfully by the novice. The more experienced user or one who has taken advantage of the searching tips is able to use a wide variety of search operators to construct precision searches. A bonus feature is the inclusion of thumbnail graphics with the option of enlarging them. Another benefit for community college students is the dictionary. It allows the student to view and select from an alphabetical list of words spelled similarly to the keyword and add them to the search, thus expanding the search and alleviating misspellings.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES - 3, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 3
Project Muse offers much explanatory information about the database itself, how to subscribe, licensing terms and copyright information, and so forth. According to the"Contact Project Muse" page,

PM offers technical support for Muse access questions (as opposed to browser questions or problems) via e-mail or telephone. (An e-mail question about connection delays has not yet been answered, 24 hours after I sent it.) A lengthy FAQ is also helpful. Quarterly statistics are offered via e-mail, broken down by journal title and by type of hit (article, image, etc.). ******* Online help is is provided in several locations. Selecting the"Click here for searching tips" link leads to a page which lists available Boolean search operators, with examples. A link from this page to "online help" leads to an *extensive* set of hyper-linked pages which can be read page by page like a user manual or by selecting topics from a Table of Contents. There seem to be some inconsistencies in the different sections of online Help. For example, I saw three different examples for ways of restricting a search to a particular year: year=1982 (on the "Search Operators" page), 1897=year (on the "Searching Fields for Values and Value Ranges" page in the online help section), and the pull-down menu selection for year at the top of the search page. The only one which worked was the pull-down menu choice, and I never did figure out how to limit a search to a *range* of dates, e.g. 1990-1998, instead of a single year.

I love: -- how the first help screen is a cheat sheet of Boolean operators, folks who need more discussion can go on to that if they like; -- how the online help discussions are comprehensive and clearly written, with examples and hypertext linking of special terms;

Online help is not particularly "friendly" but if someone cares to wade through it, more sophisticated training can be achieved. I could find only an email help line (help by web). Vendor supplies initial training if needed. An easier online help would be desirable. THE FAQs do not supply information about the database itself, but rather about subscriptions to the database. This could be a good way of communicating tips and tricks in using this resource.

Telephone technique support available and helpful.

The initial page of search tips is quite straightforward. Then there is a link to online documentation which is quite extensive. Here the user gets an explanation of the search engine, PLWeb Turbo, and a lot more information about search refinements. Clicking on the "contact" link gives the user information about contacting Project Muse by email, phone, and fax.

Clicking contact on the home page give one the e_mail address and telephone number for tech support and has a FAQ link. The help screens were very extensive and gave a good explanation of the features and search strategies for the product. Although minimal, the help screens are deployed to be used in context with explanations of buttons and search options clearly noted.

COST - 3, 4, 4, 4, 3, 4, 4
Project Muse offers many, many different pricing structures, with heavy discounts for community colleges, high school and public libraries, consortia, etc. They are to be commended (and thanked profusely!) for recognizing the differing budget constraints of different types of libraries and for not simply trying to cash in on their product at the expense of potential users. Community colleges and

particularly this community college consortium (double discount) will definitely appreciate this flexibility though individual campuses will have to decide whether the specific journal titles included in the database justify the still significant price for their own clientele. The cost seems very reasonable given the quality of the search engine and the caliber of the journals included.

Cost seems very reasonable for this resource however it appears from their help screens that use is restricted to "on campus use" [one geographically-contiguous campus at any given time. The Multi-campus plan permits campus-wide use; however, each campus within a subscribing institution must pay for separate access. Multi-campus sharing of the resource under a single subscription is strictly prohibited. The Basic plan permits up to 25 IP addresses, computers, or individuals at a single building site to access Muse simultaneously. Subscribing institutions are expected to make their best feasible efforts to enable access only to those people who are registered users of the institutional network.] This seems to be a conflict from what the Muse representative told us (regarding referring URLs).

This product is a wonderful addition to a general database. It offers peer reviewed journals at a great price with the promise of more than one hundred to come.

It appears that the pricing is reasonable for community colleges, especially with the opportunity for consortium purchasing.

