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# Free, Full-Text, Scholarly Journals on the Web

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## Some Historical Background

In the November, 2000 issue of *College & Research Libraries*, Michael Fosmire and Elizabeth Young had a fascinating article entitled, "Free Scholarly Electronic Journals: What Access Do College and University Libraries Provide?" In the article, they discussed the rapid growth of these free, academic, peer-reviewed journals on the Internet that covered all different subject areas. Through careful effort, the authors had located over 200 scholarly, full-text, peer reviewed journals, many of which were indexed in major services such as ERIC, Medline, MathSciNet, INSPEC, and Chemical Abstracts. They also noted, though, that most college and university libraries were not making use of these free resources.

My reaction to the article was twofold: first, I was surprised to discover how abundant these free, scholarly journals actually were and how useful they could be for my reference work. Second, I was a bit frustrated, because the article did not provide any information as to how to locate the web addresses for these online journals. I promptly sent an email message to Mr. Fosmire, stating that the reason people were not using these free online scholarly resources is that they did not know about them, and after reading his article I (and they) still did not know how to access them. I requested that he send me the web sites for the journals and also suggested that he consider sending out this information to some reference and collection development listservs. Mr. Fosmire replied with the web site information and a friendly comment that he also had been planning to post his material electronically in some format. I later discovered that he chose to communicate his information in the form of an Internet journal article, "Free Scholarly Electronic Journals: An Annotated Webliography."<sup>1</sup>

In the three years since the Fosmire and Young article appeared, librarians have become more aware of these online journals. The appearance of BioMed Central (<http://www.biomedcentral.com>) and FindArticles.com (<http://www.findarticles.com>) on the web have brought attention to these journals, both in positive and negative terms. BioMed Central represents an organizational commitment to make peer-reviewed, scientific journal articles available at no cost for a significant number of journals. FindArticles.com, however, provides the full-text of several hundred popular magazines and journals, and students sometimes use this resource instead of the higher quality library databases.

Also in the past three years, the number of free, online journals has increased dramatically. Many librarians probably do not realize how large this collection of web resources has become. I have not created a single "master list" of these journals but rather have compiled a list of sites providing general or subject-specific collections of them. Here are some of the things I have discovered. FreeMedicalJournals.com (<http://www.freemedicaljournals.com>) presently holds 1,380 free, full-text online journals, though they may not all be peer reviewed. The Directory of Open Access Journals page (<http://www.doaj.org/alpha/ALL>) provides a list of 671 scientific or scholarly journals freely available on the web, while the University of Houston's Scholarly Journals site (<http://info.lib.uh.edu/wj/webjour.html>) gives an alphabetical listing of 172 peer reviewed journals. The Engineering Electronic-Journal site ([http://www.eevl.ac.uk/journal\\_list.html](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/journal_list.html)) contains over 250 journals and the AERA SIG E-Journals in Education site (<http://aera-cr.asu.edu/links.html>) has 142 journals. Other sites are listed at the end of this article, but the above suffice to indicate how significant a resource these free electronic journals have become.<sup>2</sup>

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## The Quality of the Online Journals

A number of articles have been written evaluating the quality of these online journals. In fact, Fosmire cowrote one such article entitled "Free Scholarly Electronic Journals: How Good Are They?"<sup>3</sup> He and co-author Song Yu examined 83 scientific and mathematical online journals in terms both of impact and immediacy. Impact was evaluated by calculating how many citations in 1999 were made to 1997 and 1998 articles in the journals. Immediacy was determined by noting the number of citations in 1999 made to 1999 articles; these articles would have had immediate impact. The authors found that thirteen of the journals had an impact rating in the 90th percentile. One of them, *Advances in Theoretical and Mathematical Physics*, had an article cited 800 times and another cited 500 times. Likewise, thirteen journals were in the 90th percentile in terms of immediacy. Other articles also have confirmed the scholarly value of these peer-reviewed, free, web journals.<sup>4</sup>

Another indication of the quality of these electronic journals is the manner in which they are viewed by citation indexes. Most of them are indexed in one or more of the recognized citation resources and have an OCLC ISSN number, just as Fosmire found to be true of his journal collection in 2000. A particularly interesting example is *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. This publication has been freely available on the web since its inception in 1994 and has been indexed in ATLA. In 2001, ATLA chose to include this title in its ATLAS collection of full-text journals; this indicates the level of respect this journal had gained. In the latter part of 2003, ATLA made a policy decision to remove from ATLAS all titles, such as the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, that could be freely obtained from the Internet.

A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* noted that Thompson ISI plans to create a Web Citation Index by 2005.<sup>5</sup> This product will compare with other significant Thompson ISI products such as the Web of Science, which is highly respected and

considered closely at times for promotion and tenure in the sciences. This new database Web Citation Index "will list which scholarly works have cited particular papers published online" and it also "will track citations of traditionally published works by online papers ..."<sup>6</sup> The addition of this new citation database should, over time, enhance the respectability of peer-reviewed online journal articles in academic circles and stimulate more publishing in this area. This would be true both for cost as well as free journals.

