CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of CQ Library
February, 2000

The California Community College Libraries, Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a "hands-on" study of CQ Library. CQ Library provides Web access to two of CQ's most popular print publications, the CQ Weekly and The CQ Researcher (formerly Editorial Research Reports). CQ Weekly provides nonpartisan legislative news and analysis on Capitol Hill. CQ Researcher provides weekly in-depth articles on current and controversial issues, with lengthy discussion of the issues, pros and cons, background information, a chronology, future outlook, a bibliography and links to related CQ Weekly stories.

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

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#1 --- No Support

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

        enhancements noted below in Comments Section.
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#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 (4,4,3,2,4,3)

CQ Weekly and CQ Researcher (formerly "Editorial Research Reports") have long been standard reference tools in college libraries. The content of the online versions appears to be the same excellent articles as in the print versions of these two sources. The added value of the online version is, of course, wider access and quicker updating.

CQ WEEKLY article coverage is from 1983 to the present. In addition to news and discussion, Floor Votes can be searched by keyword to see how specific members voted on a bill. Votes cast are included from 1995 to the previous week. The CQ Researcher index is updated quarterly. A year 2000 Congressional Calendar in PDF format is also offered, though currently it shows little more than holidays, House and Senate recesses and dates of the Republican and Democratic national conventions. CQ Researcher is a staple of academic library reference collections which serve undergraduate students, and the timeliness of the digital version makes it even more valuable. Full-text retrospective coverage to 1991 is useful, particularly for institutions which prefer to support only the digital version (i.e., to drop the print subscription). This product offers two Congressional Quarterly publications online CQ Weekly Report and CQ Researcher. Both are important publications for community college students. CQ Weekly is searchable back to 1983 and CQ Researcher back to 1991. They contain the complete print documents in a format that is easy to access and search without a lot of effort on the searcher. Although the frames format makes it difficult for the visually impaired and also to print from.

CQ Library provides full-text access to Congressional Quarterly Weekly back to 1983 and to CQ Researcher back to 1991. Both hard copy versions of these two resources are enormously useful in community college libraries. As online databases, I have rated them low because access to information is too limited to the specific resources. For example, Expanded Academic Index ASAP through

InfoTrac SearchBank offers indexing to over 2,000 journals, including CQ Researcher. Though CQ Researcher is not available in full text in SearchBank at this time, I would sooner have students locate what they need across a broad journal database and have the hard copy version to give them if CQ Researcher was one of the useful resources indicated. It is true that CQ Weekly is not available on Search- bank at this time. I don't know if it's available through Pro- quest, Ebscohost, First Search or any of the other online database providers.

CQ is an invaluable source for government information. The online content is a useful addition to the print version. The full text and coverage would be a welcomed supplement to our on-line collection.

The CQ product has always been an excellent resource for our students. The difficult thing about the product was its indexing. It is very hard for students to understand. Now keyword searching has solved even that problem. The scope of the database (back to 1983) is excellent. Things I would improve:(1)the document is delivered in sections. The link to a PDF copy of the entire document had to be pointed out to me. The single most important aspect of a resource is that the student be able to take the "article" home with them to read and mark up. This should be, and isn't, a very obvious, one-step procedure. (2) Frames makes navigation difficult. When I wanted to go back or print in one frame, that frame has to be selected. This is not well known by most web users. Neither of these problems renders the databases unattractive however.

SEARCH INTERFACE (3,3,2,2,4,3)

After Internet portals and database products which overwhelm users with the plethora of choices and visual noise on each page, I really appreciate the clean, simple layout of the CQ Library screens--two frames (four actually, but it looks like two) and only four buttons in the upper left corner of the screen (six for CQ Researcher). That's it. Users can browse topics or search by keyword, category, date, bill number Committee name and so forth. Search results in CQ Weekly are sorted by relevance, a nice feature.

It's a nice clean use of frames, with table of contents in the left frame and the text of items selected in the larger right frame. One thing I found annoying was that in CQ Weekly when you make a selection from the left frame, the table of contents in that frame changes to show items on the topic you selected. After selecting an item, the corresponding text appears in the right frame--so far so good. But then when you're finished reading the item and you want to go back to the original table of contents topics, there's no button or method that I could see that will take you directly back to the list of topics in the left frame. To return to that table of contents, users must either hit the Back button repeatedly or return to the CQ Library Home Page and select "CQ Weekly"all over again. The addition of some link back to the topics list in the table of contents would be very helpful (particularly during periods when Internet congestion makes the loading of each page on the way back take forever).

