

péter's picks & pans



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Ovid Mental Health Collection

ERIC/AE Version

A&E Biography

This month, one of my picks is Ovid's Mental Health Collection full-text database. The other is an excellent, free version of the ERIC database, a staple in all university libraries, and a good source for those who are looking for ways to educate people about information technology. The pan is a biographical database that has some merit, but makes the absurd claim that it has "the Best Biographies on the Web." It does not, and its search engine is brain-damaged.

the picks



OID MENTAL HEALTH COLLECTION

Always at the forefront of software innovations, Ovid had links from full-text documents to abstracting/indexing databases and vice versa, long before it became the hot topic. The Mental Health Collection (MHC) is one of the six Ovid Full Text Collections. As in the other collections, every word of the SGML-coded text is searchable, including references and graphics captions. All the charts, photographs, and tables of the original are embedded, including color graphics.

The most interesting and novel part of the record is the reference section.

Search template and results list of a query in Ovid's Mental Health Collection.

REFERENCES

1. American Psychiatric Association (1994) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th edn)* (DSM-IV). Washington, DC: APA. [\[Context Link\]](#)
2. Dietz, P. E., Matthews, D. E., Martel, D. A., et al (1991a) Threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to members of the United States Congress. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 36, 1445-1468. [\[Biographic Link\]](#) [\[Context Link\]](#)
3. Dietz, P. E., Matthews, D. E., Van Duzee, C., et al (1991b) Threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to Hollywood celebrities. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 36, 105-109. [\[Biographic Link\]](#) [\[Context Link\]](#)
4. Olligson, M. J. (1992) Chilling the shillies: developing new letters to the list those who threaten critics. *Georgia Law Review*, 27, 223-239. [\[Context Link\]](#)
5. Hansen, R. H., Steyer, R. & Green, J. (1992) Obscene mail harassment and solicitation in a criminal justice population. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 37, 122-124. [\[Biographic Link\]](#) [\[Context Link\]](#)
6. Hansen, J. L. (1992) Complex PTSD: a syndrome in members of imprisoned and repeated trauma. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 37, 277-281. [\[Biographic Link\]](#) [\[Context Link\]](#)

Hotlinks from the cited references to their entry in MEDLINE and PsycINFO, and to the full-text version of the articles.

The bibliographic entries for the cited documents include hyperlinks to other databases offered by Ovid. Users can click on a hyperlink and check the entries (including the abstract) from

MEDLINE, PsycINFO, or CINAHL. If a cited document is part of an Ovid Full Text Collection, and if the user's institution subscribes to that collection, then the cited document can be

displayed in its entirety. From that document, other cited works can be traced. From the citation list you can jump to the referenced context in the source document. This extremely-efficient linking is what citation indexing was meant for.

The Ovid Mental Health Collection (MHC) includes ten titles from 1995 onward. This may seem to be a very small collection but, with only one exception, they represent the *crème de la crème* in psychiatry, as witnessed by the chart produced from the latest issue of Journal Citation Reports (JCR) from the Institute for Scientific Information. Although I don't claim to know the Impact Factors of psychiatry and psychology journals, the one I know off the top of my head is the *Archives of General Psychiatry*. It is ranked first among all the 1,672 social sciences journals of the Journal Citation Reports. This sparked my interest to find the impact factor of the other journals in MHC. The impact-factor ranking of eight of the primary sources of MHC in the Social Sciences category (1,672 journals), the full Psychology category (489 titles), and the Psychiatry category (80 titles) of JCR is impressive. Six of the titles are among the top eight journals within

the Psychiatry category. The *Annual Review of Psychology* is not part of the Psychiatry category, but its impact factor would make it number two in the ranking. This is as good as it gets, and proves that small is beautiful.



ERIC/AEVERSION

The latest version of the ERIC database (<http://ericae.net>), developed by the Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (AE) and mounted at the College of Library and Information Services, University of Maryland, was launched in the Spring of 1999. Beyond the new search engine, the other novelty is the inclusion of the entire ERIC file: Resources in Education (RIE), Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), and a new Full-Text Library of over 250 select journal articles, books, and other resources from across the Internet.

