A Comparative Analysis of OPACs at Boston College and The Ohio State University

Rosanna M. Longenbaker

longenbaker1@owls.southernct.edu

Information Analysis and Organization

ILS 506-S70

Dr. Sierpe

Assignment 3

April 22, 2012

I began this assignment by examining the OPACs of the libraries at The Ohio State University, Penn State University, the University of Notre Dame, and Boston College. I selected these libraries for a few different reasons. One reason was that after graduation, I would like to work in either a museum library or an academic library. I decided that OPACs from university libraries would work better for the assignment because the collections would be much larger than those of museum libraries. I chose The Ohio State University and the University of Notre Dame because many of my relatives have attended those two schools. I chose Penn State University because it is a public university like The Ohio State University. I selected Boston College because it was a large Catholic college that could be compared with the University of Notre Dame.

When I went to the library websites for each school, I noticed that each website gives users a search box to do a federated search of all accessible materials, including journal articles The Ohio State University was using a version of World Cat titled "World Cat @ OSU." Their main page also contained links to a variety of other catalogs. One catalog was "The Ohio State University Library Catalog" (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2012). I explored this OPAC further. The Penn State University Libraries site presents users with a federated search tool titled "LionSearch," which also offers an advanced search where you can look for materials outside of the library's holdings (The Pennsylvania State University, 2010). Their actual library catalog is called The CAT and it offers a "Quick Search" or an "Advanced Search" with multiple search boxes. You can toggle between the options and Boolean limiters (SirsiDynix, 2000-2011). After navigating away from the federated search box for the Boston College University Libraries (The Trustees of Boston College, 2012) you will arrive at the "Quest Library Catalog." Three settings buttons across the top of the screen allow the user to choose between a "Basic," "Advanced," or

"Command" search (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009). This was the first time I had

encountered a "Command" setting and I was interested by the option. The Hesburgh Libraries at

the University of Notre Dame begin users with a screen for "Catalog Plus," which is a federated

search (Hesburgh Libraries, 2010-), but they have the option of "Catalog Classic," which seems

to just search the catalog. However, it also appeared that a user could search the catalogs of Saint

Mary's, Holy Cross, and other college and campus libraries from the same site (Hesburgh

Libraries, n.d.). The "Catalog Classic" was almost identical to the OPAC in use at Boston

College.

I was surprised by the similarities between the four OPACs. There were no noticeable

differences between the Boston College and Notre Dame catalogs. I wonder if they were made

using the same software. The advanced search screens in all four OPACs were similar, but "The

Cat" from Penn State University gave the most search boxes. It gave one search box for each

field even though you could toggle between the fields (SirsiDynix, 2000-2011). I wonder if users

realize that they can change the settings.

I decided to focus on the OPAC for the Ohio State University because I am originally

from Columbus where the school is located and more importantly because I liked that they give

users search tips in the OPAC. When you look at a search box there is a list below it that

explains Boolean operators and how to use wildcards (The Ohio State University Libraries,

2010). The user does not have to guess what symbols the OPAC uses or look for a separate help

section.

The second OPAC that I chose for my comparison was "Quest Library Catalog" from

Boston College. I picked the OPAC because of the novelty of the code search, which was only

available in the OPACs for Boston College and the University of Notre Dame. I chose the

Boston College OPAC because it was clear that it only included materials from one university.

I was very impressed with the "Quest Library Catalog" on the Boston College website. It

had many features that would be useful to students and scholars doing research. The catalog

gives the user the option to perform a "Basic," "Advanced," or "Code" search. In a basic search

you are given one search box. You can enter a single term or multiple terms that will be searched

for together. It has 18 different options for searching for the terms that users have specified

within records. In addition to just doing a keyword search, you can also search for a keyword

within the title or author field. The user can also search "Authors beginning with" and "Titles

beginning with." While the keyword search generates a list of books, the "beginning with"

options generate an alphabetical listing of authors, titles, or subjects depending on the category

selected (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009).

When the user clicks on an author or subject a list of books comes up (Boston College

Libraries, 2000-2009). The list displays have some very helpful features that I have not

encountered in other catalogs. For example above the list of results there are links allowing you

to go to the next subject in the catalog or the previous subject in the catalog. Instead of only

saying previous and next, the catalog actually lists the name of what you are looking at along

with the name of the previous and next subjects (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009). There is

no need to flip back and fourth between web pages to see what comes after your current

selection.

When you select an individual record, you have the option of viewing it in "Full View,"

"Brief View" or "MARC Tags View." The full view gives you links to other books on the same

subject or by the same author. Some records even connect to listings of the table of contents or

other information that is available through the Library of Congress. Other records give links to more information at Google Books (Boston College Libraries 2000-2009).

The advanced search provides three search boxes. The user can toggle through different search fields and Boolean operators. Instructions and tips on how to use the advanced search are located on the page below the search boxes. They are concise and would be easy for a student or researcher to use. The advanced search results in a list of books and other materials (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009). One nice feature is that when the user enters an individual record in the "Full View" the search words that were entered to arrive at that record are in a different color than the rest of the text

The code search uses Common Command Language. It allows the user to search very specific fields such as place of publication. A short list of codes is provided for the user on the search screen along with brief samples and instructions. I tried the code "WPU" which let me search "words in publisher name" (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009). It produced a list of records containing "Harper" in the publisher name since that was my search term.

The OPAC also provides conveniences to users when they go to find the physical book. Certain books can be found on a map of the library. This map can even be downloaded to a cell phone! Users can also make lists of materials with notes that will be saved until the end of their session. There is also the option to have only the selected results display. Researchers can even E-mail records to themselves or request materials through the catalog (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009).

