Reference Universe

Profile in Reference Service

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Sharlee Jeser-Skaggs
Instructional Services
Richland College Library

Name of Library: **Richland College Library**

Name of College: **Richland College, Dallas County Community College District**

Location: **Dallas, Texas**

Population Served: **14,000 credit and 10,000 non-credit students per semester**

Paratext Product: **Reference Universe**

About Richland College Library and Dallas County Community College District

Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) is the largest undergraduate institution in the state of Texas. Each of DCCCD's seven colleges—Brookhaven, Cedar Valley, Eastfield, El Centro, Mountain View, North Lake and Richland—is individually accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award the associate degree. Since 1965, the District has served more than 1.5 million people.

Richland College serves 26% of all the students enrolled in the District, making it the largest of the seven colleges. The student body is highly diverse, representing 98 nations and speaking more than 79 first languages. Approximately 45% of students transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The White House and the Department of Commerce named Richland a 2005 recipient of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the first community college to have received this award.

The library's information sources include more than 100 electronic databases and over 90,000 books, as well as access to Web sites and Internet search engines on 60 public computers. Library staff, which includes nine professional librarians, teaches two hundred information literacy classes per year and assists students in their research.

The library received the ACRL Excellence in Academics Award in 2004, the ALA Library of the Future Award in 2001 and the EBSCO Achieve-ment Award for Outstanding Program Development in 1999.

In addition to its credit and non-credit students, Richland has a charter high school, Richland Collegiate High School (RCHS). Up to 400 high school juniors and seniors can complete their last two years of high school at Richland College, graduating from Richland College with an Associate of Arts degree at the same time as graduating from high school, ready to transfer to a four-year university. RCHS was rated "exemplary" in its first year of operation by the Texas Education Agency, one of only 15 charter high schools in Texas to earn this rating.

Reference Challenge

Sharlee Jeser-Skaggs, Instructional Services Faculty, has always had a passion for reference work. In 1989, she thought the publication *First Stop*—an index to thousands of subject encyclopedias—was a dream come true. When it became outdated, she and other Richland librar-ians compiled their own in-house database to supplement the book. "We were blown away when *Reference Universe* came along," said Sharlee. "This was what we had been waiting for—an index to our reference collection that would help us zero in on articles needed for student projects."

*"The fact that you can search inside your collection and in the wider world makes **Reference Universe** a fabulous tool for collection development."*

"I've been a fan of Reference Universe from the very beginning...Reference books are expensive. You want to get the most value out of them. Reference Universe is the tool to help you do that."

The Paratext Solution

According to Sharlee, students often need an introductory article to get started on a project. When faculty assign a specific research topic (e.g., affirmative action), the library needs to protect against a run on available materials by the first few students who beat a path to the library's door. The library creates "Assignment Alert Carts" and uses *Reference Universe* to identify major reference sources on the topic. The books are pulled from the shelves and placed on reserve book carts. This saves the students' time as well as the librarians'. "With Reference Universe, a search turns up all facets of a subject from a variety of disciplines. With books located in different areas of the library, I often use a call number sort in Reference Universe to find books on the shelves by groups."

Sharlee says library staff always stresses the value of encyclopedias to their library instruction classes. "We teach *Reference Universe* in all our classes so students know how to find overview information to start their projects." This is especially important with Richland's large ESOL student population. "These students," says Sharlee, "are lost when they start studying American history and government if they can't get background information. And where do they get that background? From subject encyclopedias. *Reference Universe* gets them there."

Why Libraries Need *Reference Universe*

Collection development and accessing what's in your reference collection are two big reasons to invest in *Reference Universe,* says Sharlee.

- ***Reference Universe* allows the library to make the best use of its limited resources.** *Reference Universe* is essential for smaller libraries, "because we have to make the best use of the resources we have. *Reference Universe* helps us glean everything we can from our collection." For example, a student was researching Phineas Parkhurst Quimby and the Mind Cure, and was required to cite a book source. With *Reference Universe,* library staff was able to locate an encyclopedia article in a volume the library owned and provide the student with excellent information. "Finding an article citation on an obscure topic would be very difficult without *Reference Universe*."

- ***Reference Universe* is a valuable tool for collection development.** Recently a faculty member alerted the library to new topics being introduced into a course — Reparations and African Americans and Reparations and Native Americans. The library had a pretty good collection on African Americans, but was weaker in the area of Native Americans. A search in *Reference Universe* identified four titles related to Native Americans that they didn't own. Sharlee was able to ask the Collection Development Librarian to order the books and have them ready for the students before the course began.
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- **Regular updates to the database increase access to the collection as well as provide details on new titles.** *Reference Universe* isn't a static resource, Sharlee said. New titles are being added all the t ime. This helps with collection develop-ment since you might see a title in *Reference Universe* before you even see a review of it.

"I've been a fan of *Reference Universe* from the very beginning," says Sharlee. "Reference books are expensive. You want to get the most value out of them. *Reference Universe* is the tool to help you do that."

About Reference Universe

Reference Universe is a unique service providing the only cumulative index to reference works in existence.

Paratext began compilation of the *Reference Universe* database in 2003 and now works with over 250 imprints, spanning more than 11,000 reference works in English.

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New content is added each quarter, with the goal of providing complete coverage of all reviewed works published from 1985 forward.

Reference Universe works inter-actively with each library's OPAC, allowing staff and patrons to query the detailed indexes and article titles in specialized encyclopedias, handbooks and compendia which are matched against each library's holdings.

The result is an exhaustive discovery tool, maximizing every library's electronic and printed reference collection and guiding patrons more precisely to authoritative works to begin or expand research.

Additional information can be found at: www.paratext.com