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A Customized Database on Scandinavian Government

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NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Martha L. Brogan was affiliated with the University of Minnesota. Currently June 2007, she is Associate University Librarian for Collection Development and Management at the University of Pennsylvania.

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A Customized Database on Scandinavian Government

Abstract

The development of the Scandinavian political studies database is a joint project of Martha Brogan, a professional librarian and former bibliographer for Western European Studies, and Robert B. Kvavik, a political scientist with a specialty in Scandinavian government and politics.

Comments

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hurting those whom the boycott was intended to aid, resulting in the availability of even fewer resources for libraries serving black students and scholars.

Audience response reflected the complexity of the topic. Several participants strongly supported exemption of informational materials from an otherwise solid boycott. Although the position of the African National Congress is total isolation of

South Africa, other participants made it clear that the ANC is not the sole voice of anti-apartheid forces. As Corinne Nyquist concluded, the importance of the session lies not in its resolution of the problem but in its open discussion. The panel will be repeated at ALA Annual Conference in Dallas next summer.—*Helen MacLam, Choice magazine.*

■ ■

A customized database on Scandinavian government

By **Martha L. Brogan**

*Assistant to the Provost and Vice President
for Academic Affairs
University of Minnesota*

and **Robert B. Kvavik**

*Assistant Vice President
for Academic Affairs
University of Minnesota*

Customized bibliographic databases and educational innovation.

The development of the Scandinavian political studies database is a joint project of Martha Brogan, a professional librarian and former bibliographer for Western European Studies, and Robert B. Kvavik, a political scientist with a specialty in Scandinavian government and politics.

Originally and ultimately intended to facilitate the compilation of a published bibliography, the project—while still in its developmental phase—has already served a beneficial use to support research and instruction at the University of Minnesota. During Winter Quarter 1988, in a graduate seminar on Scandinavian government and politics, the database was used effectively to develop specialized readings lists on such topics as Finnish for-

eign policy, Norwegian and Icelandic interest groups, and coalition governments in Sweden. The customized lists were discussed with the students, and research themes were identified which could be investigated using materials held by the University Libraries.

The database also produced a master reading list for an undergraduate class on Scandinavian politics. The electronic bibliography saved us, our students—and presumably some of our library staff—precious time in identifying and locating relevant materials. Rather, the faculty member's energy focused on helping students specify research problems, the student's on synthesizing materials and formulating positions on agreed-upon prob-

lems in the field, and perhaps the librarian's, on judicious selection of new materials to add to the collections.¹

Of course, the strength of the bibliography, no matter what its format—electronic or in-print—is based on the selection of materials it identifies and must be grounded in a thorough knowledge of both the subject under consideration and the multiplicity of sources where the subject is discussed. While new technologies may simplify some of the tedious and mundane elements of producing a bibliography, they do nothing to guarantee a quality product. The technology permits us to gather, store, and manipulate data in new ways—and even occasionally provides “management information” about what we have compiled—but the content of the bibliography, upon which the ultimate value of the tool rests, remains the domain of the subject specialist. This particular project has been especially successful because of the combined skills in bibliographic “sleuthing” and subject expertise which we could bring to it. Although it is entirely possible for one individual, whether teaching faculty or professional subject bibliographer, to possess the requisite skills, we have found the collaborative approach to offer more checks and balances to the project, and, we hope, to result in stronger final tool.

When we began to work on this bibliography in January 1986, an annotated bibliography of contemporary Scandinavian political science had not appeared since Sven Groennings' *Scandinavia in Social Science Literature: An English-Language Bibliography* (1970). Although *Scandinavian Political Studies* compiled cumulative bibliographies for the periods 1960–1975 and 1976–1979, they focused on publications of Nordic political scientists, represented extensively the Scandinavian literature, and were not annotated. Further, this effort ceased with the second cumulation.

The more recent work by Kjell Eliassen and Mogens Pedersen, *Scandinavian Political Institutions and Political Behavior, 1970-1984: An Annotated Bibliography* (1985), is limited to Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, and focuses more narrowly on political institutions and elites, political participation, the decision-making process, and the public sector. Despite its subtitle, it employs a classified subject approach rather than annotations and it lacks an index. Other less comprehensive efforts have also been attempted, mainly as extended course reading lists, such as Eric Einhorn and John Logue's “A Selective Bibliography of Scandinavian Politics and Policy” (1984), which is limited to

monographic literature, and Robert B. Kvavik's “Scandinavian Government and Politics: A Bibliography of Materials in English” (1984).

With this intention to fill the eight twenty-year void, at a time when the English-language social scientific literature on Scandinavia is flourishing, we set out to develop a search strategy for Scandinavia in political science. Our efforts were greatly facilitated by the historic strength of the University Libraries' collections in Scandinavian Studies. We began with our local collections and established from the outset a principle of reviewing each item for its potential inclusion, calling interlibrary loan services to the rescue only in isolated instances where the materials were not readily available at the University of Minnesota.

Aided by PRO-CITE (in its early version called PBS or Personal Bibliographic Software), citations were entered manually from such sources as: *Suecana Extranea*, *Index Nordicus*, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *Scandinavia in English*, *Books on Sweden in English*, *Scandinavian Political Institutions and Political Behavior 1970-1984*, *Documentation on Sweden*, *Nordic Democracy*, *Comparative Public Policy: The Politics of Social Choice in Europe and America*, and “Scandinavian Government and Politics: A Bibliography of Materials in English” (see bibliography). With few exceptions, no more than 20 percent of the items from these bibliographies was selected for inclusion. Older and dated bibliographies were reviewed primarily for identifying classic studies or works in fields no longer in vogue. In addition, articles published from 1970 to the present were selectively extracted from such journals as *Cooperation and Conflict*, *Acta Sociologica*, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *European Journal of Political Research*, and *Western European Politics*.

