

LIBR 202 – ASSIGNMENT 1: SAMPLING INFORMATION RETRIEVAL SYSTEMS AS A USER

Library Research – The Seattle Public Library – 08.29.09

Keyword searches on SPL's public catalog:

- *Cherokee tribe*: no results in catalog
- *American Indians*: 2561 results
- *Native Americans*: 295 results
- *Oklahoma*: 1098 results
- *Trail of Tears*: 65 results
- *Andrew Jackson*: 151 results
- *Reservations*: 354 results
- *Bury my heart at wounded knee*: 8 results
- *Sovereign nation*: 3 results
- *Cherokee nation*: 26 results

The most relevant search seemed to be the one for "Cherokee nation." From there, I looked at individual resources that were returned in order to determine how they were catalogued and to revise my list of search terms from their subject headings. These were the subject headings that came up:

- Cherokee Indians—History—19th century
- Cherokee Indians—Relocation
- Trail of Tears, 1838-1839
- Cherokee Nation—Claims
- Indians of North America—Oklahoma—Claims
- Indians of North America—Land tenure—Oklahoma
- Cherokee Indians—Census
- Cherokee Indians—Genealogy
- North Carolina—Genealogy
- Cherokee Indians—Biography
- Cherokee Indians—Land tenure
- Water rights—Oklahoma
- Jurisdiction—United States
- Indians of North America—Legal status, laws, etc.—Oklahoma
- Cherokee Indians—Government relations
- Frontier and pioneer life—Oklahoma—History
- Marriage records—Oklahoma
- Oklahoma—Genealogy
- Cherokee Indians—Politics and government
- Cherokee Indians—Treaties

I spent the rest of my half hour looking at the databases and web sites available through SPL's catalog computers. I did a quick search for articles using "Cherokee nation" as my search term; over 13,000 results in seven databases were returned! These included:

- Book reviews
- Articles
- Reports
- Critical essays
- Author abstracts
- Case studies
- Era overviews
- Letters to the editor
- Statistical data

Afterthoughts:

Although it is easy to search the library catalog and databases over the Internet and also to receive reference assistance from a librarian online or over the phone, visiting the library itself can be a bit of a hassle. Since the library I visited is located in downtown Seattle, there is no free parking, which means that you either have to pay to park, get dropped off, or take a bus. Once you enter the building, if you are not familiar with it, you may be disoriented and have to ask a staff member or volunteer where to go to search the library catalog or to get reference assistance.

Since I am familiar with SPL's public catalog, it was easy for me to conduct my searches. However, 30 minutes is really not enough time to do sufficient research on this topic. With literally thousands of results returned from my various searches, I would need to sort through a vast quantity of information to find what I need. Also, with a topic as broad as "Cherokee Nation," there are a lot of resources that may or may not be relevant. It would help to narrow the topic.

In terms of quality of information retrieved, it seemed to be pretty authoritative. Most of the results were books or government publications. Some of them were about very specific topics, such as water rights, land claims, or marriage records, within the broader topic of "Cherokee Nation." Without having a narrower topic, it is hard to say exactly how relevant or up-to-date the information was, but there was information on a variety of subtopics, and some of the resources were published recently.

Overall, I was satisfied with the results of my information seeking. Some of the initial search terms were too specific or not specific enough, but by doing several different searches using different terms, I was able to find the information I needed.

OPAC Research – King Library Catalog – 09.01.09

Keyword searches on King Library's online catalog:

- *Cherokee tribe*: 9 results

- *American Indians*: 282 results
- *Native Americans*: 6607 results
- *Oklahoma*: 1768 results
- *Trail of Tears*: 89 results
- *Andrew Jackson*: 392 results
- *Reservations*: 456 results
- *Bury my heart at wounded knee*: 11 results
- *Sovereign nation*: 11 results
- *Cherokee nation*: 118 results

Updated search terms (from subject headings of relevant resources), excluding those already found through SPL search:

- Cherokee Indians—Water rights
- Cherokee Indians—Race identity
- Indians of North America—Mixed descent
- African Americans—Relations with Indians
- Slavery—Southern states—History
- Slavery—Oklahoma—History
- Ex-slaves of Indian tribes—Southern states—History
- Ex-slaves of Indian tribes—Oklahoma—History
- Southern states—Race relations
- Oklahoma—Race relations
- Cherokee Indians—Wars
- Indians of North America—History—Civil War, 1861-1865
- United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Participation, Indian
- Cherokee Indians—Trials, litigation, etc.
- Cherokee Indians—Legal status, laws, etc.
- Indians of North America—Legal status, laws, etc.—Georgia
- United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Indian troops
- Cherokee law

Afterthoughts:

In practical terms, for remote access to the King Library catalog, an Internet connection is required, and the speed of one's connection impacts the amount of information retrieved in 30 minutes. When accessing the catalog through the SLIS homepage, it took me a few moments to find the link to the catalog on the page that came up when I clicked on "King Library." I had to read through a lot of information to find the catalog link, as it didn't really stand out.

In terms of quantity, thousands of titles were retrieved, which is a lot to sort through. Again, a narrower topic would be helpful. In terms of quality, the information seemed very authoritative, as most of the works were of an academic/scholarly nature or published by the government. The findings were very precise on various subtopics and seemed relevant to the overall topic. Many of the titles were published within the past 5-10 years, making them relatively up-to-date.

Google Research – 09.01.09

Terms searched from Google's general search screen:

- *Cherokee tribe*: 170,000 results
- *American Indians*: 7,320,000 results
- *Native Americans*: 12,100,000 results
- *Oklahoma*: 114,000,000 results
- *Trail of Tears*: 1,320,000 results
- *Andrew Jackson*: 34,700,000 results
- *Reservations*: 72,200,000 results
- *Bury my heart at wounded knee*: 229,000 results
- *Sovereign nation*: 7,470,000 results
- *Cherokee nation*: 1,010,000 results

Afterthoughts:

Google searches need to be specific in order to filter out irrelevant results; for example, "reservations" is too broad a term, bringing up results for dining and travel reservations. The "Advanced Search" feature may be helpful to narrow results.

Many results are commercial sites or sponsored results. This calls into question the authoritativeness of the information they provide. Even those which are not commercially sponsored or for-profit could present inaccurate information.

Searching on Google is a lot different from searching a library catalog or even a database, because the information retrieved is not catalogued or classified, is not selected for inclusion, and is so broad and numerous. If you don't have a very specific topic, you can easily get lost or overwhelmed by the amount of information retrieved. Also, you can realistically only use the results on the first several pages of results, because nobody has time to page through millions of websites!

The results retrieved through a Google search are going to be mostly websites, or perhaps an online vendor (such as Amazon) of books or other media. You would have to do more substantive research to discover books, articles, or government publications on your topic, or resort to going to the library or its online catalog and databases to search.

Some websites returned in the search may expose your computer to security threats, viruses, spyware, etc.

REVISED SEARCH TERMS:

Based on my research using these three systems, my revised list would look like this:

- Cherokee Indians
- Cherokee Nation
- Indians of North America
- Cherokee law