April 2013

Op Ed-The Subject Heading Browse Display: Another Essential Component of Information Discovery-A Response to Donald Hawkins on Indexing Data and Indices

Rebecca Kornegay

Western Carolina University, kornegay@wcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kornegay, Rebecca (2013) "Op Ed-The Subject Heading Browse Display: Another Essential Component of Information Discovery-A Response to Donald Hawkins on Indexing Data and Indices," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 25: Iss. 2, Article 15.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6474>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Op Ed — The Subject Heading Browse Display: Another Essential Component of Information Discovery

A Response to Donald Hawkins on Indexing and Indices

by **Rebecca Kornegay** (Research & Instruction Librarian, Associate Professor, Liaison to History, Philosophy, Religion, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University; Phone: 828-227-3417) <kornegay@wcu.edu>

Indexes are back! In the December 2012-January 2013 issue of *Against the Grain* (v.24#6, p.66-68), **Donald Hawkins** wrote an article most welcome, "Indexing and Indices: An Essential Component of Information Discovery." He describes our industry's recognition that high-quality indexing is important and reports on several publishers' current work to create taxonomies and thesauri that will improve their wares. And in **Peter Meyers'** blog post, "Missing Entry: Whither the eBook Index?" **Meyers** gives the best explanation I've seen for why even eBooks need indexes. I was delighted to see these pieces, just as I was pleased to see the **2012 Charleston Conference** talks give so much time to findability. This is a shift from a few years back, when content was the only game in town. It's hard not to agree that content should be king; without it, where would we be? But while our digital content grew like topsy, libraries were left with what **Hawkins** terms "brute force searching" to dig into mammoth full-text databases.

This push for solid indexing isn't universal, though. While **JSTOR** is working on its **JSTOR** Thesaurus, and **ProQuest** devotes a department to vocabulary management, other information providers take a different route. Electronic reference works in **Credo** and **Oxford Reference Online** (two of the very best e-reference sources out there) do not contain the indexes that exist in the print volumes, and **JSTOR's** eBooks, as demoed at the **Charleston Conference**, anyway, offer no navigation from an eBook's index to the pages inside. Kudos, by the way, to **Gale Virtual Reference**, which does include indexes and links the searcher from the index entry into the reference book itself.

The appearance of **Hawkins'** article in *ATG* gives me a jumping-off place to talk about another sort of index, one that, were it a winged creature, would appear on the threatened spe-

cies list. That is the library catalog's subject index, and more specifically, its public manifestation as the subject heading browse display. I'm talking about the traditional, pre-coordinated subject heading, made up of main subject heading plus subdivisions, presented early on in a search. For example, a subject heading browse screen for books about the Vietnam War might look like this:

Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Aerial operations

Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Economic aspects

Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Foreign public opinion

Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Medical care

Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Personal narratives

Why should we care about this? Two reasons: The subject heading browse display provides a unique and powerful way of getting into our collections; at the same time, many libraries, when they implement their discovery catalogs, are choosing not to make this search tool available to front-of-the-house librarians. There are several situations, in fact, in which the subject browse feature is crucial.

Situation 1: Understanding the Large Collection

Consider two universities with large agricultural programs — **North Carolina State University** and **Cornell University** — and their collections about pigs, properly called "swine" in the agricultural context. Type "swine" into **NCSU's** "Books & Media" search box and you get a list of almost 2,000 titles. Relevance is spot on, and a dropdown box offers several useful limiter suggestions, but still, we're looking at 2,000 books about swine. When I'm on

the spot as a reference librarian, I want a clear picture of a collection, and to get that I need the complete list of swine subject headings. At **Cornell University's** library that's just what I get, when I bypass the initial search box and slip, librarian-style, into the Classic Catalog. There I find an orderly list of the subject headings that describe **Cornell's** very large collection of books about pigs. Granted it takes 459 subject headings to do it, but the headings make sense right away:

Swine—Anatomy

Swine—Behavior

Swine—Breeding

Swine—Economic aspects

Swine—Feeding and feeds

Swine—Housing

Swine—Marketing

The **University of Virginia's** libraries illustrate this equally well. A search on **Thomas Jefferson** in **UVA's** discovery catalog yields over 8,000 items and offers straightaway a list of them all. The discovery catalog offers also an advanced search, where specifying a subject search winnows the list to 4,700. But consider the added value of the subject heading browse display in **UVA's** **VIRGO** Classic catalog, where readers who are interested in the stages of **Jefferson's** life can choose from this list:

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Childhood and youth

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Family

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Marriage

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Last years

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Death and burial

Situation 2: The Search for the Intangible

The subject heading browse display can also express nuance and suggest terminology for searches for which keywords are not obvious. **Virginia's** **Thomas Jefferson** collection is, again, a perfect case study. The **VIRGO** Classic catalog offers the researcher a remarkable list of suggestions that help find books on the intangible as-

continued on page 39

8 Library Services That Will... Make You Smile.

- 1) **Publishing Sources** - Almost 200,000 at our disposal
- 2) **New Title Selection Plan** - Immediate notification
- 3) **Electronic Ordering** - Simple online ordering system
- 4) **Early Release Program** - Immediate availability guarantee
- 5) **Cataloging** - We do the busy-work for you
- 6) **Comprehensive Reporting** - Up-to-the-minute order status
- 7) **Duplicate Order Alert** - We're on guard, you avoid hassles
- 8) **Paperback Reinforcement & Binding** - Avoid expensive wear & obsolescence

For more details, visit:
emery-pratt.com

"Things always go smoothly with Emery-Pratt. Their people are knowledgeable, and always provide friendly, rapid service."

*Cameron University
Lawton, OK*

Emery-Pratt

Dependability. Reliability. Smileability.

1966 W M 21, Owosso, MI 48867-9317
Phone: 800 248-3887 • Fax: 800 523-6379
emery-pratt.com

Op Ed from page 38

pects of **Mr. Jefferson**, a sort of "Did you mean?" list:

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Contributions in education
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Contributions in science
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Knowledge—Architecture
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Knowledge—Botany
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Knowledge—Philosophy
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Views on education
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Views on religion
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Views on virtue
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Views on women

How in the world could any of us — student, professor, librarian — come up with just the right keywords to bring these ideas to our searches?

Situation 3: The Snowball's Chance in Hell

Admit it, in many cases the searcher has a snowball's chance in hell of coming up with a

term that will match the catalog's records. This is clear when researchers seek works about a particular time period. The subject heading structure of chronological subdivisions is a work of scholarship, perfected by specialists at the **Library of Congress**, and it can quickly scuttle a keyword search. Each country's history, for example, has its *own* set of time periods: Canada—History—1841-1867, but Uruguay—History—1830-1875. Topics other than history have chronological subdivisions, too. Chinese art subdivisions are based on dynasties (--Ming-Qing, --Song-Yuan) and geology uses --Jurassic or --Cambrian. In other words, guessing the right way to type a time period into a search box is next to impossible. Much better to ask for the complete list of possible time periods, presented in the subject heading browse display, and choose the best one for the question at hand.

Professional Expertise

It's worth noting that savvy library users have noticed the value of the subject index that is embedded in library catalogs. Students and faculty often know to click on a subject heading link within a catalog record (though they're frequently surprised to find themselves back where they started, with the one item they found in the first place). And discovery catalogs depend on the subject headings in order to recommend ways to limit a search. But for a reference librarian, hyperlinked subject headings and subject-based facets should *complement* the full subject heading browse display, not supplant it.

Researchers expect librarians to be search experts, to know techniques that go far beyond excellent keyword searching. In the **Ithaka** report, *Supporting the changing research practices of historians*, the interviewer asked historians, "Have you worked with any of the librarians on campus?" Historian: "Oh yes. Because they are trained as librarians they can think of search terms, or ways of searching that I — I am not trained as a librarian, so I don't. So yes, definitely the librarians are crucial in the whole research process...." The reference librarian who doesn't know about the subject heading browse display (or whose library has chosen to relegate it to the back of the house) is missing out one of our profession's best-performing tools.

DDA, the bookBot, and Final Thoughts

In a 2005 *LJ* article and subsequent book, *Magic Search: Getting the Best Results from Your Catalog and Beyond* (ALA Editions, 2009), colleagues and I argued that keyword searching using subject heading terminology is an essential professional skill. We didn't say much about using the display of subject heading + subdivision as a browse tool. But recent developments convince me that the browse function really does matter. Demand-driven acquisitions, remote storage of materials, and closed-stack set-ups like **NC State University's bookBot** robotic book delivery system in the new **Hunt Library** mean that finding

continued on page 40

what you want *in the catalog* is often the only way to go.

A colleague said to me the other day, “they’ll never make indexes like they used to.” She is probably right. Full-text keyword searching is here to stay, and I wouldn’t have it otherwise. But the library catalog’s subject index is a tool we all own. It’s already designed, built, paid for. **Library of Congress** continues to modify it to suit emerging topics and trends.

