

**CCL-EAR Committee Review
Of "Facts.com"
September, 2000**

Facts.com, published by the Facts On File News Services (no longer affiliated with Facts on File, Inc., the book publisher), offers a suite of reference collections for research on events, issues, statistics and people of the last 20 years. It also includes in-depth features on many historic events drawn from the 60-year Facts On File archive. The collections include overview materials, primary source documents, country profiles and maps, biographies, and photographs, and they are supplemented by recent two weeks of news feeds from Reuters. Collections may be licensed individually, as the "Facts.com database," "Issues and Controversies on File," "Today's Science on File," or "World Almanac" or integrated as part of the "Facts.com Reference Suite." The main Facts.com database, purchase separately from the Reference Suite, includes selected materials from each of the Reference Suite collections as well as from the "Editorials on File" collection which is not currently available online as a separate database.

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, 4, 3, 4, 4, 3

The Reference Suite@FACTS.com encompasses a useful array of databases in its "suite" of resources. Particularly useful to community colleges are Issues and Controversies and Today's Science. FACTS.com and World Almanac would also be useful to our students in many situations. The information is timely, yet covers an extensive backfile including 20 years of content, drawing upon 60 years of archives from Facts on File. The News Digest is updated weekly, with headlines from Reuters updated hourly. Although this information is readily available at many websites, having it indexed and searchable is a valuable resource. World Almanac is updated monthly. The base information is taken from the full text of the printed 1999 World Almanac, with updates from the 2000 edition. Again, it is extremely useful to have the full text of the World Almanac searchable by keyword. Several features are easier to use in an online version than in the print format, e.g. the perpetual calendar requires a simple click on the year desired rather than referencing from a list and then locating the proper calendar from multiple choices. Issues and Controversies contains articles on 250 topics dating back to September 1995, the inception of this resource. It is not clear for what time period the backfile will remain available or if coverage will be for a rolling time period. There is considerable overlap of coverage with CQ Researcher, and coverage within each article is not as extensive as what you will find in CQ. However, there are topics in Issues and Controversies that are not included in CQ, so librarians must make a local judgment as to how much coverage and at what level is most appropriate for your users. -----

The databases contain many value-added features. Issues and Controversies articles include bibliographies with current citations, links to websites with mostly valid URLs (I only found one invalid URL), "Keywords and Points" listing possible search terms to use in searching other databases, historical documents, maps, charts, graphs, and association addresses listed under "Groups to Contact." Today's Science includes numerous overview articles, a glossary of terms, and resources for teachers oriented to K-12. All of the databases feature numerous hyperlinks to related articles in the other databases in the FACTS.com suite. Much of the information in these databases is aimed at the high school and middle school level; but many community college students would find the information helpful in researching, organizing and locating information in the beginning stages of writing term papers or for locating, checking and verifying news events. --/--

Facts.com has done an excellent job of creating the kind of "one-stop shopping" community college students love. One hopes that this will not prevent students from looking beyond the Facts.com database for additional research materials since it is, of course, not an exhaustive collection and since parts of it seemed to be aimed at a lower level (e.g. high school) audience; but it would be a great starting place for many current events or recent historical topics. Since the database draws primarily from news sources, the emphasis is on factual content rather than on opinion or analysis; thus students will need to synthesize the gathered information and form their own opinions on the issues, not a bad thing at all. -----

The materials are taken from many, many years of Facts on File products, a number of which have been standard in library reference collections for decades. Students (and reference librarians) will appreciate the "Key Issues" feature which offers a menu of 49 hot topics ranging from abortion, affirmative action and animal rights to domestic terrorism, free trade and sexual harassment, each linked to numerous articles on the topic. -----

I found some surprising results in the Today's Science collection. For example, a search on 'bloodborne pathogens' (for the OSHA standard on this issue) turned up no hits. (Same with "blood borne pathogens.") A search on "osha" turned up only two hits, one from 1994 and one from 1997. The results were the same whether searching from the main Facts.com Custom Search page or from Today's Science's own page. Likewise, "strontium" turned up only two articles. Some of my other searches had similar results. This database does not seem to be as robust as the main Facts.com database, and I would give it a lower rating than the others. -----

