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Resources for College Libraries (RCL)

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Resources for College Libraries (RCL)

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Composite Score: ★★★★★

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Abstract

Resources for College Libraries (RCL) is a subscription bibliographic database produced by Bowker (a ProQuest affiliate), *Choice*, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Primarily a collection development tool, the database provides titles of print and electronic books, Web sites, and databases deemed essential by subject specialists for four- and two-year college and vocational and technical school library collections. This resource is a seminal tool for library collection development, maintenance, and assessment.

Pricing Options

RCL offers three subscription options: RCL, for four-year undergraduate college library collections; RCL Career Resources, for two-year community colleges and vocational, career, and technical school collections; and RCL Plus, RCL and RCL Career Resources in one database. Institutional subscriptions are approximately \$2,000 to \$2,500 per year for RCL Plus, \$1,700 for RCL, and \$700 for RCL Career Resources, but cost depends on an institution's FTE (full-time equivalent) and other factors. Justification of the price of this type of product—a database that, for the most part, is not directly used by students and faculty for their information and research needs and thus has a high per-use cost—should be based on its indirect benefit to stakeholders, namely students, faculty, the institution, and the community; Oakleaf and others¹⁻³ use of qualitative and quantitative methods to articulate, measure, demonstrate, and put a price tag on the value and impact of libraries and their resources (i.e., collections) and services (i.e., reference) using cost benefit, return on investment (ROI), and other analyses may help.

Product Description

Resources for College Libraries (RCL) is a subscription bibliographic database produced by Bowker (a ProQuest affiliate), *Choice*, and the Association of College and Research Libraries

(ACRL). Primarily a collection development tool, the database provides titles of print and electronic books, Web sites, and databases deemed essential by subject specialists (academic librarians and faculty members) for four- and two-year college and vocational and technical school library collections. The current version, RCL2.0, is a vast improvement over RCL.web, which replaced a seven-volume print set published in 2006. The database is searchable by key word, subject, title, author, Library of Congress Classification, and via a hierarchical framework of RCL subject categories. Users can save, share, and e-mail individual titles and lists, check local library holdings of titles, or order titles directly from a supplier or retailer. Brief and detailed Books in Print-type records (Bowker owns BIP) are provided; entries include *Choice* reviews when available, and, if applicable, an indication of an Outstanding Academic Title (OAT) designation. Archived webinars and 'help documents' are available as well as training tutorials that can be accessed from links on the RCL main page or viewed in YouTube. The database is updated continuously and currently contains over 85,000 titles in 125 subject areas.

The first stop for new and prospective users should be the short training videos (sponsored by ProQuest) that are available on the RCL home page and in YouTube⁴ (Figure 1).

These eleven videos are 1:41 to 3:32 minutes in length and cover the basic features of the database, including Home Page, Quick Search, Advanced Search, Browse, RSS, Brief Search Results, Detailed Record, Print and E-mail, Lists Home Page, Lists, and List Details. In addition to the brief Web tutorials, subscribers and non-subscribers

FIGURE 1 ProQuest Training Videos for Resources for College Libraries

FIGURE 2 Resources for College Libraries Training Webinar

FIGURE 3 Sections on the Main Page

FIGURE 4 RCL Subjects

can access archived webinars about ProQuest databases and products at <<http://www.proquest.com/customer-care/training-webinars/>>, including a 45-minute webinar about RCL dated July 17, 2014 (Figure 2). The webinar reviews search methods (Quick, Advanced, Browse), search results, the Search [my library] Catalog feature, and Help, as well as the sections on the main page: RCL, Learn more about RCL, RCL Career Resources, RCL Plus, Intota Assessment, Training & Support, and Contact Us (Figure 3) [access the main page via: <<http://www.bowker.com/rcl>> or the About RCL tab once logged in]. The RCL section includes: Overview, Features, Subjects, Editors, and FAQs. The Subjects sub-category includes a list of RCL Subjects; clicking on a subject links to a description of the subject, means by which selections were made, and selection preferences and focus areas (Figure 4). The Editors sub-category includes a list of editors and their affiliations. Each major LC class has a subject editor. The section Learn more about RCL includes History, Selection Policy, Project Partners, User Feedback, Training, Collecting to the Core Articles, How to..., RCL News, and Webinars.

Additional sections on the main page include information about RCL Career Resources (Overview), the companion product Intota Assessment (Overview), Training & Support (links to short training videos, webinars, RCL help documents, and Technical Support), and Contact Us (regarding Subscription & Pricing, Editorial Questions, and Technical Support).

HOME PAGE

Once logged in, users have access to the basic search box; Advanced Search and Browse links; New and Featured titles; Out-of-Print, but “On the Shelf” titles; and Editors’ Web Picks. Users click on the cover image or title link to get more information about the title (publication details, links to reviews, etc.) (Figure 5).