The Search Wizard—based on the Webinator software—allows the

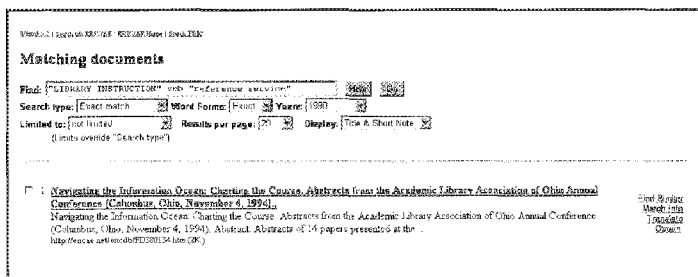
user to type in a term for "lookup" in the ERIC thesaurus, then selects one or more of the descriptors, and adds to one of the three sets that make up the query. It is an intuitive and efficient method to formulate a search query using descriptors. One drawback, however, is the two-step dance with dates. You have the option of searching for 1966-1989 or 1990 to present. You can't search the entire database with one search statement. The descriptor-selection step is optional. For example, I locked up the descriptor for bibliographic instruction. The preferred term is "Library Instruction," so from the list I chose that. I added Web as a free-text term in the second cell, then looked up "Reference Service." Its plural form is the ERIC preferred term, and I added that in the third cell.

Showing the preferred descriptor(s) in context makes the selection easy in this interactive process. It could be easier only if the posting information were also available. Up to five searches can be saved and re-executed later. The process is superbly explained.

From the short-result list (this needs improvement for the author-name part of the display), you can launch a search for similar items when a particular citation is especially promising. The Search Wizard takes the major descriptors from the model record and searches for records that include all the terms. Users can remove one or more of the terms that were entered automatically, and add their own terms.

The short-entry display of results is very good, with hotlinks on the side for a) finding similar records, b) highlighting the search term(s), and c) instant translation to and from English, German, French, Spanish, or Portuguese. The translation is not perfect, being done by the machine rather than a human, but helps tremendously.

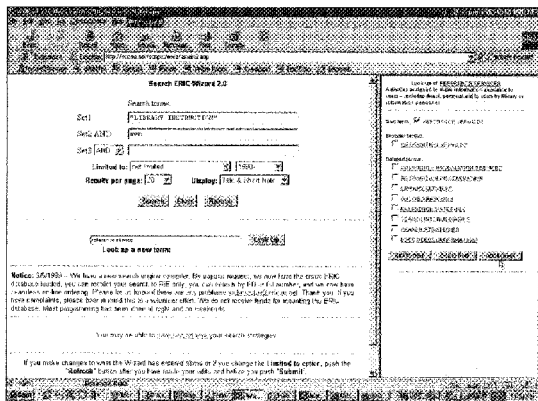
This version runs circles around many versions of ERIC, including the CARL version used at some universities. CARL treats the ERIC thesaurus as a separate database. It does not let the users pick up terms, so they have to jot down the descriptors, switch databases, and type in the terms. It has far less



Short-entry results list with additional options.

Titles in Mental Health Collection	All SocSci	All Psyc.	All Psychiatry
	rank	rank	rank
American Journal of Psychiatry	5	4	2
Annual Review of Psychology	13	7	n/a
Archives of General Psychiatry	1	1	1
British Journal of Psychiatry	28	14	6
Current Opinion in Psychiatry	841	315	62
Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology			
Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	15	9	4
Psychological Medicine	36	20	9
Psychosomatic Medicine	32	17	7
Year Book of Psychiatry and Applied Mental Health			
Total number of journals in this category	1672	489	80

Impact factors of journals in the Ovid Mental Health Collection.



Looking up a term in the ERIC thesaurus and selecting the proposed descriptor.

search, limit, and output functionality than ERIC/AE. In spite of ERIC/AE's deficiencies, it's CARL that costs several thousand dollars in license fees, while ERIC/AE is not only free but was developed without taxpayers' money. In fact, this is a volunteer effort, with programmers working after their regular hours. In spite of this, emails regarding search strategies and how to use the system are answered promptly.



the pan

A&E BIOGRAPHY

I had ambivalent feelings about choosing A&E Biographies ([http://](http://www.biography.com)

www.biography.com) as a pan. First: I like the A&E Biographies on television. They are objective, informative, and exceptionally well-narrated, letting the biographee take center stage, as opposed to the biographical interviews on the major commercial channels where the schmoozing interviewer often gets more airtime than the subject. Second: I am less critical of free sources if they are adequate. A&E Biography could meet these requirements as it has short biographical entries of more than 20,000 personalities, and its special collections, such as the Country Music Gallery, are well-designed and easy to navigate. It was the absurdity of the tag line that made me decide to pan this database. It claims to have the "Web's Best Bios." My first reaction was, "Oh boy." Whoever invented the A&E tag line was very ignorant, or was just helping Sunday journalists to come up with a baseless punchline. The Web's-best-bios moniker belongs to Biographical Resource Center of the Gale Corporation, and the Wilson Biographies Plus Illustrated database of H.W. Wilson. ➔



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People who match jasco.