A suggestion: One of the "Special Features" is a collection of photos with a browseable list of persons and events. It would be handy to be able to search the collection by keyword. -----

The encyclopedias I saw used again and again were the World Almanac Encyclopedia (not surprising since World Almanac owns Facts on File News Services) and Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia. The dependence on these two rather than on a more substantial encyclopedia such as Britannica or Americana make those parts of the database more suitable for high school level work than college level. --/--

There are four separate components to Facts.com: Facts.com, Issues and Controversies, Today's Science, and the World Almanac. Of the four components, I found the general Facts.com database to be the best. Facts.com coverage of current events is good. I retrieved Reuters articles concerning the Firestone tire recall written the day before. Facts.com has the full text of the news wires, which are a good start in the research process. Facts.com has retrospective information that is hard to find in other resources. On key issues like World War II it has news wires from the period. This is valuable information to get an understanding of perspective. Under the Historic Events menu, there are only 17 events highlighted between 1940 to 1979. It would be useful if this feature was expanded. Facts.com would be a useful tool on campus -----

The other three products seem to be geared to the younger learner. Issues and Controversies coverage only goes back to 1995. That isn't a sufficient amount of time to get an understanding of issues that have chronically plagued us, like school prayer. ----- Today's Science is also very limited in scope. There were only 26 articles in the subject index under earthquakes and volcanoes. The glossary only had a general definition of volcanoes without information about the different types (shield and composite). Today's Science has limited retrospective information. Coverage begins in 1992. -----

The World Almanac is nowhere as useful as the printed version. The online product coverage and scope is limited. The table for "Median Price of Existing Single Family Homes" had cities listed alphabetically with no option to sort by rank. The "100 most populous U.S. cities" was also arranged alphabetically. Whereas in the print, it was ranked by size. --/--

This database is very appropriate for community college students. It contains a wide variety of information ranging from Reuters current news stories to well constructed background and historical pieces in Issues and Controversies. Included are primary source documents, editorials, charts, graphs, maps and photographs. Facts.com contains the content of the entire Facts on File News Digest from 1980 through the current quarter. In addition, it provides excellent links to complimentary information included in the special features section : Historic Events (1940-1979), Key Events(1980-2000), Key Issues, Key People, Newspaper Editorials, Historic Documents, World Heads of State & Government Leaders, Country Profiles, Maps, Photos, News Art, and the World Almanac. -----

The content and sources of the databases are clearly described. A helpful section on how to cite material from them is also included. --/--

The Reference Suite @ Facts.com contains useful information for papers on current topics and controversial issues. The backfile to 1980 is helpful for students doing research on past news events. ---

The Issues & Controversies database provides the user with in-depth information on current topics. The articles are well researched and written. The bibliographies attached to these articles come from general interest magazine and newspapers like US News and World Report, New York Times and Wall Street Journal which most libraries are likely to hold. No professional journals are listed. The

articles are written at an easy-to-read level, which is helpful for students with only basic skills. -----

The topical guide to all 75,000 Facts on File News Digest articles is an easy to use index. A click and the researcher moves from the main topic to sub-topics and then to a list of articles. Researchers who are unsure of what they are looking for can use this index and find articles that relate to their area of interest. -----

Each article is enriched with links that lead to more information. For example, there are links that allow the user to trace articles on the same topic backward or forward in time, link to same subject articles in other databases and link to overview articles. The hyperlinks that are found within the articles are easy to use and lead the researcher to additional information. This has both good and bad qualities - it allows them to broaden their research and present a more complete picture of their topic; on the other hand, it is possible to stray or lose the original focus of the research when following multiple links. The keyword option that appears with some of the articles is a very helpful feature. It gives the researcher access to additional words that can be used in the search process -----

Charts, graphs and photographs are included in the databases, but a few of the links are incorrect. For example, a link for a graph about violence on TV took me to a graphic on DNA. Placing your cursor over words with a green "G" after them gives you the definition of the word. Very useful in the science database. --/--

FACT.com is a multifaceted and comprehensive collection of databases that can be browsed or searched as a group or individually. There are two levels of searching, basic or custom. Custom searching allows the user to search all seven databases. Basic searching is limited to the Facts on File news digest. Both search levels allow keyword queries, Boolean operators, wild-card characters, truncation and date limiting. Natural language searching is also supported and worked well. -----