QUICK SEARCH

In the main search box, search by ISBN, key word, author, title, publisher, word from the book’s table of contents or first chapter (if they are included in the record), etc., are available. The Boolean Operator AND is implied; quotes work for phrase searching. Pull-down menus on either side of the search box allow filtering by subject, title, author, or publisher, or within a subject area such as Anthropology or Computer Science.

ADVANCED SEARCH

A typical advanced search menu has options to limit search terms to the title, subject, author/contributor, etc. Searches can be narrowed by Status (in or out-of-print), Audience, records with *Choice* reviews, Price range, Date range, Date added to RCL, LC and Dewey Classification ranges, Award, Format, and Media Mentions. Bulk searches can be conducted; copy and paste up to 1,000 ISBN/UPC or EAN

FIGURE 5 Home Page

numbers or upload a CSV file with up to 1,000 ISBN/UPC or EAN numbers.

BROWSE

Browse entries by RCL or RCL Career Resources subject headings (Figure 6) or Library of Congress Class (Figure 7). Users can search an entire heading, i.e., American Literature, or limit the search to a subheading, i.e., American Literature-History and Criticism. Results can be limited by date they were added to the database.

RSS

Users can set up an RSS feed and receive notification when new items are added to the database in a general or specific category (the database is updated daily). An instructional help box shows readers how to set up RSS feeds.

BRIEF SEARCH RESULTS

Twenty-five results are displayed by default. Brief Search results include the entry's title (hyperlinked), author, (hyperlinked), publisher (hyperlinked), ISBN number, format, price, LC and Dewey classification numbers, and series title, if applicable. Icons indicate whether the entry is a Book, an e-Book, or an Electronic Resource (database or Web site), and whether there

is a *Choice* review for the book, a synopsis, a first chapter to read, or an Outstanding Academic Title designation. Selected record(s) can be added to a list; downloaded; printed; shared on Twitter, Facebook or Google Plus; or searched in the user's home library catalog (via a "predictable URL" or through a Z39.50 server).

DETAILED RECORD

After conducting a brief search, more detailed information is available. Click on the cover image or title hyperlink to access a detailed record. In addition to the information contained in the brief record (title, author, ISBN #, etc.) and the "action items" – e-mail, print, download, put in a list, etc. The detailed record includes annotations, *Choice* reviews, and links to a book's table of contents (when available) or first chapter (when available).

FIGURE 6 RCL Subjects

FIGURE 7 Browse by LC Class

SEARCH CATALOG

In Brief and Detailed Record views, an “action bar” displays options to Add to List, Clear Selected, Show Selected, Print, E-mail, Download, and Search Catalog (Figure 8). One or more records (a maximum of 10 at a time) can be checked against the user’s local library catalog.

PRINT AND E-MAIL

Results (all or individually selected titles) can be printed, e-mailed, and downloaded. Records can be sent to more than one e-mail address.

LISTS

Records can be selected and saved to lists. Lists can be shared, printed, and downloaded (to an Excel spreadsheet); lists are public by de-

fault, but can be made private with a password. Contents of lists can be sorted by name, type, or date updated. Clicking the List tab reveals all the lists in a network. A list can contain an unlimited number of titles, but only 999 titles can be downloaded at a time. Lists can include brief or detailed information including annotations and *Choice* reviews. Individual titles from one list can be saved to other lists. Prices are given, including a total price for the entire list. Lists expire three years after creation or most recent modification. Properties (name of list, password required or not, expiration date) can be changed.

HELP

The Help tab directs users to links for guides to short visual guides (i.e., annotated screenshots) for Getting Started, Browse, and Advanced Search functions, Search Results, Item Records, Lists, My RCL (Overview and Using My RCL), and Videos (the short training videos described above).

FIGURE 8 “Action Items”

COMPANION PRODUCTS

ProQuest's Intota Assessment is a companion product that works with RCL, BIP, Ulrich, and the subscriber's local library to analyze sections of or the library's entire collection. Intota Assessment provides evidence about the strengths and weaknesses of a collection and generates reports and metrics. Information about Intota Assessment can be found via a link on RCL's main page or at: <<http://www.proquest.com/products-services/intota-assessment.html>>.

Bowker's BookWire App is a free mobile app available for RCL and BIP subscribers. It allows users to scan a book's barcode, perform a keyword search, make a purchase, or save a title to a list. Information about the BookWire app is displayed in the database and can be found at: <http://www.bowker.com/en-US/products/servlib_bookwire.shtml>.