Electronic downloading was done concomitantly using Biblio-link. We ran searches on external databases such as the Online Union Catalog of OCLC, the RLIN files of the Research Libraries Group, and the bibliographic databases offered by Lockheed Information Systems (Dialog). In the latter case, we searched U.S. Political Science Documents (USPSD), *Historical Abstracts*, *Social Science*, and *Public Affairs Information Service* (PAIS). Subject headings for politics, e.g., economic policy, political parties, were employed for each of the Scandinavian countries and with Scandinavia and Northern Europe; no documents published prior to 1970 or in languages other than English were requested by the search protocol. The entire database was then screened for duplicates and irrelevant materials. We also deleted articles which were felt to be out of date or had been slightly modified and published anew in less common and hard-to-find journals.

While the working corpus was being established, we began to design the codebook to be used for indexing the citations. The codebook provides access to the database by five broad categories: for-

¹The original version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies, April 28–30, 1988, at Eugene, Oregon. The project is supported by a small grant from the Educational Development Programs office at the University of Minnesota.

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author, title, date of publication, call number). Text searches can be made in any field. Duplicate records can be identified and deleted. This feature is especially useful when downloading records from several external databases which invariably overlap or duplicate one another. Using communication software such as Crosstalk, the various Biblio-links, written especially for use with PRO-CITE, download citations from external databases and enter the data into the appropriate fields in a PRO-CITE database. An indexing feature supports the creation of subsets or mini-databases, e.g., to create a bibliography of materials on political parties from a larger bibliography on Scandinavia.

We are pleased with the system but would caution potential bibliographers of the following caveats.

First, the system is expensive for those just starting out. The software costs approximately \$1,000 and the hardware requirements run on the top-end of the PC market.

Second, although successive releases of the software are increasingly flexible, PRO-CITE is still limited strictly to the production of bibliographies. It is not applicable as a general file or database management package.

Third, despite the promise of downloading, the system is still extremely time-consuming to use in the initial phases of development. Each Bibliolink, whether to OCLC, RLIN, or to specific Dialog databases, has to be especially configured for the search so that the appropriate fields are transferred correctly. Virtually every downloaded record, even if successfully transferred, requires additional editing, thus reducing the potential gain in cost efficiency. For example, author's names may appear in varying forms in different files, and they have to be edited to a standard form; call numbers for the local collection have to be inserted manually; and foreign diacritics do not transfer correctly.

Fourth, the integrity of downloaded records is wholly contingent on the reliability of the original input. A prudent bibliographer is wise to verify the authenticity of each record.

Fifth, PRO-CITE's editing capabilities, while improving, do not compare in sophistication to those of familiar word processing packages. Editing is limited to a line-by-line basis and cannot be performed on a screen or compiled text basis. Helpful procedures, such as global "search and replace" commands, are not available.

Sixth, as explained earlier, no matter how "expert" the technology, it cannot replace knowledge of the subject and familiarity with the sources, whether those of the local collection, the international book trade, commercial database vendors, or specialized research institutes abroad.

In effect, we have developed a prototype with all of the problems and promise such projects involve. The changes that are occurring in library automa-

tion and the rapid developments in the area of artificial intelligence and expert systems, however, are bringing this type of academic support service closer to reality for faculty and students. From the perspectives of this Scandinavian Studies faculty member and librarian, it is an exciting and gratifying prospect. Developments that promote research and writing in the undergraduate classroom are fundamental to quality education. Lastly, information management systems will create new linkages and divisions of labor between professional librarians and the research community and a clearer recognition of the centrality of the library to the academic enterprise.

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French university libraries in 1988

By Joan McConkey

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University of Colorado at Boulder Libraries*

The observations of an American librarian on sabbatical.

For three months I was in France visiting libraries and meeting with French librarians during the winter of 1987-1988. My program was arranged by the international relations office of the Direction des Bibliothèques, de Musées, et de l'Information Scientifique et Technique (DBMIST) of the French Ministry of National Education. It is more usual to go to France as an exchange librarian through a program sponsored by ACRL and the Franco-American Exchange Commission. My position in administrative services does not lend itself easily to exchange, because of the nature of the responsibilities and the rarity of similar positions in French university libraries, so I was pleased to learn that an independent visit to a number of libraries during my sabbatical leave was possible through the same sponsors.

My itinerary included several days at DBMIST for an overview of organization and new developments in French university libraries and visits ranging from one or two days to three weeks in a variety of university libraries. In Paris I also visited the Bibliothèque Nationale and two modern public libraries, the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information (BPI) at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Médiathèque de la Villette. BPI, a comprehensive

public reference library, is very popular with university students who enjoy its free access to materials, special services, and extended hours. The multi-media collection using the latest library technology of the Médiathèque reflects the science and technology emphasis of the City of Science and Industry where it is housed.

The university libraries I saw included the venerable Sorbonne Library and the Bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve, whose history goes back to a pre-revolutionary abbey library, both in the historic student quarter of Paris; and the modern libraries of the postwar University of Paris X (Nanterre) and the still newer University of Technology of Compiègne. A three-week stay was barely time to absorb the complexity of the Interuniversity Library at Montpellier which serves 40,000 students in three universities with six libraries. In Montpellier I also spent half days in the public library, which has marvelous rare book collections and a very modern media center, and at the departmental archives of Hérault, which are rich in regional history.

A week at the library school in Villeurbanne, a suburb of Lyon, gave me an opportunity to learn about the curriculum, to attend an interesting all-