E-Resource Sharing at The California State University

By Evan A. Reader, Director
CSU-System-wide Electronic Information Resources
Office of the Chancellor, The California State University
September 6, 2002

The California State University, a publicly-supported institution of higher learning in the State of California, has a long and rich tradition of resource sharing among its twenty-three campus libraries. System-wide programs in effect for many years have allowed faculty and students timely access to the combined electronic resources and print materials available at the libraries of the CSU.

The central office of System-wide Electronic Information Resources (CSU-SEIR), in cooperation with CSU's Council of Library Directors (CSU-COLD) and its permanent sub-committee EARCOM (Electronic Access to Information Resources), provide the body and structure of a successful cooperative program of resource sharing which guides the evaluation and selection of learning materials that benefit the libraries of the largest university system in the world.

Three major e-resource sharing projects are funded and supported through the central CSU Office of the Chancellor. Each of these projects use network technologies to provide greater access to e-resources among learners and researchers and greater efficiencies within the CSU. The first is the CSU "Electronic Core Collection".

The Electronic Core Collection (ECC)

CSU's electronic "core collection" is defined as the online bibliographic and full-text information resources that support the common core curricula. Core curricula are defined as those offered by at least two-thirds of the twenty-three CSU campuses. These include the social sciences, life and physical sciences, arts and humanities, and professional programs such as business administration, education, nursing, public administration and engineering/computer science.

In September, 1996, the CSU Libraries Electronic Access to Information Resources Committee (EARCOM) proposed that a common collection of electronic databases be centrally licensed, through its own library consortium CSU-SEIR, for all CSU libraries to support the general as well as specific information needs of core programs at the study level. A set of criteria were developed to determine which electronic resources should be included in the core collection (see http://seir.calstate.edu/ecccriteria.html). The criteria followed closely the principles, which had been established by the committee, for acquiring electronic information resources. These principles have guided the committee, since its inception in 1989, in its review and recommendation of vendor proposals (see http://seir.calstate.edu/principles.html).

Primary among the criteria is that the e-resource support the common core of CSU curricula. Other criteria require that the resource considered for inclusion in ECC have at least one year of actual use by a minimum of fifteen or two-thirds of all CSU campuses. The search interface and service capabilities of the information provider are also of importance. The interface must include both basic and advanced capabilities. The service must allow both local (on-campus) and remote (off-campus)

accessibility and be compatible with the current telecommunications infrastructure. The content/service provider must be flexible and responsive; provide adequate documentation and training, and; require minimal technical support of library staff. Finally, the cost of acquiring the resource must reflect the economies of scale brought about through large volume and collaborative purchase.

In the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1997 four databases, identified by EARCOM as having met the criteria, were licensed by CSU-SEIR and made available to all CSU campuses. Called the "Initial Core" these databases included LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe, Factiva (Dow Jones/Reuters), STAT-USA, (business and economic information from the Federal Government) and, Encyclopedia Britannica. In the five years since the Electronic Core Collection was first established it has grown to include other databases. With the recent addition of two new titles the core, today, consists of seventeen databases. Added to the initial core were ProQuest ABI/INFORM Global and, Business Newsstand, EBSCO Academic Search Elite, Gale Expanded Academic ASAP, JSTOR Arts and Sciences Collection I, ProQuest Ethnic Newswatch, ABC-CLIO American History & Life and, Historical Abstracts; Project MUSE Full Collection, RAND California, Wiley Interscience, Elsevier Science Direct and, the latest additions, American Psychological Association 'PsycINFO' and, Basic BIOSIS. These seventeen databases provide access to over 15,000 full-text e-journals, some also held in print but many of which add increased depth to the CSU e-resources collection.

Acceptance of a resource into the ECC does not constitute inclusion in perpetuity. The EAR Committee recognizes that technological developments and changes in CSU core curricula and budgets all have impact on the ECC. All ECC resources are, therefore, subject to formal system-wide review. A review of each resource is conducted at least once every three years. A recommendation from EARCOM is then forwarded to the CSU Council of Library Directors to either retain or remove the resource.