Critical Evaluation

How valuable is RCL? What John M. Budd said in his 1991 review in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship about Books for College Libraries*, 3rd ed. (BCL3), the predecessor of the printed version of *Resources for College Libraries* and RCLweb, applies to RCL2.0: "the imprimatur given to BCL3 from such a body as the ACRL carries with it an authority that is attached to each title on the list. Also, the authority of the list makes it attractive for evaluative uses by such bodies as accrediting agencies."⁵ In fact, most academic library collection development policies list Books in Print, *Choice*, and RCL as primary collection development tools, referring to Resources for College Libraries as "a source to consult,"⁶ or a "respected bibliographic selection tool."⁷ (Additional resources include ARBA [American Reference Books Annual], ALA's Guide to Reference [contains 16,000 entries; designated Essential by *Choice*], and journals that review books and online resources). However, these do not provide the breadth, depth, authority, and selectivity of the RCL database. RCL is frequently mentioned in libraries' annual reports, accreditation applications, self-studies, and strategic plans, referred to as a "standard collection development tool,"⁸ a tool that was used to "order materials of the highest quality within limits of the budget,"⁹ or "the premier list of core print and electronic resources for academic libraries."¹⁰ Books about collection development tout the value of Resources for College Libraries, calling it "a list to consult,"¹¹ a "standard retrospective core collection source"¹² (in reference to the 2006 print set), and "one of the two most comprehensive [core collection] lists for academic libraries"¹³ (in reference to the 2006 print set). While Books in Print, ARBA, *Choice* and ALA's Guide to Reference are excellent complements to RCL, what a *Choice* "review team" said about RCLweb in 2007 holds true for RCL2.0: "[it is a] valuable tool for academic librarians...[and] there is no comparable product."¹⁴

STRONG POINTS

Content is continuously updated. A search in Advanced Search shows that over 4,000 new titles were added to the database from January, 2013 to January, 2015; 1,331 of these include a *Choice* review.

Being able to create lists that include *Choice* reviews is an excellent way to recommend titles for purchase, solicit opinions about specific titles, or demonstrate gaps in the subscriber's library collection.

Searching the database by limiters in Advanced Search is very useful for finding such things as the 15 books in the database that have won Alex Awards, titles that have been added to the database during a given period, books with a *Choice* OAT (Outstanding Academic Title) designation, or books in a given price or date range. For small

collection assessment projects, it is very useful to be able to search within a general or specific Library of Congress Classification range, then check the results against the local library catalog holdings. These results can then be shared as a list with library colleagues, funding agencies, or departmental faculty decision makers.

While students may have trouble using the RCL database to find resources for their research papers (as suggested in the How to... subsection in the section Learn More About RCL), the RCL database would be helpful to instructors trying to identify core resources in their subject areas to use in curricula. Using the Browse search, I selected the broad RCL Subject Sociology and found books from a variety of Library of Congress classification areas by Studs Terkel, Herbert Spencer, Hannah Arendt, Tracy Kidder, Karl Marx, Talcott Parsons, Margaret Mead, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, to name a few.

This resource is a seminal tool for library collection development, maintenance, and assessment; a tool for curricula enhancement; a conduit for librarian-faculty collaboration; and a benchmark for creating quality library collections. A multitude of training videos, webinars and help documents make this complex resource easy to use.

Contract Provisions

Subscribers are expected to restrict use of Bowker products to authorized users and locations and adhere to copyright laws. Institutional subscriptions allow for unlimited, simultaneous users, and remote access. *Choice* reviews and information from Books in Print are the ownership of the American Library Association.

Authentication

Subscribers have the option to authenticate either by IP address or by username/password. Remote access is supported through a proxy server, Shibboleth, or VPN (Virtual Private Network).

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Contact Information

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Resources for College Libraries

Review Scores Composite: ★★★★★

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

Selections and subject hierarchies are contributed by academic librarians and university faculty members and are vetted. The database combines RCL bibliographies with *Choice* reviews and information from Books in Print, and culls information from the user's local library catalog. Content is updated continuously.

Searchability: ★★★★★

The database interface is improved from earlier versions and a multitude of help resources make navigation easy. Entries include cover images and are presented in the familiar Books in Print format. A variety of search methods help users find focused results in formats that are easy to share.

Pricing: ★★★★★

The benefits of possessing a high-quality print and online collection and being able to generate evidence that connects library holdings and services to institutional goals and student outcomes should be taken into consideration when evaluating the cost of this unique product.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

Standard features allow unlimited, simultaneous users and remote access.

<<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-aFAdxOSTDefft-zloNdOeTixKvmuxMJi>>

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About the Author

Christina Miller, M.L.S., M.S. Ed., is an Assistant Professor, York Library's Head of Reference, and a member of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Miller orders books for the College's Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work Departments and the high school on campus, the Queens High School for the Sciences at York College. ■