Amint, Jacques	See Jacques, Jacques
Amint, Jacques	1513 - 1599
Humanist, born in Mehan, France. He translated many Classical texts, the most important.	
Amint, Jacques	1934 - 1987
Racing cyclist, born in Normandy, France. He won the Tour de France five times.	
Amint, Jacques (Jacques J)	1851 - 1949
Physicist, born in Bone, France. He was director of the laboratory of biological.	
Amint, Jacques	1794 - 1872
Physicist, born in Lunignan, France. He standardized light measurement by using the red.	
Barchas, Jack D	1935 -
Neurologist and psychiatrist, born in Los Angeles, California, USA. He was professor of	
Amint, Jacques	1967 -

A tad excessive number of irrelevant matches for the uncommon name "Jasco."

Hussein (Ibn Talal) 1935 -

King of Jordan since 1952, born in Amman. He studied at Alexandria, Harrow, and Sandhurst. He steered a middle course in the face of the political upheavals inside and outside his country, favouring the Western powers, particularly Britain, and pacifying Arab nationalism. After the 1967 war with Israel, the PLO made increasingly frequent raids into Israel from Jordan, their power developing to such an extent that he ordered the Jordanian army to move against them, and after a short civil war (1970), the PLO leadership fled abroad. His decision to cut links with the West Bank (1988) prompted the PLO to establish a government in exile. Alone among the Arab Middle-East States he was forced by domestic pressure to give support to Iraq during the Gulf Conflict (1991), and risked losing Western aid for Jordan. He has been married four times; his second wife, Toni Gardiner, was an Englishwoman, by whom he had an heir, Abdullah, in 1962.

The A&E Biography entry about King Hussein makes him look as if he's still alive.

OK, those are fee-based biographical sources. But A&E's tag line does not use the modest qualifier, the Web's Best Free Bios. Even that would not be true, as the Biographica! Dictionary (<http://www.s9.com/biography>) is better than the A&E Biography database. The former is significantly more comprehensive than the latter, with 27,000 versus 20,000 biographies. The entries are comparable in length and content, though A&E gets a point for having pictures of some of the biographies.

Where A&E fails first is currency. That would be essential in a Web-

based database. I got suspicious when I found King Hussein of Jordan to be alive when checking the A&E Biography entry in mid-August, six months after his death. The latest information about Hussein was from 1991, about his despised approval of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Not a word about the following years when his intermediation was crucial in two Mid-East peace agreements. And not a word about his American-born fourth wife (Queen Noor) either, although she lasted the longest and was married to him when he died.

I checked on how many poets, politicians, artists, and scientists who died in 1999 are still alive according to A&E Biography. The results were disappointing. Of the six Nobel Prize Winners who passed away in 1999, only Gertrude Elion, the first woman inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame, had her death date listed. Gerhard Herzberg, Henry Kendall, Wassily Leontief, Arthur Schawlow, and Glenn Seaborg are gone, too, but not according to the A&E Biography.

The real damper of this database is the brain-damaged software. It is hard to believe that in 1999 a biographical database is mounted that cannot search the full text of the biographical entries, let alone in a refined way—by year of birth, country, occupation. A&E Biography is searchable only by the name of the subjects. True, you can search also by first name, if you pine to know how many persons with Ursula as a first name made it into the database. There are eight of them. But I am not being precise; you can't limit the search to the first-name segment. The entire name field is searched. This would not be a sin, although it may confuse users. The real sin is that the search engine responds with useless information unless it finds a real match. It has the guts to say, for example, that there are 175 "people who match jasco."

Even one match is unlikely, as there are less than a dozen Jascos in the U.S. and Hungary combined. So why the large number of "matches"? Because they match on the first two characters, that's why. A&E Biography gladly lists all the people whose first name or last name starts with "Ja." Yes. Great. We have all the Jacques, Jacobs, Jacks, Jackies, and Jays along with the Lithuanian master violinist, Jascha Heifetz. We had more capable search engines in the 1960s than this.

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