The main menu does also contains "Special Feature" links to indexes for maps, news photos, newspaper editorials, historic documents and the World Almanac. One nice feature is the hyperlinks within news stories or articles to other relevant material within the databases. Facts.com is updated every week and headline news stories are updated every hour. --/--

Facts.com is really three useful databases yoked under one title that hyperlinks the three parts together. Each one could stand alone but it is really designed to be used as a whole. It combines full text articles that are both interlinked to the other parts of the database but are also linked to hundreds of web sites. These features make it the most useful to distance learners and to folks with inadequate library access. The downside to the database is the fact that it takes a great deal of training to get the best results. For example: using keyword and basic searching in Issues and Controversies does not bring many relevant hits in such subjects as divorce, abortion, and children. The site is featured as one that is designed for home use and one that users can quickly grasp the essentials of the most complex topics. With sufficient training the students could certainly profit from the topics covered in depth. The World Almanac and the Today's Science are much more easy to use and self explanatory. --/--

SEARCH INTERFACE - 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3

At first glance, the search screen seems rather busy and difficult to locate the needed information. The use of frames increases this "cluttered" feel, but also makes a lot of information available to the user at one time. The search screen itself is located in the left frame, and offers a basic search and a custom search. The interface offers a large number of searching options. The Custom Search allows the user to narrow the search by selecting databases, limit by true date range, and sort by date or relevance ranking. Menu options are also available, allowing the user to search by a subject index or by a list of "Hot Topics." In all cases, the user has the option of searching by keyword, indexes or overviews with lots of hyperlinks. Users can utilize wildcards, true Boolean searching with and, or and not, date range searching, and exact phrase searching. The interface also makes it easy to search a single database by providing direct links to each of the databases at the bottom of the screen. Within each database, multiple search options are available. Cross-linking between the databases by use of hyperlinks is extensive, and very useful. Printing is accomplished simply by using your browser's print functions. I was able to successfully email pages to myself without any special screens or procedures. --

There is room for improvement in a few areas. The pop-up glossaries in Today's Science do not stay on the screen long enough for users to read, let alone absorb, the information. It would be helpful to extend this time to make this excellent feature more useful and less annoying. It would also be helpful to have search terms highlighted in the results to make it easier for users to see why an article was retrieved. Consistency of subject indexing could also be improved in the FACTS.com database. When I did a search in the subject indexes under Religion--Lutherans--Ecumenical movements, I retrieved 4 citations dating from 1993-1998, but nothing regarding the recent talks between Lutherans and Episcopalians. However, when I did a Custom Search under Lutherans, I retrieved 17 articles, with the most recent article dated July 8, 2000, which discussed the talks with the Episcopalians. When I went back to the subject indexes, I could not find this article listed anywhere under the Religion--Lutherans category. Lastly, I ran across frequent 404 errors when clicking on links, particularly in the "Help" screens. However, the errors were not consistent; sometimes I would get the error message, and the next time I would get the requested screen. --/--

Users can 1) browse by topic in preselected indices ("Historic Events," "Key Issues," "Key People" "Newspaper Editorials," "Historic Documents," "Photos," "Maps" and so forth) or 2) browse a hierarchical list of Facts on File subject headings ("Menu Access"), or 3) search by word or phrase in the Basic or Custom search boxes. The browse topics method will probably be popular with students who can't think of a topic for their papers, while anyone looking for information on a particular topic will have better luck with a keyword search (taking into account, of course all the usual problems associated with false hits from keyword searching. A search on "olympics," for example, pulls every article that mentions the word. The first two items in search results for "olympics" are lists of obituaries for 1997 and 1998, followed by 24 other hits which are equally useless for information on the upcoming year 2000 Olympics. Adding the year "2000" as a search term gets slightly better results though the first seven items listed are still useless with regards to this topic. Theoretically this shouldn't

even be necessary since the default sort for a Basic search is reverse chronological order.) -----