CQ RESEARCHER articles can be searched by keyword (only) or selected from a list of past reports. Keyword searches are sometimes not very effective since they pull every article which even mentions

the search word once or twice. For example, a search on "libraries," pulled a list of 48 articles, with "Rethinking Ritalin" and "Adoption Controversies" placing second and third in the list of search results. "Rethinking Ritalin" mentions once that bookstores and *libraries* have books on the topic. "Adoption Controversies" mentions once that adoptees often go to *libraries* to research their birth mothers. The article on "Puerto Rico's Status," sixth in the list of search results, seems to be a false hit, not mentioning "libraries" even once. Users wanting better results might want to resort to searching a database like Gale's Expanded Academic Index to locate CQ Researcher article citations by topic, then go to CQ Library for the text. It's unfortunate that controlled vocabulary indexing was not done on this database as a supplement to the keyword search capabilities; search results would have been *much* more relevant.

I'd give CQ's look and ease of use a "4" rating, but its search engine deserves a "2." The use of frame is less than desirable from both a usability and an accessibility point of view. The WAI Web Content Accessibility Guidelines give specifics about making frames as accessible as possible. I am not qualified to judge whether or not CQ is following these guidelines to the letter, but even for the average library user, frames cause difficulties. For example, printing is more complicated in a frame-based design. [Good general advice for any information provider who wants to market to libraries: librarians want products which require us to do less instruction on computer applications so we can concentrate more on teaching "information seeking" skills.] The search screen is easy to use, but keyword searching has its limitations, particularly fulltext keyword searching. The ability to search by subject or browse the index would be very welcome.

Downloading the PDF index is too slow for most users, and browsing through it is cumbersome. The text version of the index is not readable. Perhaps putting the index into HTML as well would solve this problem. Another alternative is to make the database searchable by the subject headings used in CQ's index. Perhaps the easiest solution is to give the user the choice of keyword searching the entire document

Available in PDF format is a commendable feature. Some users prefer downloading an entire document in one piece to hopping between the sections in HTML format; those who want to print an entire document will also find the PDF version convenient. Having a choice of formats generally makes a product more valuable. Also, Adobe is making progress on accessibility for PDF documents (which alleviates one of the problems with frames).

The interface for these products is very easy to use. Each has a search feature. The CQ Weekly search screen is very extensive. The person searching has the ability to really customize their search with the ability to choose word or phrase, subject(pull down screen) date, bill number, committee name(pull-down screen) and even by-line. But I found some problems with getting results from a search. Maybe I made too many choices? But the ability to search by bill number and floor vote is nice. Search terms are printed in red in the Researcher articles and if the term is in a certain area of the article in CQ Researcher that section has a gold ball next to it. All the charts and illustrations seem to be included in the on-line version of CQ Researcher. But where are the instructions for printing? How about a no frame option? And what is with using the right mouse button? Although the information is wonderful,

as with the print products, and the ability to search is great I was really frustrated with CQ Researchers index using Acrobat and the printing process. The index for CQ Weekly was great, why can't it be for Researcher? I also had the screen freeze, could not use the Back button, after looking at some results from the search. Text Index difficult to read.

The search interface for both CQ Weekly and CQ Researcher defaults to the latest issue of each resource. Both "help" screens are quite clear and not overwhelming in length. Both search interfaces allow for Boolean, adjacency and default truncation. Both interfaces also show the user how to cite the resources.

Searching CQ Weekly is available using word and phrase (in other words, keyword searching), by pre-established subject headings taken from the subjects used weekly in the magazine (such as agriculture, appropriations, defense, etc.), by date, by bill number, by committee name, by page number and by byline. I noticed when I searched the keyword "education" since 10 priations," that I got a chronological sort although the help frame on the left seemed to indicate the sort was done by relevancy ranking. Searching CQ Researcher is available by title and text. There is no subject searching - only keyword. The search results are presented by relevancy ranking. A chronological approach is accomplished by specifying a date/dates. The index to all the issues can be downloaded either as a .pdf or .txt file. I looked at both. The .pdf file had broad subjects with all relevant article titles list below. The .txt file was a long list of unalphabetized article topics.

An easy database to use. It seems intuitive and the directions are in a standard format with other online products. The search screen itself was very well developed with many opportunities for boolean and field searching. The search results were a bit scattered. I only found articles directly related to my subject fifth, eighth, even eleventh on the list. I have a feeling the algorithm is a bit looser than necessary.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES (2,3,3,3,2)

Apparently the only way to contact CQ re. questions or technical problems is by e-mail to a CQ "hotline." This is entirely inadequate tech support. When we have a library or a classroom full of students trying unsuccessfully to access a site, we need immediate, real time contact with a technical support human being.

Online Help includes information on how to navigate the site, search, and cite articles in either MLA or APA style. Help is pretty skeletal, but includes examples and is probably adequate since the interface is very clear and easy to use. Unfortunately, online help is hidden under a link called "FYI," clear to many users maybe, but probably completely mysterious to many of our students, especially those who are non-native English speakers. I'd like to see a link labeled "Help" in the same upper right corner as the "FYI" and "Contact CQ" links.