The price quoted was very attractive for the kind of material offered in this product.

Based on the number, variety and quality of the included journals the cost seems quite reasonable.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE - 2, 4, 3, 4, 2, 4, 2
The connection to the server was *extraordinarily* slow each time I used Project Muse, and each page took *forever* to load. Individual articles seemed to take even *longer* than forever. We were not having problems accessing any of our regular databases or other Web sites at these times, and many of these are also served considerably East of here, so I'm not sure what the problem is. (Traceroute muse.jhu.edu stalled at: h2-0.jhopkins.bbnplanet.net (192.221.74.77) *every* time I ran it.) This would be a serious concern, bad enough in any library, but especially problematic in libraries dependent on older computers or those libraries without T1 lines. At a busy reference desk, one can't stand and wait for each page to load without having a pile-up at the desk. And students using the database simply won't wait; they'll just go to a different database.

Fast database, good connection.

Searches for natural language searches seemed long (but retrieved 7,000 hits)

There is no problem in response time and the product seems very stable to use. We did quite a bit of work on the database and had no problems.

Access to the Project Muse web page was reliable and stable. Downloading search results, however, was consistently slow.

I had no trouble accessing Project Muse and response time was very fast.

Response time varied greatly, sometimes lightning fast and at others excruciatingly slow.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT - 3, 4, 3, 4, 2, 3, 3
Project Muse is a unique undertaking, with many features and policies that I like. It will be most accessible to high-level users, intelligent, computer-saavy students who are willing to spend the time learning to compose a good Boolean search and who are capable of dealing with scholarly level articles. In an a community college setting, I'd say it's a database for faculty, librarians and top students---not a bad thing at all since many faculty encourage their students in transfer level courses to restrict their research sources to "scholarly" or refereed journals. It's probably not a database that will be widely accessible to the masses. Outstanding as a supplement to core magazine and newspaper databases. ******* SUGGESTIONS: 1. Correct the # of journals in the database description for Project Muse. (http://muse.jhu.edu/plweb/dbdef.html#Muse) It still says the database consists of 40 JHU journals. There seem to be at least 45 JHU journals listed in the title list, and 60+ other titles are also included. 2. Place search buttons and selections at top as well as bottom of search page. 3. "Click here"?!!! Good web design calls for more descriptive links, e.g. "View databases descriptions," rather than "Click here for database descriptions" and "Use the old search engine" rather than "Click here to use the old search engine." (See any web design style manual if you don't believe this. :-)

You have my suggestions for improvements above, but I would take this database even without them.

Because of the academic nature of this material, cost, and the ability to retain "ownership" after the subscription period ends, I suggest we open t his for a more extensive trial. ---

As I mentioned above, I believe this product has potential but in it's current version, it is unacceptable due to the lack of a more well organized search interface and the consistent slowness of the search engine.

This product offers materials not usually available at a community college. Many faculty on our staff in the language arts area would be interested in their students having access to these journals and also for the faculty themselves. The price also makes this a product to consider.

This seems an viable addition to most community college collections and especially valuable for scholars program and transfer students. Overall this product has been well thought out, both for content and technically. The price quoted for community colleges makes it very attractive.

What would your rating be if product was evaluated based on utility for your home campus only? - 3, 4, 3, 4, 2, 3, 3

We have many faculty in the humanities and social sciences who would probably be very happy to see this database. I think I would scrape money together from somewhere, if need be, to get this database.

At the price, it's a no brainer.

I like the idea of offering over 100 scholarly full-text databases at a reasonable price. I think perhaps the faculty would be more inclined than the students to make use of the product. A cleaned up search interface and faster accessibility to the database material would certainly make the product more appealing in the future.

Although some of the journals in this collection are beyond what our students need or may understand, many faculty would be thrilled to have this material available for their students and for their own research needs. I would encourage purchasing this product for our campus. I would like to be able to add this product to our electronic resource collection. I think that access to such scholarly journals is an important aspect of undergraduate education and this collection is affordable for us.

<div align="center">Last Updated: February 26, 2002</div>