Some things I like about the interface: 1) The layout is attractive and relatively easy to follow. 2) Facts.com has done an excellent job of integrating the various sources from their many collections into one seamless database. (Users still have the option of limiting a search to one or more specific collection(s) if they choose.) 3) Excellent use is made of hyperlinks. For example, one can read a lengthy article on the Vietnam War and follow links within the article to other stories on topics mentioned within the article ("U.S. Bombs Haiphong area," "Vietnamese War Protests," etc.). In addition, the left frame for most articles offers a list of "Key News Events" related to the topic (The article on the Vietnam War lists articles on related events clear back to the 1940s.), arranged in chronological order, each hyperlinked to a story on *that* event, each with its own set of related links. The left frame also includes links to other relevant "Overview Articles" and to biographies of key persons related to the War. Articles on some topics also include "Country Profiles" on countries related to the topic. Thus students can move around easily from one story to the next, gaining insight into related events, important people, and so forth until a fuller picture of the topic begins to emerge. 4) Users can sort results by date or by relevance. -----

Problems: 1) The "Begin Search" button is at the bottom of the left frame (especially in a "Custom Search" where many search options are listed above it). This is fine if you want to set a date range (immediately above) for your search. But for the simple searches which most students will probably do, it would be easier if the "Begin Search" button were at the top of the frame, right next to the box where you enter your search terms. 2) There does not seem to be a "reformat for printing" option. Since students must often pay to print articles, this ends up being costly for them. 3) Articles in Today's Science have a broad red band with the words "Today's Science" and a house and question mark symbols repeated numerous times throughout the article, right in the midst of the text. In the 3-page article "Study Confirms Amphibians' Decline," this band appears 13 times. When I print the article, the red band is replaced with a small sphere with the letter "G" on it. I don't know if this is a software bug or a browser issue (iMac running Netscape 4.7), but it needs attention. 4) In the full Reference Suite, there are so many ways to end up at the same article, and so many different product names and menus that a less technically savvy student, or an ESL student (or anyone who is tired!) could easily lose sight of where they were and how they got there. 5) One really annoying feature: When you make a selection in the "Special Features" frame then make choices from a series of subsequent menus, the browser's Back button will sometimes return you one step at a time, as usual, but other times you are dumped back at the Facts.com opening screen, and you have to retrace your steps all over again to get to a list from which your selection was made. (It does not seem to happen consistently.) --/--

I found the search interface intuitive to use. There are two types of access to the information: Menu access and by searching (Basic and Custom). One can search the database by keywords, natural language, or using Boolean operators. It also supports truncation or wildcards and sorting by date or relevance. -----

Both types of access are clearly laid-out and well labeled. Little things like labeling the search button

"Begin Search" is helpful to the novice user. A small glitch is when the user has a new item displayed, the only way to get back to the results list is to use the browsers back button. -----

In Facts.com it would be helpful if the special features (key events, key people, historic events, etc.) were listed under "menu access". Once I was searching the database, it was hard to get back to the special features without clicking on the browser's back button until I got to the main "welcome" screen for Facts.com. --//--

My first impression was that the opening screen was too busy and presented the student with too many options. However, after a few minutes using the product I really changed my mind. The options presented give excellent access to the information contained in these databases. The databases are extremely well integrated with only minor variations in interface search options and capabilities and these all appear to have been well conceived and adapted to the information contained in each individual database. Once into these databases I found that navigation was easy and intuitive. -----

Options for searching by key word as well as indexes for subjects and top news stories allow flexibility for the user to find detailed information or to browse and get an overview of the topic. Having the options of relevance ranking and reverse chronological order is a good feature of the interface. However, the results list, especially for a date order search, can be confusing. Understanding that the vendor's logic is to present the overview results first, I still believe many students will not have the patience to continue on to the particular or specific article that was anticipated. -----

A major problem is that the check boxes do not seem to relate very well to what is actually searched and retrieved. A search limited to the "Facts On File News Digest" included results from Facts.com Special Features. It also appears that the Reuters News database is not searchable by key word even though it has been selected. -----

The interface has many of the more sophisticated search options, including a search history button which aid in navigation. Some additions that would be nice are the ability to select individual articles from results lists, ability to e-mail selected articles and/or print them. However, I do not fault the product for these lacks that are primarily available in much more comprehensive and costly databases. -----

Numerous links are provided throughout these databases. Such linking allows the student to follow an event or topic through the entire 20-year period to get an historical perspective. Longer articles have content lists that link to article sections and internal links to related articles. --//--