### Problem: Searching the Journals Effectively

At present, the main problem with these free journals is that they are not all indexed and collected into a central database for efficient searching. Rather, they are located in various places on the web, and are only loosely gathered in general or topical collections. In the field of science, this is not a significant problem because one can search by keyword and find relevant articles from three large collections of free, full-text journals: BioMed Central, the Directory of Open Access Journals, and PubMed Central.<sup>7</sup>

In fields other than science, Google's advance search feature probably provides ([http://www.google.com/advanced\\_search?hl=en](http://www.google.com/advanced_search?hl=en)) the most effective method for searching through the online journals. One puts the journal title in quotations in one square and the key word(s) in a second square. For instance, searching the "Journal of Buddhist Ethics" and the keyword "Euthanasia" brings results for several relevant full-text articles from different volumes of this journal. The first result, for instance, is the article "Buddhism and Medical Ethics: A Bibliographic Introduction," published in second volume of the journal, in 1995.

While this technique seems to work successfully with some journals, such as *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, for many others such Google searching is not very effective. For example, searching for "retinal pigment" in *Molecular Vision* brings up an abundance of citations, but they are mainly

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from pages other than that of the journal itself. One would have to write down all the citations and then go to *Molecular Vision* and find them in the archived volumes of the online journal. The Google searching thus can be a time-consuming process, and students and faculty have become accustomed to databases that function quickly and efficiently.

With this in mind, when passing along information about these free journals to faculty and students, I always state that searching in these journals is a slower process than with the databases. Usually, though, people are pleasantly surprised that there really are all those journals out there on the web. Faculty members often seem happy just browsing through the issues of journals that are of interest to them."

### Looking Toward the Future

In looking toward the future, there is every reason to believe that the growth of free online scholarly journals will continue at the same or even a faster pace than in recent years. This is the case partly because of the continual growth of the Internet and the ongoing shift of publications toward the online format.<sup>8</sup> Beyond this, however, the success of the Open Access movement will lead to a significant increase of new scholarly journals available at no cost.<sup>9</sup> This significant change in the way publication is done has mainly affected the medical and scientific journals, but it later will touch other areas, such as the social sciences, as well. This subject could be the basis of an entirely different article.

While all of these developments are encouraging, there is still the problem of the present (and perhaps future) free scholarly journals that have so much valuable information, but cannot be searched very effectively. One thought that comes to mind is contacting a database such as the Scholarly Electronic Publishing Resources (<http://info.lib.uh.edu/sepb/sepr.htm>), which has an abundance of searchable free texts and other materials to see if they would consider adding these free journal resources. If these databases do not seem interested, perhaps even FindArticles.Com, which is run by the search engine LookSmart, might be a possibility. If all

options fail, though, perhaps a volunteer indexing project needs to be considered to make efficient online searching available for these free, yet valuable, journals. This last thought is at least worth careful reflection. †

### REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup> Michael Fosmire and Elizabeth Young, "Free Scholarly Electronic Journals: An Annotated Webliography," *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* (Fall 2000). <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/istl/00-fall/internet.html> There are approximately 150 journals listed.

<sup>2</sup> ICAAP Journals (<http://bluesky.icaap.org/journalist.php>) – 150 Journals; Anistoron: History, Archaeology, ArtHistory Journals on the Internet (<http://www.anistor.co.hk.gr/english/index.htm>) – under "extras" – 218 full text journals; Physics Related Full Access Journals (<http://physnet.eprints.org/PhysNet/journals.html>) – 66 Journals; Electronic Journal Miner (<http://ejournal.coalliance.org>) – A good resource to locate free, peer-reviewed journals by subject.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Fosmire and Song Yu, "Free Scholarly Electronic Journals: How Good Are They?" *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, Summer 2000. <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/istl/00-summer/refereed.html>

<sup>4</sup> Stephen P. Harter, "The Impact of Electronic Journals on Scholarly Communication: A Citation Analysis," *The Public-Access Computer Systems Review* 7, no. 5 (1996): 5-34. <http://info.lib.uh.edu/pr/v7/n5/hart7n5.html> See also Stephen P. Harter, "Scholarly Communication and Electronic Journals: An Impact Study," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 49.6 (1998): 507-516; Also, Richard D. Llewellyn, Lorraine J. Pellack, and Diana D. Shonrock, "The Use of Electronic-Only Journals in Scientific Research," *Issues in Science & Technology Librarianship*, no. 35 (2002). <http://www.istl.org/02-summer/refereed.html>

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Kiernan, "Company to Track Citations of Online Scholarship," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50, no. 28 (2004): A31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Search Pages: BioMed Central <http://www.biomedcentral.com> (Need to set up free registration), Directory of Open Access Journals <http://www.doaj.org/findarticles>, PubMed Central <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?db=pmc>

<sup>8</sup> A good site indicating the growth of the web is Hobbes Internet Timeline located at <http://www.zakon.org/robert/Internet/timeline>

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Open Access Movement, see Lila Guterman, "The Promise and Peril of 'Open Access,'" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50 (January 30 2004): A10; See also "SPARC and PLoS Partner to Advocate for Open Access Publishing," *Computers in Libraries* 24 (January 2004): 41. See also Lila Guterman "Two Routes to Open Access: Archives and Institutional Subscriptions," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50 (January 30 2004): A11; See also Paula J. Hane, "The Latest Developments in Open Access, E-Books, and More," *Information Today*, 21 (January 2004): 7-12.