

ReferenceUniverse™

Profile in Reference Service

"If we're going to use our reference collections – and get a return on the significant investment we've made over all these years – we must have a product like Reference Universe to make our print and electronic reference collections visible, down to the article level."

Sue Polanka
Head of Reference and Instruction
Dunbar Library



Name of Library: Paul Laurence
Dunbar Library

Name of University: Wright State
University

Location: Dayton, Ohio

Population Served: 17,000 students;
850 faculty; 1450 staff

Paratext Product: Reference Universe

About Wright State

Named after the world-famous Wright brothers, Wright State is a nationally accredited state university with an impressive range of study. Its six colleges and three schools, including schools of medicine and professional psychology, offer more than 100 undergraduate degrees and nearly 50 Ph.D., master's and professional degrees.

Paul Laurence Dunbar Library is the main academic library for Wright State. It supports undergraduate and graduate programs in the liberal arts, sciences, engineering, and business.

Fordham Health Sciences Library supports the School of Medicine, the College of Nursing and Health, the School of Professional Psychology, and biomedical sciences graduate programs in the College of Science and Mathematics.

In FY 2006-2007, the reference staff at Dunbar Library responded to 32,000 reference questions, an increase over the previous year's volume. Students using Dunbar Library are the primary users of *Reference Universe*.

Reference Challenge

As in many undergraduate libraries, Dunbar staff is called upon to help students whose professors require they use a range of resources when writing term papers. This helps ensure students learn to do research using more than just online databases and search engines. But some of the topics students select can pose real challenges to finding information in the print reference collection. This is especially the case with younger librarians who are more familiar with electronic resources and may have little knowledge of the print reference collection.

In addition, because Dunbar serves students in almost 150 different disciplines, librarians are sometimes asked to help research a topic with which they are unfamiliar. Before they can guide students appropriately, they need a general introduction to the topic, which is not always easy to find.

The Paratext Solution

Sue Polanka, Dunbar's Head of Reference and Instruction, provided this example of how *Reference Universe* helped a student meet the professor's requirement to use various research tools for a paper, including an article from a reference book.

“The student was doing a paper on the Chicago nightclub fire that killed more than 90 people in 2003. He needed to research fire exit door chains and was required to cite a reference book as one of his sources. I knew if I was going to find something at all I would find it in *Reference Universe*. And sure enough, I was able to find an article on fire exits and standards and requirements for fire exits that mentioned the use of chains. There’s no way I could have found an article on this topic in a print reference book if our library didn’t have *Reference Universe*.”

Sue said she has helped many students find the sources they need through *Reference Universe*, including one challenging search on gun barrels. “In the OPAC, all I could retrieve were books about the Civil War. In *Reference Universe*, I found articles with diagrams of current style gun barrels.”

When faced with an unfamiliar topic, reference librarians need to quickly gain enough information to point students in the right direction. Sue said she and her colleagues turn to *Reference Universe* first to get an understanding of the topic and find key words to help narrow the search to better assist the student. For example, a quick search in *Reference Universe* for Locus of Control turned up several encyclopedia articles to provide a definition and overview for the librarian. “Turning to *Reference Universe* first helps our librarians better

serve students,” said Sue. “And, since *Reference Universe* links directly to articles in most online reference titles, it is very easy for users to access information by searching multiple online collections in one location.”

Why Libraries Need *Reference Universe*

As the manager of a busy reference department, Sue Polanka appreciates a service that delivers results and saves time. For her, and for Wright State University, the way to maximize their reference investment is to make the invisible visible with *Reference Universe*, a single comprehensive portal to their electronic and print reference book collection.

Sue points to several reasons why she couldn’t see running a university reference department without *Reference Universe*.

- **Without *Reference Universe*, a university’s reference collection is invisible.** “These titles are listed in our catalogs only by title. You can’t get to articles through the catalog – the only way to do that is through *Reference Universe*. Students don’t know what’s on the shelf; faculty don’t know what’s on the shelf. And more and more, librarians don’t know what’s on the shelf either. If we’re going to use our reference collections – and get a return on the significant investment we’ve made over all these years – we must have a product like *Reference Universe* to make our print and electronic reference collections visible, down to the article level.”

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“Reference Universe is the first source I introduce to new librarians fresh out of library school. Reference Universe shows them the wealth of information in our collection that is otherwise hidden.”

Sue Polanka

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.

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

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- **Reference Universe is a great first stop for students doing papers.** It gives them an overview of their topic, a place to start. “And, isn’t that what our wonderful reference books are for?” When she was doing library instruction, Sue says, she would find out in advance of visiting a class the topic every student was going to be researching. Then, she says, “I used *Reference Universe* to find an encyclopedia article on every student’s topic and brought each student the appropriate reference book so he or she would have a place to start”
- **Reference Universe provides different perspectives on a topic.** “If you’re doing a paper on hunger, you wouldn’t necessarily think to go to the Irish Encyclopedia to find something on the potato famine, or look up marketing campaigns for non-profit agencies on hunger during the Great Depression. *Reference Universe* can broaden the way students think about their projects.”
- **Reference Universe is a good collection development tool.** “Search results indicate which titles your library owns – and those that you don’t. This can help you enrich your collection to better meet curriculum needs.” Sue says that *Reference Universe* is the first source she introduces to new librarians fresh out of library school.

And, *Reference Universe* is an excellent tool for experienced reference librarians as well. Sue says one of her colleagues has been at the university for more than thirty years and knows the print reference collection inside and out. She appreciates *Reference Universe* because it streamlines her workflow and saves time. Instead of looking through title after title, she just turns to *Reference Universe*.

About Reference Universe

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

Reference Universe works interactively 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.