The online help is fairly well-written and there is no need for vendor-supplied training. A technical

support email address is provided, but it could be made a little easier to find. The FAQ and customer service information links on the CQ Library main page are for prospective subscribers. Once an institution has subscribed, its users should not see this type of promotional information every time they access one of the databases. There should be a separate "gateway" for current subscribers for access to the databases and user help links. From the "Cover" of the CQ Researcher database, it is difficult to find the link to online help; the user has to click "FYI" and then "How to Use this Site". The online help should be more prominent and more clearly labeled. [Bug report: CQ Researcher's How to Use this Site link is connecting to instructions for using CQ Weekly.] Clicking on contact CQ takes you to a screen where you can contact Customer Service through E-Mail and there is a suggestion and feedback form. Clicking on FYI takes you to a screen that you can click on how to navigate and how to search in CQ Weekly. The Navigation help tells about what is in each of the four from areas and about using the right mouse button. And what the Home, Cover and Search buttons are for CQ Weekly but not the other buttons for CQ Researcher. And they do not tell you how to print! But all in all I suppose it is adequate.

CQ Library offers a "how to contact us" e-mail address for each database, a "hotline" e-mail address and a "suggestions and feedback" form for users. I saw no indication of a telephone hotline option. I had quite a bit of trouble but it seems to have been cleared up. It does, however, raise concerns. Help required a few too many screens to get to actual information. But was well written and clear.

COST (3,3,4)

No cost data was available at the time of this review. I am unable to assign a rating in this category since I have not seen any information about the price being offered to our consortium.

The cost seems reasonable.

I don't recall the exact cost of this product, but I do remember being told that if a library already subscribes to the hard copy format, the cost of the added online access is pretty minimal. Considering the usefulness of the periodical, it is cheap.

Cost of product was not available at time of review. This is a second tier product (as opposed to a full-text article database that is essential for research) and needs to be priced accordingly. I serve more than 25,000 students and need the price to be reasonable

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE (3,4,3,3,4)

I experienced delays only a few times while using the database via the campus network, and they could have been due to net congestion between our campus and the world. Amazingly, I had no problems at all using the database via modem. My institution has subscribed to CQ Researcher for the past year and we have experienced almost no problems.

Response time has always been average or above average and we have not noticed any downtime.

The response time was adequate but it did freeze up a few times after I accessed the results from a search in CQ Weekly.

In general, the connection to the product seemed to be stable and reliable and the response time was adequate.

Once we were connected, it was totally reliable and stable. Server was not slow at the times I used the product. I was able to log in right away.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (3,3,3,2,4,3)

There is no question that this will be a valuable resource in community college libraries.

It would be more valuable if its search engine didn't rely solely on keyword searching.

CQ Researcher is an excellent resource for community college libraries, but the web version could use improvement in three areas: 1) the "gateway" screen and online help links (se browseable index/subject searching/more refined keyword searching (see User interface above) 3) frames (see User interface above) Because of the information in the database and the ability to search it, although I think the Index to the print version is fine, this is a good product. But I found the frames format frustrating and the printing a real pain.

I think both CQ Weekly and CQ Researcher are absolute necessities for community college libraries. The reason that I am not so much in favor of them in the online version is because they are so specific. Students generally want to search a more all-encompassing database for information on a topic. The lack of a real subject search approach in CQ Researcher detracts further from my support of the online version. In both CQ Weekly and CQ Researcher, I came up with a number of searches that had very little useful information on my topics, due no doubt in part because CQ Researcher only goes back to 1991 and CQ Weekly to 1983.

Should be on online in every academic library.

I am quite enthusiastic about this database as many community college students are interested in issues papers. Some of the display and printing features could be improved but these are minor concerns. So my evaluation is really a 3.5.

Rating for home campus only: (3,3,4,2,4,4)

The print versions of these two sources are heavily used in our library. We would love to have them online if the price is right. On the subject of cost, I would like to note that our library budget does not

allow us to spend vastly more money on a digital product than we do on the print equivalent. In other words, it is access to the information, rather than the format per se, that is most valuable to us.

Our students should really like this product. It is getting to the point anything in hard copy is evil and having these important sources online should be much appreciated.

I would not be in favor of making this product available online to our users. We're relatively new in our use of online databases and at this point we're not specializing very much. Further down the road, when we have far more broad-based databases, I might consider CQ Library as a possible item. I would be especially inclined towards CQ Weekly because we have no online indexing of this resource currently and because searching by bill numbers could useful, though this information is available in other sources on the Internet.

We would rate it a four. I will probably get this database if it compares as better than Facts on File

Last Updated: Feb 26, 2002