



## How ARL Academic Libraries Present Open Web Resources – A Proposed Solution to Address Discoverability



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 13 November 2014

Accepted 16 June 2015

Available online 27 June 2015

#### Keywords:

Open web resources

Online resources

Discoverability

Discoverability of open web resources

Research guides

Subject guides

### ABSTRACT

Open web resources on the Internet have become increasingly important in the scholarly community and are being cited ever more frequently in scholarly articles. Academic librarians continue to assess and collect open web resources that are of value to the academic community in order to support research. With the questions of how ARL academic libraries collect, present, and make searchable open web resources, this paper analyzes all ARL academic libraries' websites and finds that all of them are collecting valuable open web resources and presenting these on research/subject guides. This paper also finds that some ARL academic libraries implement search boxes for the collected list of open web resources, but only descriptions or titles of the resources housed on the libraries' website are being searched. None of the libraries makes the content or full text of open web resources discoverable on the academic library websites. Based on the findings, this paper proposes a solution to address the discoverability issue of collecting open web resources and how to make the content or full text of the open web resources searchable.

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### INTRODUCTION

Librarians assess and collect resources that are of value to students and faculty in order to support research. One type of items collected are open web resources, which are subject specific websites freely accessible by anyone with access to the Internet including government, organizational, nonprofit websites, in addition to individual open access journal articles that are stored on research/subject guides. In the last two decades, open web resources on the Internet containing valuable information have been influencing the academic community and have been increasingly referenced in scholarly publications. Academic library users have adopted a new pattern of information searching and have been calling for effective searching features. Online search engines have influenced library patron's expectations for the ease of accessing valuable information. Discoverability issues of academic-valuable open web resources remained unsolved according to the current literature.

This paper observes how Association of Research Libraries (ARL) academic libraries collect and present the valuable open web resources as of spring 2014. The observation finds that ARL academic libraries gather links to open web resources, but several do not have a way to make these resources discoverable on the library website. This means that there is no way for patrons to search for the collected links and none of the libraries is set up to search the content or full text of the open

web resources. Databases usually mine several fields of data for search results, but because these open web resources are only linked to research/subject guides at the academic libraries the content is not searchable. At best, the content of the description of the open web resource written by the librarian is searchable, but it is usually only the title. To make these resources useful libraries need to make the full text of the resource searchable on library websites. Based on the findings, this paper proposes a solution to address the discoverability issue of collected open web resources and how to make the content of the open web resources searchable.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The Internet has become part of the everyday experience for many people worldwide. With the exponential growth of online resources becoming available in this new era, information from the Internet has integrated into academic-related resources, playing an important role in scholarly publications (Yang, Qiu, & Xiong, 2010). Spinellis (2003) noticed that researchers had been using a substantial amount of web resources in their scholarly publications. In one of Reed and Tanner's (2001) studies, they asked academics to rank information resources from the web. For general topics, 50% considered the web valuable, and 41.8% considered the web valuable for scholarly purposes (Reed & Tanner, 2001). Gray, Thompson, Clerehan, Sheard, and Hamilton (2008) and Wu (2009) also noticed that the Internet had become an enormous academic document repository, functioning as an important platform for people participating in academic research to obtain valuable information. As stated by Yang and Chou (2009), one of the most

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obvious indicators of the web's acceptance and value to academia was the substantial citation of website URLs in peer-reviewed publication across all disciplines.

In a study of web resources in scholarly journals, Zhang (2011) found that from 1996 to 2007, the percentage of web resources being cited in peer-reviewed publications was in a steady growth. In a similar study conducted by Zhang (2001), the percentage of articles containing e-citations increased from 1.8 to 33.9% between 1991 and 1998. This study defined e-citations as anything online, which included electronic journals as well as open web resources (Zhang, 2001). In 2002, Herring studied the citations across disciplines and found that more than 55% of articles cited electronic references, which contributed to 16% of the total citations. In 2008, Bhat and Sampath Kumar's study showed that for all 25,730 references, 81.49% of articles had web references, and 43.52% of all references were open web resources. A survey conducted by Naude, Rensleigh and Du Toit in 2010 showed clearly that respondents had accepted open web resources as valuable information for academic purposes, and up to 90.2% of respondents had used open web resources for academic and research purposes. L. Zhang claimed in 2011 that online resources had gained a wider recognition among researchers (p. 168).

In recognizing the importance of open web sources, scholars have been studying information-seeking behaviors in higher education and have identified a library patron need to have open web resources integrated into a single discovery service. Saad and Zainab (2004) reported that undergraduate students depend on online search engines such as Google to search for information for research purposes. The study claimed that Internet usage at the early stage of research is important to familiarize students with their topics (Saad & Zainab, 2004).