A permanent and stable budget for funding the Electronic Core Collection was established several years ago. Prior to that time each CSU campus was assessed annually for its proportionate share of the core collection. Beginning in 1997/98 costs for the ECC were partially offset by supplemental funds granted through a central "Strategic Initiative Program". In 2000/01 a General Fund increase provided CSU libraries with a permanent allocation to further develop ECC content and to support the dissemination and use of electronic information resources. The total expenditure for the Electronic Core Collection is currently $2.7 million annually.

Through the cooperative identification and implementation of the electronic core collection and through its unique common gateway, called "PHAROS", CSU libraries are able to share equal access at all 23 campus locations to a common core of e-resources. The ECC has greatly enhanced the development of distance learning programs by enabling students and faculty to access these critical resources from their remote locations. CSU libraries have further benefited by consolidating their acquisition of common online information resources through the central CSU-SEIR. By consolidating purchase orders for common services, while not compromising campus-level freedom of choice, CSU libraries have increased the leverage of CSU-SEIR in their negotiations with information providers. This has resulted in increased savings and more cost-effective access to the resources required to support teaching, learning and research at CSU.

The ECC represents a winning example of how policy and procedures developed with consensus among cooperating campuses sharing common interests can achieve effective and lasting results.

"PHAROS", CSU's Common User Gateway to e-Resources

PHAROS is an information scholars portal developed as part of CSU's Unified Information Access System (UIAS) initiative. UIAS has developed an innovative and dynamic tool for student access to information resources, for resource sharing among libraries, and for guidance and instruction in navigating the complexities of the ever-expanding information environment. UIAS is defined as a single, easy to use, integrated and coherent computer-based user interface which provides direct online access to or delivery of: print resources described in CSU libraries OPAC catalogs or in the online catalogs of libraries beyond CSU; digital resources including text, image, video and multimedia; Internet-based resources and; guidance in the use and evaluation of information resources including access to self-paced information competence instruction.

PHAROS provides the students, faculty and staff of the 23-campus California State University with access to electronic research resources through any Web browser. The PHAROS gateway server on each CSU campus presents the student with a series of screens designed to guide in framing a search and in selecting appropriate e-resources. It allows searching of multiple databases with a single command and offers links to additional interactive help when needed. Search results are integrated and displayed in a useful and coherent manner. The system assigns each user a profile to permit campus librarians to customize the interface and information sources most appropriate for the student's level (for example, lower division undergraduate). The system also authenticates the student's status as a legitimate borrower, whether dialing in or using the system in the library, and permits direct requesting of books and articles from another CSU library without the necessity of going through the interlibrary loan department.

The 'Union Catalog' component of PHAROS offers patrons direct access to a system-wide collection of more than 12 million volumes and over 30,000 periodical and serial titles. Allowing the user an online catalog that can simultaneously search the collections of all CSU libraries is an essential component of resource sharing. By implementing the Union Catalog and other resource sharing arrangements CSU libraries have expanded the amount of material that's available to its students and faculty.

CSU's Shared e-Book Collection

The CSU Shared e-Book Collection currently consists of more than 5000 titles and is available to all CSU students, faculty and staff. The collection is funded through the central Library Resources Budget on an annual basis. Individual campuses are also encouraged to establish unique, locally funded e-book collections that support the instructional, reference and research needs of their campus communities not met by the CSU Shared e-Book Collection. e-Books are accessible on major hardware platforms and readers in wide use in CSU libraries and without special technical requirements such as plug-ins or proprietary systems.

The Shared e-Book Collection is an initiative that fulfills CSU's goal to develop the full spectrum of information resources most useful to students and faculty through a combination of collection

development, licensing and, cooperative agreements. The Shared e-Book Collection provides diversity in forms of recorded knowledge resources to support academic programs and student learning by encouraging the use of new technologies and by promoting cooperation among the CSU libraries.

