

To: Melvyl Advisory Group
Heads of Public Services

From: Melvyl Central Index / View Now Assessment Advisory Group
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Subject: Melvyl Central Index / View Now Pilot – Assessment and Recommendations

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Background

In early 2011, the UC Libraries began planning for piloting and assessment of two potentially significant Melvyl features: expanded article content (“Central Index”) and View Now. Preliminary testing by librarians at UCB, UCI, and UCR took place in November 2011, and the pilot project was launched on January 6, 2012.

In March 2012, our group was charged by the Melvyl Advisory Group with recommending whether UC Libraries should move the Central Index and View Now features from pilot to production. In response, we reviewed the 2011 preliminary staff test results and other applicable data and in April 2012 conducted an assessment of the features with graduate and undergraduate students at UCB and UCD (special thanks to Melissa Browne for her help in arranging for the test at UCD).

Recommendation for “Central Index”

We recommend that the expanded journal content (“Central Index”) be moved into production. It increases opportunities for users to discover articles, and our testing indicates that it does not significantly interfere with the use of Melvyl for other purposes.

However, we also note some serious issues with content and usability that cause frustration, confusion, or failure for users. Because of these, we also recommend that the UC Libraries:

1) *Roll this feature into production quietly*, as was done with the pilot, not conducting a promotional campaign for it, and specifically not promoting it as an alternative to searching databases through their native interfaces. Naturally, the libraries should still prepare the necessary documentation, such as help pages and sample teaching materials.

2) *Encourage OCLC to address the key issues that impede access to journal article content in Melvyl.* The addition of article content in Melvyl holds significant potential to benefit students, and an intuitive user interface and support for common, article-related activities would help them take full advantage of this feature. The UC Libraries can do a valuable service by providing OCLC with real world usability feedback, including the attached report which outlines the findings of the April 2012 assessment activities. Testing with students and by librarians suggests that the following issues need particular attention:

- *Database selection:* The database selection apparatus on the Advanced Search screen is needlessly complicated and confusing and obscures the other advanced search options. Some of the database names as given are meaningless to students.

- *Article retrieval via citation:* Melvyl does not provide a flexible, unstructured way to enter part or all of a known item citation for retrieving articles. Both test participants and librarians noted that they often paste whole or partial citations into the Google Scholar search box, which handles this common user behavior extremely well.
- *System cues and labeling:* Access to full text is problematic, and cues that suggest full text availability within Melvyl are sometimes misleading. For example, test participants reported some confusion between “article” and “e-journal”, puzzlement about what the label “document” signifies, and frustration when an item labeled “ebook” was in fact not available in full text form.
- *Navigation to native environment:* Users should have an easy, direct path to native interfaces where journal- or database-specific activities are better supported, and which sometimes contain full text not available through Melvyl. Currently, many clicks are necessary to get to journals through Melvyl, and the handoff to native interfaces is neither intuitive nor smooth.
- *Content currency and scope:* Search results are often less complete and timely in Melvyl than results in a given database’s native interface. Abstracts from some of the most important databases (such as Academic Search Complete and Business Source Complete) are missing, and thus not searchable or viewable. Subject coverage is relatively sparse for fields like physics, chemistry, and engineering. Advanced search capabilities such as discipline-specific subject term searching, filtering, and term mapping are not available.
- *UC-eLinks:* UC-eLinks received mixed reviews from test participants. Some reported frustration when their expectation of direct access to articles was not met and they were instead required to re-enter search terms or browse a list of journal issues after landing at the native interface. Participants did express appreciation when UC-eLinks delivered articles using the “direct linking” mechanism. We encourage the Melvyl Operations Team to expand where possible the number of articles available via direct linking.

Recommendation for “View Now”

We recommend that the View Now feature be activated only for HathiTrust items at this time. For the pilot, View Now was turned on for free resources in three categories: the HathiTrust Digital Library, .gov and .edu documents, and Internet Archive/Project Gutenberg items. View Now aims to make it easier for users to get to a resource by providing a hyperlink in the item’s record view. However, many test participants had difficulty getting to their desired resource through the use of this feature. Given the name of the feature, users expected View Now to immediately provide a view of the item, and they expressed disappointment or confusion when it did not. Links to non-HathiTrust items frequently led to web pages that users were not able to easily decipher, resulting in frustration.

View Now is currently the best way to surface the three million public domain items in HathiTrust for Melvyl users, and we recommend it remain activated. When more direct links to full text are consistently available for other categories of material, most importantly government documents, we recommend the feature be activated accordingly.