The visual design of the database is a little cluttered with too many frame sand graphics. I find the color scheme for the fonts (blue, red, white and black) to be excessive and I believe that it adds to the clutter. Each frame is jam-packed with what could be a bewildering array of links. A user might be confused about which database(s) to use, not realizing that the different databases produce very different results. Aesthetics aside, the Reference Suite@Facts.com operates as a very seamless

package. One can move effortlessly from one database to another. -----

The search feature is fairly easy to use, but weak. When more than one term is entered, a Boolean AND is assumed. You can use Boolean operators in your search, but that's not apparent from the search screen. Brief help text below the search box invites new users to click for more searching tips. The help screen that goes along with the search field gives an adequate explanation of the search process. There is no advanced search that allows the more sophisticated search functions such as field searching and proximity operators. Having more sophisticated search features would allow the user the possibility of refining the search and thus producing a quality, concise result list - especially important when using such a big database with a variety of materials. I was a little confused by the custom and basic search options. Custom allows you to select which databases you want to search while the link to basic search (which actually takes you to a screen called full-text search) only searches in the database you are currently using. -----

I could not find a "back to results list button." When I used the browser's back button I found that the page was often expired and I had to repost the data from cache. Also missing is a "best part" or "find keyword(s)" button- that feature is a big help when there is a large result list and one retrieves lengthy articles. Also useful would be a search summary and links that would group the search results by type, for example: number of results from the World Almanac or number of news articles from Reuters, etc. -

From what I can determine it is not possible to email an article. Instead, one needs to email the URL for the article. A colleague was able to open the attachment of the article. Under "file" one is able to edit a page and print or save the edited page to disc. This is a very nice feature. Using "edit page" once can remove the various frames and graphics that decorate the page and add or remove text. --/--

The search screen is located on the left-hand side of the opening page of the database. The design is visually appealing and easy to follow. It is less cluttered than most web search engines. Menu access into the specific indexes were placed below the opening screen viewpoint and users needed to scroll down the page to locate those links. The top of each page has a "home" button that returns the user to the homepage. At the bottom of each page are links to Facts.com, Issues and Controversies, Today's Science, or the World Almanac. ----- You can limit or narrow your search by date range. Search results are customizable to either display results in date range order or in relevance order. -----

Facts.com uses the web browser's features to print content, download using the File Menu or e-mailing using Internet Explorer. This feature is different from other database vendors, which provide their own ability to deliver documents within the database. -----

One useful feature that is missing is the ability to do field searching or proximity operators. Since the database is so large those features would be useful. ----- The ability to select a text only version of the search interface without the use of frames would be helpful for users accessing the product with screen reading software. --/--

The interface is very easy to use and the clearly displayed citation information is a real plus for students. It is very useful for the students to have the searchable subject headings that link selected articles with others in the joined databases. The clearly displayed citation information is very helpful and is clearly linked to the standard MLA format with good examples. --/--

USER SUPPORT SERVICES - 4, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 3

FACTS.com provides extensive help screens throughout the database. There is a help screen link on every page in the form of a question mark. The screens seem to be comprehensive and designed to answer almost any question a user might have. There is information on how to formulate a search, multiple examples, list of stop words, and even information on how to cite the resource in a bibliography. Contact information for email, toll-free fax number and toll-free phone numbers are all listed. The help screen menus are consistent from database to database, so it is easy to predict where to find specific information. --/--

Online Help is thorough and well written. Unfortunately, it is not context-sensitive which means that in the middle of a search where a student doesn't know what to do next, s/he is expected to interrupt his/her train of thought re. the search topic, stop and figure out which Help menu option to select, then read the Help offered under that selection. (It took me several minutes to find the Help screen which told me whether I could use quotes to indicate a phrase.) After that, the only way back to his/her original search from the series of Help screens s/he may have read is the browser "Back" button or the "Go" menu. A "Return to results list" button would be helpful here. Students who will take the time to read the different Help screens offered by Facts.com will be helped considerably in their searching. However, "just need[ing] something quick" seems to be an epidemic these days, so many students will miss the benefit of this carefully thought out and well-written Help and will thus not take full advantage of the database. ----- A list of the major sources is included in online Help, but the publishers point out that the entire list is a lengthy one and evolves continually. -----