One other thing that was very useful about this OPAC, was that it does not erase the previous search terms when you return to the search box to start a new search. That was great

because I could modify my search without having to reenter all of the terms (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009).

There were a few shortcomings. When searching for a specific ISBN, the number that a user is searching for is not highlighted. I did not notice at first that the book I had entered was the second item on the list. Also, it is not clear how you return to the search box. The terms "Basic Search," "Advanced Search" and "Code Search" appear in boxes near the top of the screen (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009). Something about the design of the buttons made me think that they were just settings to be adjusted instead of buttons to return to the search box.

The catalog for The Ohio State University gives the user one blank search box. The default tab is a keyword search. Other tabs allow the user to search by title author or numbers. There is a tab that allows the user to search for both a title and author at the same time (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010). I thought that this setting would be useful for someone who knew exactly what book he or she needed and was just looking for a call number. The user can then use a drop down menu to select the library they want to search or leave it in the default setting, which is the full catalog. Another drop down menu allows the user to pick the field they would like the results to be sorted by (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010).

As I mentioned earlier I like the brief instructions and search tips that are listed under the search box. That makes users aware of special features such as "Wildcards" and "Proximity Operators." The catalog has a number of other useful features. When the user is presented with a list of materials, call numbers, or other items, they are given the option of "extended display." This will show more detail about all of the items in the list. For example if the user clicks "extended display" while looking at a list of call numbers the titles of the works will also be

given. There is also a button that allows the user to modify the current search. The lists of results

can be saved or just the selected items can be saved (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010).

The "Advanced Search" feature gives four search boxes and allows the user to toggle to

the fields and Boolean operators that they would like. Instead of listing "Not," the catalog lists

"And not" (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010). This might confuse some users.

Individual records automatically list the title, author, and publisher information. There is

a series of tabs below that information where the user can pick what else they would like to see.

The default gives the call number and availability of the book. The other tabs are "Details" and

"Find Similar Items." The "Full Record" option shows these together. "Find Similar Items" gives

links to the author's name in the list of authors and links to lists of information in other fields.

Some records give the user a link to a preview of the work through Google. These same records

allow users to rate books on a five-star scale (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010). That

would allow users to participate in the OPAC. This could be considered Web 2.0.

The biggest drawback that I found to this catalog is that the link to the "Advanced

Search" is only listed under the "Keyword" tab (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010). I

think that users could easily miss the advanced search if they were looking under title or author.

However, they would be less likely to need the advanced search if they already know the title or

author of a work.

Also, I thought that some of the ways that information was displayed in the catalog were

unusual. When a list of titles is displayed, the uniform title is listed instead of just the title (The

Ohio State University Libraries, 2010). That did not seem very useful to me because I thought

that users who wanted works translated to English might not recognize the original titles in a list.

It also led to odd results. When I tried out the "Author and Title" search tab, I entered

"Shakespeare" for author and "Romeo" for title. One of the results that came up was listed as "Hamlet." This seemed strange so I looked at the individual record. It was actually a translation of four plays, including *Romeo and Juliet,* into Czech. The uniform title said simply "Plays." I am not sure why it was listed as "Hamlet" (The Ohio State University Libraries, 2010).

There are many differences in the layout of the OPACs for The Ohio State University and Boston College. The search boxes for the two are opposites. In the Boston College OPAC, the user selects the tab for the library or subsection of materials that he or she would like to search and then toggles through a list of fields to search. The other OPAC has tabs for the search options and a toggle feature to select the library or subsection such as journals.

The Quest Catalog for Boston College lists results in a default order, but it tells the user what that order is at the top of the list. The user can change the setting while looking at results (Boston College Libraries, 2000-2009). The Ohio State University Library Catalog gives patrons options for how they would like the results to be sorted when they enter search terms. The Ohio State University offers an "Author and Title" search from their basic search box (The Ohio State University, 2010), while the Quest Catalog would require a patron to use the "Advanced Search."

Although the layout is very different, both OPACs have many features in common. There are methods in both for users to select just certain records. Users also have options to take their search results with them. This could be via E-mail, making a list that can be printed, or downloading the results. Both OPACs allow users to access lists from links within records. They both can display the MARC coding for a record. I was impressed with the two OPACs. They would be very beneficial to researchers wanting to find all of the books and other materials held by the given library relating to their topic of interest.

References

Boston College Libraries. (2000-2009). Quest Library Catalog. Retrieved from:

http://library.bc.edu/F/2C2IDNND77XUCTLNGY271QPPUVI4UKCETLX94PR4VSE2

6TD8T5-06751?func=find-b-0&local_base=BC_CATALOG

Hesburgh Libraries. (n.d.). Hesburgh Libraries: University of Notre Dame. Retrieved from:

http://www.library.nd.edu/

Hesburgh Libraries. (2010-). Hesburgh Libraries: University of Notre Dame [Catalog Classic].

Retrieved from: http://alephprod.library.nd.edu/F/?func=find-b-0

The Ohio State University Libraries. (2010). The Ohio State University: Library Catalog.

Retrieved from: http://library.ohio-state.edu/

The Ohio State University Libraries. (2012). The Ohio State University: University Libraries.

Retrieved from: http://library.osu.edu/

The Pennsylvania State University (April 10, 2012). Penn State University Libraries. Retrieved

from: http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/home.html

SirsiDynix. (2000-2011). & The Pennsylvania State University. (2001-2011). Penn State

University Libraries: The Cat. Retrieved from:

http://cat.libraries.psu.edu/uhtbin/cgisirsi/?ps=S2uB11v41h/UP-PAT/47720642/60/26/X

The Trustees of Boston College. (2012). Boston College University Libraries. Retrieved from:

http://www.bc.edu/libraries/