



Northwestern University Library increases access to its electronic holdings using Google Scholar Library Links

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Jeff Garrett

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for Collection Management
Bibliographer for Classics
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ABOUT GOOGLE SCHOLAR'S LIBRARY LINKS PROGRAM

Google Scholar provides a simple way to search for scholarly literature. From one place, you can search across many disciplines and sources: peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts, and articles from academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories, universities, and other scholarly organizations. Google Scholar helps you identify the most relevant research across the world of scholarly research.

The Library Links program allows libraries to connect their holdings to Google Scholar, making it easier for their patrons to search and access the libraries' electronic resources when they're using the service. Once a library has joined the program, patrons will see additional links in their Google Scholar search results which facilitate access to the library's holdings. These links lead to the library's servers, which, in turn, direct patrons to the full-text of the articles.

The libraries at Northwestern University are committed to providing students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visitors with access to a rich collection of materials that encourage exploration and learning. With more than 4.6 million volumes, 4.3 million microforms, and nearly 42,000 current periodicals and serials, the libraries' holdings rank 11th among the nation's private universities. The University Library, located on the main campus, comprises main subject collections, branch libraries, and several specialized departments. It serves more than 15,000 full-time students, including 7,000 undergraduates living on campus in Evanston, Illinois and thousands of graduate students living in Evanston and Chicago. In every branch, collection, and department, librarians and staff are aware of technology's impact on the collections and draw on specialized expertise and skills to help users launch, organize, and execute a successful search for information.

Challenge

Northwestern University Library works hard to make sure that every student has access to the highest quality academic resources. At a time when more students are using the web for research, and more traditional scholarly resources are available in digital format, that means ensuring easy access to the full breadth of the library's extensive electronic holdings.

“As collection management librarians, it's our job to spend wisely and make sure our patrons get the maximum benefit from the resources we provide,” explains Jeff Garrett, Assistant University Librarian for Collection Management and Bibliographer for Classics. “One of our most important goals is to increase community access and drive more traffic to our licensed holdings, as well as to raise awareness generally about library resources.”

Access to the library's electronic resources is especially critical for Northwestern's graduate students. “Students at every level use the library, but grad students are the heaviest users,” says Garrett. “Many of them live off campus, in the city. I don't know if you know how cold it is in Chicago in February. So this isn't only about service – it's about survival.”

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Solution

Library administrators first heard about Google Scholar's library links program through peers at MIT, Emory, and elsewhere. The program enables libraries to connect their holdings to Google Scholar, allowing students to use the service to find and access scholarly materials the libraries have licensed. Inspired by Google Scholar's potential to increase exposure to its holdings, Northwestern joined the program in 2005 and launched a “Google Gets Brainy” campaign to educate students about it. This included sending out a press release, holding Google and Google Scholar workshops, and, finally, adding a Google Scholar button to the library's home page.

“Google is enormously popular – one of the great inventions of our age. With library links, Google Scholar introduces a broad community to our scholarly resources, including people who might never have accessed these materials otherwise,” explains Garrett. “The reason Google Scholar is being promoted is that it allows us to use the popularity of Google to get people to capitalize on the high-quality information we’re paying for.”

Now, students like undergraduate Rita Biagioli are finding it easier to track down obscure library materials. “I was working on a paper last week for one of my psychology classes,” says Biagioli. “The professor suggested we look at the citations in his book to find additional sources in the field. I couldn’t find any of them using psychology-specific online databases, but then I searched for the titles of the articles on Google Scholar and it brought them right up.”

And Biagioli isn’t alone. Implementing Google Scholar’s library links has had a dramatic impact on the use of Northwestern’s electronic holdings. Over the span of the first year, library administrators found a 78 percent increase in requests for articles coming from Google Scholar users – much more than the 20 percent increase they originally hoped for. An analysis of click-throughs to the full text of articles in the library’s database revealed even more striking results. “In January 2007, we saw a 148 percent increase in click-throughs from January 2006,” says Garrett.

Library patrons with higher-level research skills are also benefiting from Northwestern’s participation in the library links program. Patrick Johnston, a 4th year graduate student in political science, says that as the service becomes more popular, more grad students will discover how useful it is. “Google’s strength is the single search box, the easy-to-use interface. For many researchers used to more traditional research tools, this is a radical innovation. And the Advanced Search option allows for much more refinement and sophisticated use,” explains Johnston. “As Google Scholar becomes more widespread, more people will use it and become familiar with the configurability of search queries.”

Northwestern is confident that Google Scholar is helping more students take full advantage of what the library has to offer. According to Garrett, “Users want ease of access. We want comprehensive coverage. And I think Google Scholar can do both.”