A couple of problems: --The "Return to the Help Menu" link at the bottom of the "Keyword Searching: A Quick Start" page results in a "404 Not found" error message. This link should be corrected. --The word "Help" in large white font on red background at the left side of all the Help screens looks like a link back to the Help table of contents, but it isn't. It would be helpful if the word were linked to the Help table of contents. -----

Concerning in person support: A customer service rep returned my call for information within twelve hours. (My call was made in late afternoon, thus the overnight delay.) Tech support is available via e-mail or FAX. Telephone support is also available, but only Monday through Friday, and it ends at 2:00 P.M. Pacific time. Since tech support is generally something requiring immediate attention, the in-person telephone support is inadequate for West Coast users. --/--

Each product has its own help files and the help button is clearly marked with a question mark placed the same location in each database. However, I found the online help difficult to navigate. The help

was not context sensitive. So, I had to navigate through several screens to access the specific help I required. The help screens provided adequate information to solve most questions. -----

It was easy to locate technical support information. One can email, fax, or call Facts.com for assistance. It was very helpful that they listed the hours of the telephone support. --/--

The help function is more than adequate. The initial instructions "Getting the Most from FACTS.com" are quite complete and well written. There is potential for some confusion because this section is based on the Facts On File News Digest interface which contains more detail than the initial FACTS.com screen. In context help seems to be available on practically every screen as well as a clearly marked "Home" button. -----

My single request for technical support, left as a voice mail message, was quickly and effectively answered. --/--

The help button takes you to a menu of help options including how to cite FACTS.com. The help screens are not context-sensitive, but they are very detailed and the menu makes it easy to find what you need. --/--

Documentation is available online to support the product. The instructions are very easy to follow. Unfortunately the images that are provided are not very clear and are out of focus within the documentation. There is telephone support Monday through Friday from 9:30 - 5:00 eastern time. Technical support is also available by e-mail and fax. --/--

The how to contact us is clearly marked and is easy to use for both students and librarians. I did not find a phone number. --/--

COST - 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 3, 3

Facts on File offers a variety of subscription options for FACTS.com. Libraries may subscribe to individual databases or may subscribe to the entire suite at a discount. Libraries need to pick and choose carefully to select those databases that would be most useful, and only pay for what is needed. We are obviously paying for the advantage of having these resources online and keyword searchable; the difference between the printed version of World Almanac (\$11.00) vs. the database(\$145-580) is substantial. Issues and Controversies as an individual database costs more than CQ Researcher and provides less information;but as part of the package it may be a better deal. The vendor has not provided information to us regarding remote access availability or extra cost for branches, so I am assuming there is no extra charge for this type of usage. The overall cost for the Reference Suite seems reasonable for an online database if all databases will be used by your students. --/--

Given that Facts.com wouldn't *replace* expensive newspaper subscriptions in a community college library, the price for the complete Reference suite is substantial, particularly for larger colleges. The

price for the plain Facts.com database only is lower, and the product *is* attractive; individual libraries will need to carefully evaluate the cost/benefit ratio of these products with respect to the rest of their online holdings. --/--

Pricing was competitive with other comparable products. --/--

The cost seems too high for such a selective database. While the information contained is valuable and accessible, compared to a full-text general database and other more limited/selective databases, the cost is excessive. --/--

The cost seems reasonable and there is the option to subscribe to the entire Reference Suite or to choose the most useful databases for your college. --/--

The cost proposed to the EAR Committee seemed reasonable. --/--

The Issues and Controversies on File are a bar learners but would need plenty of phone reference help for the student to gain full value. The World Almanac seems less valuable if the library has Gale or Ebsco and also has the other basic on-line sources such as encyclopedias and newspapers. Today's Science has the same drawbacks in terms of value as does the World Almanac. --/--

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE - 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 3, 3

Access was not a problem. We experienced no problems connecting from our library workstations. Response and load time was good. Frames took a good deal longer to load on my (much) slower home computer, but the system was still quite functional. --/--

Facts.com *appears* to be accessible via a text based browser, but Lynx would not activate any of the search buttons with the usual key commands. I wonder what this means for the ability to search using disability readers. Browsing works fine via Lynx. I had no problem with the connection. --/--