Titles and collections of titles selected for the Shared e-Book Collection support the common core of CSU curricula. Common curricula are defined as those offered by at least two-thirds of the twenty-three campuses. Access strategies are selected that are most appropriate for the subject content and expected usage including lease and purchase options as well as the number of simultaneous users appropriate to the title or collection. Resources are selected which are appropriate for delivery through campus online catalogs as well as PHAROS whenever possible. e-MARC records capable of being loaded in campus online catalogs are available to enhance usability of the selected titles.

The CSU has developed a selection process for the Shared e-Book Collection which includes participation by CSU's Council of Library Directors (COLD), its permanent subcommittee (EARCOM) and, an e-Book Selection Team comprised of six librarians, each appointed by COLD to serve two-year terms.   While EARCOM is responsible for the review and selection of e-book vendors, members of the Selection Team serve as primary selectors responsible for the selection and de-selection of specific titles. One member of the team serves as 'Team Leader' responsible for coordinating the team's activities and as liaison with EARCOM. Four members are assigned as 'selectors', each working in one of four core curricula areas including Social Sciences, Life and Physical Sciences, Arts and Humanities and, Professional Programs. The four selectors are free to seek assistance from their colleagues as appropriate. The sixth member is responsible for the preparation and analysis of usage data that will serve the team in the selection process. This individual evaluates the use of the Shared Collection by gathering and reviewing reports to determine use by title and subject area or discipline. Reports on titles and subject areas not used are also examined to inform the selection and de-selection process. Usage reports are normally a service feature provided by e-book vendors whose titles have been selected as part of their contractual agreements with CSU.

The e-Book Selection Team works on an annual cycle selecting titles for the Shared e-Book Collection only once per year in the spring semester. Lists of forthcoming titles are solicited from EARCOM-approved vendors to form the basis for this work. Selection and purchase must be completed by the end of June of each year. Individual CSU campus libraries are notified of the title selections at the beginning of CSU's fiscal year in July. Timely notification of selection decisions is critical so that individual campus libraries may begin to make their own selections for their own unique locally-funded e-book collections.

CSU has evaluated the economics of purchasing and distributing e-books from a centralized shared collection and has compared results with the more traditional model of purchasing these same materials in print form.   A one-year pilot study, conducted by the CSU EAR Committee (EARCOM) and completed in December, 2001, demonstrated the benefits of the e-book over its printed equivalent. The study revealed that e-books were clearly preferable for high-use titles which are replaced on a frequent basis. The materials which fall into this category include certain types of reference works such as directories, computer manuals and some business books. These subject areas were also those that received the highest level of usage among the entire e-book collection.   The CSU-SEIR consortium was instrumental in pioneering a business model which allowed for shorter-term lease of

titles requiring frequent update or replacement as opposed to the actual purchase of titles having longer-term value.

e-Books offered CSU distinct economic advantages when purchased consortially for the Shared Collection. Purchasing the rights to electronically access a single title from multiple campus locations clearly reduces the cost of each location having to acquire the same title in its print-equivalent form. This is true, of course, only if sufficient access to the title is also made available. The standard business model for an e-book is that only a single user is allowed to access the title at any one time. CSU's 'lease model' allowed for multiple-simultaneous access of up to three users at a time. This was the equivalent of having three copies of the same title within the shared collection. Though the title is available only for a specified period of time (usually one year) its price is the same as though it had been permanently acquired. This model is attractive when used only for high-use and frequently-replaced titles. A central shared e-book collection clearly benefits all who participate and is the most economical method for providing certain types of information.

For further information about CSU's e-resource sharing projects, the EAR Committee (EARCOM) and, the consortial activities of CSU-SEIR, visit the SEIRWeb page at http://www.calstate.edu/SEIR. Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or require additional information at SEIR-MAIL@calstate.edu.