After finding out a similar conclusion that novice researchers, including college freshmen and seniors, chose generic search engines as the highest rated channel for information searching, scholars stressed that libraries need to develop a new approach to assist researchers on academic valuable information (Ismail & Kareem, 2011; Pickard & Logan, 2013). Facilitating research requires the libraries to understand the particular information seeking behaviors of library patrons better (Pickard & Logan, p. 402). Kirkwood (2008) and Haines, Light, O'Malley, and Delwiche (2010) also stated that librarians and educators need to enhance information literacy by providing valuable information resources to researchers, calling on librarians to revise their information-collecting policies and to integrate resources and services to facilitate research.

Rare is the literature discussing open web resources collections and how to make them searchable in academic libraries. Morris and Grimes (2000) believed that librarians have continued to develop research/subject guides even as "the advent of the Internet and its myriad sources of information has changed how librarians create and maintain these guides" (p. 213). In recent studies scholars found out that the most significant ways that academic libraries have been presenting a collection of scholarly-valuable links is through research/subject guides, either via LibGuides software or in self-developed web pages (Ghaphery & White, 2012; Hill & Bossaller, 2013). However, although libraries have been increasingly gathering links of open web resources on research/subject guides, these guides have not seen the same increase in usage due to the lack of promotion (Tchangalova & Feigley, 2008). To improve the visibility of the guides, Vileno (2007) suggested the main page of the library website as the "starting point would seem to be the most obvious place to promote subject guides" (p. 444).

Patron groups had perceived values in research guides, but patrons were calling for more compelling and effective search features, allowing patrons to search all relevant online resources through a unified interface (Ghaphery & White, 2012; Hill & Bossaller, 2013; Horne, Adams, Cook, Heidig, & Miller, 2009). In a recent study, Lown, Sierra, and Boyer (2013) believed that the generic search engine had shaped user expectations for ease of information searching, and a federated single search box had successfully gained popularity among library patrons.

Although libraries have embraced discovery systems, these systems are still not able to include all resources the libraries have available. Crystal (2010) expressed the shortcomings of discovery platforms, including the lack of complete coverage for all of the library's resources. Lown et al. (2013) addressed that it is important for libraries to think carefully on how to present discovery platforms along with those research tools that overlap in functionality, saying that "the variety of strategies employed by libraries to present and architect search indicated both the strong desire to get search and discovery right, and the complexity and difficulty of doing so" (p. 27). How to better integrate all collected open web resources into a single discovery system, therefore, remains an unsolved issue in the literature.

## METHODOLOGY

Realizing that open web resources are affecting scholarly research, this study analyzed open web resource collections on ARL academic library research/subject guides. Open web resources are a broad category of resources such as governmental websites, organizational websites, nonprofit websites, and individual open access journal articles housed on research/subject guides. For this paper, the definition of open web resources is any freely accessible website that an academic entity utilizes in a scholarly manner, such as cited in a scholarly article or linked to a research/subject guide. The evaluation of the content of the websites is not included in this paper; the mere act of the citation linked to a library website qualifies the resources as an open web resource for this analysis.

As of this writing, there are 125 ARL libraries, all but ten of which are academic libraries. To explore how academic libraries were connecting patrons to this valuable information on the Internet, the researchers designed a way to analyze open web resources collections at the 115 academic libraries. In addition, the researchers wanted to discover the best solution to make open web resources on the libraries' subject websites searchable and discoverable to patrons.

To begin this research, each ARL academic library website was visited and mined to find the central portals of academic-valuable open web resources. Based on the findings of Hill and Bossaller (2013) and Ghaphery and White (2012), libraries usually collect valuable open web resources by means of research/subject guides, either on traditional web pages or on a content management system such as LibGuides. With findings from the previous research in mind, when visiting each ARL academic library website, the researchers focused on identifying open web resources on the libraries' research/subject guides. The first step in the process intended to identify if each ARL academic library was collecting open web resources in some manner.

Once the identification of the web resources was completed, the next step was to find out how the academic libraries presented the web resource collections to patrons and if the ARL academic library made the collection searchable anywhere on the academic library website. In this step, researchers utilized a table to record what tools libraries were using to display open web resources. Researchers examined library website pages to see if search boxes were provided and where search boxes were placed to try to determine if libraries were making open web resources discoverable. Each main library website was visited and all search boxes on the main page were tested. These search boxes could be a discovery service, a website index search box, or a research/subject guide search box. Researchers then utilized the same text search strings, including "Global Warming", "Motor Skills", "Sociology", "African American", "Women Studies", and "Civil War and History," in each collection to test the search results. These terms were selected in order to be very broad so that the researchers could focus on the location of the results, not the content of the results. This study was not assessing the quality of the linked open web resources, but if that specific ARL library was collecting any open web resources and making the collection searchable to its patrons. Usually more than one search was performed at each library in order to verify the location of

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