I never encountered any problems with the connection or access to the service. The response time was always quick no matter the time of day. --/--

Access was generally good, although there were some occasions of slow response times. Access using a modem was stable and relatively quick. This vendor supports remote access using a referring URL, a very positive point from my perspective. --/--

The response time was good and I never had any problems logging on to the product. --/--

Access overall was reliable and stable. Response time within the search function was adequate. I did receive three error message "HTTP Error 404" while following the hyperlinks to the article "Armed forces to allow women to serve in aerial combat". --/--

There was no problem accessing the databases. The response time was excellent and reliable. --//--

OVERALL ASSESSMENT: 3, 3, 3, 4, 3, 3, 3

The Reference Suite@FACTS.com provides a useful set of databases with reliable, well-organized information. The database is well indexed and easily searchable through multiple options. Interconnections between databases are particularly well developed by use of numerous hyperlinks. There are many value-added features to each of the databases. While the information provided is less comprehensive and "scholarly" than some other resources, and there is considerable overlap with other resources, this particular set may prove most useful depending on your users. Its greatest advantage over the print versions of these resources is to make the leap to providing traditional "book" resources available over the web to our remote users. --//--

Assuming one is using a graphical web browser, Facts.com presents a current events package which is easy to use, well integrated and a source of high quality information. I suspect it will be very popular with community college students. Libraries should look closely, though, at whether the plain Facts.com database will meet the needs of their users or whether the value added by the additional databases in the Reference suite justifies the additional cost to their libraries. --//--

This set of databases provide access to a very helpful set of data for students who are writing their first research papers, delivering speeches, debates and other "general educational requirement" activities. It provides a breadth and depth that students can understand and use successfully. The information is easily searched and delivered in modes that are appropriate to community college students. The quantity and quality of the information is excellent, the interface and support mechanisms good. --//--

Overall, I really liked this product. It might be less confusing to have just the custom search screen and let the student choose the database(s)he/she wants to search rather than having the custom search and basic search options. ----- I like the fact that the databases are integrated and can be searched at the same time, but you can easily get lost if you're not paying attention. If you start your search in FACTS.com and view an article in Today's Science from your results list, you have to make sure you select the FACTS.com link at the top of the page to get back to where you started. If you click the home icon, you end up only in the Today's Science database. Ideally I would like to see a link from the article back to your search results list, but I didn't see that as an option. It's safer to use the back button. --//--

Adding the ability to perform field searching or proximity operators would improve the search interface. The addition of being able to e-mail from within the database, highlighting of search terms and including a non frames interface would make an already appealing product even better. --//--

The cost and usefulness of this database depends upon the level of accessibility to other online databases. If one has the basic group as recommended by EARC, the cost would be higher than the

value. The Issues and Controversies database would be very useful at the price if the site was tweaked a bit with an eye to the more untutored user off campus. The other two databases would be more redundant and thus too expensive for the overall benefit.

RATING FOR HOME CAMPUS - 3, 3, 3, 4, 3, 3, 2

I would definitely consider this resource as a package depending on funding availability. While it would not be a top priority, it would provide valuable access to our remote users that is not currently available. While the information is less comprehensive and evaluative than other resources, it would provide basic information and facts that would be useful to a substantial group of users in our community. --/--

Though we currently have a plethora of general information and news databases, Facts.com provides high quality information, very conveniently packaged. Our college would probably be interested if the price were a bit lower. --/--

My campus currently subscribes to The Reference Suite @ facts.com and seems pleased with it. --/--

Our younger students would find FACTS.com useful for finding what happened on their birthday (a popular speech assignment). We already use the print Facts on File Yearbook for that project. The Issues and Controversies database would be helpful for the pro and con papers. --/--

I would like to see our campus purchase this product. This would be a welcomed addition to other products like CQ Researcher that provide background information on controversial issues. The science and current biographies section would also be popular. The variety of information is another positive feature--graphs, pictures, editorials, and news. --/--

We would subscribe to Issues and Controversies with the problems addressed as noted above. The other two are less useful at the price. We would subscribe to Facts on File which seems to offer much more than twice the data for just twice the cost. --/--

Last Updated: February 26, 2002