Seeking a Core Literature: The Current State of Search Education in Top LIS Schools

Scott Nicholson
Assistant Professor
Syracuse University School of Information Studies

Adapted from:

scott@scottnicholson.com
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Goal

- Gain an understanding of the literature used in generalist search education in LIS programs
Problem

- Searching has changed
  - Traditional tools still important
  - Web searching now needed
    - Rapidly changing domain
    - Adversarial Information Retrieval
  - Theoretical basis + application
    - Provides basis for future tools
Prior Literature

- 1979/1982 - 2/3 of library schools had searching classes and most offered searching concepts (Harter, Harter & Finichel)
- 1989 - 80% of schools had a searching course (Tenopir)
- 1997 – Most schools had some type of online searching. (Hseih-Yee)
- 1998 – Xie and Cool discussed importance of teaching newer relevance-based tools alongside traditional Boolean, set-based searching
Research Questions

- Q1: How is search education integrated in library school curricula in the top LIS programs?

- Q2: How many readings cover different subtopics in these courses and how recent are these readings?

- Q3: Is there a core group of readings across library schools used in search education?
Gathering the Sample

- Sampling method from Xie and Cool (top 12 ranking U.S. News schools)
- Started with course titles and short descriptions
  - Selected courses with generalist searching components
  - Searched for recent syllabus
  - Contacted instructor of record
- Sample = 23 syllabi from 11 schools
- 401 distinct works extracted
Assumptions and Limitations

- Sample is not representative of all library schools
- Sample does not consider subject-specific searching courses
- Assumption: Works are representative of the topics covered in the class
- Courses without searching in titles or short descriptions are not included
RQ1: Typical Pattern of Courses

- Searching component in required course (reference, cataloging, organization, etc.)
  - Schools without core had searching in introductory courses
- Searching topics covered over a few weeks
- Topics: Boolean, database selection, Web searching, OPAC searching, basic strategies
- Concern: Courses are already full of content. Changes in search landscape may require more time in courses
Pattern of Courses - Electives

- Additional searching in elective courses
  - Non-searching courses that had searching components
    - Information Retrieval systems
    - HCI or Information Behavior
    - Intellectual organization
  - Courses focused on searching
    - DIALOG or other commercial tools, end-user searching, Web search tools, other databases, search strategies, comparison of tools, information retrieval theory
    - Concern: Instructors must insure this course represents the current search environment
# RQ2: Work topics by Year

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<td>Grand Total</td>
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<td>61</td>
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<td>176</td>
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RQ3: Core Authors and Readings

- 404 different authors and 401 different readings

- As expected by Zipf’s law, a few authors were frequently cited and many authors were only cited once or twice
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<th>Author</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<td>Tenopir, C.</td>
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<td>Price, G.</td>
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Chart of Frequency of Authors

![Chart of Frequency of Authors](image-url)
Seeking a Core Literature

- 401 different readings in 23 courses
- Most common readings:
  - Three readings were used in 5 courses
  - No readings used in 4 courses
  - Ten readings used in 3 courses
- 90% of the readings were only used in a single course
Most Common Readings

(5) DIALOG Corporation (2002). DIALOG Lab Workbook.
Bates, Marcia (1984). The fallacy of the perfect thirty-item online search.
Feldman, S. (2002). This is what I asked for? The searching quagmire.
Reflection

- Why is there a core authorship and no core literature?
  - Different instructors use different pieces by the same author
    - Faculty are on different re-development cycles for courses
  - Searching is a young discipline compared to other library areas
    - Will a core literature emerge?
Applications of Research

- Faculty can use the lists of authors and articles to ensure coverage of topics across the LIS curriculum.

- Faculty need to consider the current state of search in information settings and prepare students appropriately.
Future Research Questions

- Do these patterns hold over a larger sample? Would a core literature emerge?

- What is the blend of searching needed by information professionals, and are these courses appropriate?
Thanks for your Attention!

- Preprint of full JMLA article available at http://bibliomining.com/nicholson

Citations are as found in syllabi.

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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bates, M. J.</td>
<td>The design of browsing and berrypicking techniques for online search interface.</td>
<td>Online Review 13, 407-424</td>
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<td>Bates, Marcia J.</td>
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<td>RQ 24 (Fall): 43–50.</td>
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<td>Bates, Marcia</td>
<td>“How to use controlled vocabularies more effectively in online searching.”</td>
<td>Online 12 6 (Nov.): 45-56</td>
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<td>Beeking, Marcel</td>
<td>“Training End-Users,”</td>
<td>EContent, April 2000 (File 148: 11924736)</td>
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<td>Dialog Lab Workbook</td>
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Successful searching on Dialog, 1998