So what’s a librarian to do? Reference librarians, make sure the subject heading browse display is available to you. Learn to use it. If you’ve never seen it, ask about it. And when a foundering freshman wails, “I just want to write about gun control, and my professor says I have to narrow the topic,” don’t start typing. Instead, perform librarian magic. Pull up the browse screen and read off a few choices: “How about public opinion, social aspects, or ownership?”

Catalogers? Keep up the good work and recognize how important it is that your work be understood by those *outside* of technical services.

All librarians, when you implement the best discovery catalog, beautifully designed with the user in mind, don’t abandon “essential components of information discovery” like the subject heading browse display. No, they’re not for the amateur. In fact, that’s the point!

References

Hawkins, D. T. (2012). Indexing and Indices: An Essential Component of Information Discovery. *Against the Grain*, v.24#6, p.66-68.

Kornegay, B., Buchanan, H., Morgan, H. (2005). Amazing, Magic Searches: Subdivisions Combine the Precision of the Cataloger with the Freewheeling Style of a Googler. *Library Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6277396.html>.

Meyers, P. (2011, September 2). Missing Entry: Whither the eBook Index? [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://newkindofbook.com/2011/09/missing-entry-whither-the-ebook-index/>.

Rutner, J., Schonfeld, R. C. (2012). *Supporting the changing research practices of historians: Final report from ITHAKA S+R*. New York, NY: Ithaka S+R. 🍷

Rumors from page 28

Speaking of Cambridge, with **Anthony Watkinson**, the wonderful (where does he get his energy? he travels all the time), visited with the energizer bunny **Julie Carroll-Davis** (Vice President, Global Content Alliances, **ProQuest** — I had always wondered where the Quorum was and what it was, quite a group of offices and buildings), **Serpil Pavay** (her name is Turkish and means “to blossom” and she does indeed

against the grain people profile

Alison M. Armstrong

Collection Management Librarian
Radford University
<amarmstro@radford.edu>

BORN AND LIVED: I was born in Greenville, SC, raised in Asheville, NC, lived in Essex Junction, VT and currently live in Blacksburg, VA.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: My professional career started June, 2011. My library experience began in 7th grade, “working” in the middle school library.

I was lucky enough to work as a student assistant in Special Collections while I was an undergraduate at **UNCA** and then, briefly as a Page in **Asheville’s Pack Memorial Library**. I worked as a paraprofessional at **Radford University** for four years, got my MLIS and I was hired as the Collection Management Librarian this June.

FAMILY: My family consists of my husband and our Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. My extended family (especially, my favorite niece) resides in Asheville, NC and my husband’s extended family resides in Upstate New York.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I knit, make jewelry, volunteer, hike, camp, travel and, of course, play with the dog in my spare time.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Anything by: **Barbara Kingsolver, Carl Hiaison, Bill Bryson, Tom Robbins, David Sedaris.**

PET PEEVES: Cutting corners to save time but sacrificing quality. I would rather do it right the first time than do it not-quite-right quickly and then have to do it again.

It means that I am also a fan of “if you want it done right, do it yourself” which, in reality, isn’t a good way to live.

PHILOSOPHY: Social action, social justice play a big part, so does my religious viewpoint. On the humorous side, I trend toward bumper sticker philosophies to capture the essence. (Syracuse Cultural Workers and Northern Sun.)

“Your silence will not protect you.” ~ **Audre Lorde**

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: It’s coming. One day.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I hope to have contributed in some way to my field. I want to be on my way to being known as a thinker/mover/leader.

HOW/WHERE I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: We will better serve our constituents by having more direct feedback about what they want and what they are looking for. We will be more closely tied into what they are doing and seeking at a multitude of contact points (social network, Web analytics, interest groups, etc.) that we will no longer be “divining” what they want, but, in some fashion, hearing what they want and need from them. In the past five years, I think we have seen a shift toward the individual in terms of how the individual expresses their needs, thoughts, experiences and so forth (Facebook, Yelp, TripAdvisor, blogs) that give individuals a place and the power to share all of that information. Along with that trend, I think that, it is no longer just the squeaky wheel that expresses what they want, but everyone has been given the means to express themselves and the affirmation that (to a degree) other people are listening to them. 🍷

blossom as a meeting organizer extraordinaire) and the equally energetic **Heather Crossan**. We are planning for the **16th Fiesole Retreat**, which will be in Cambridge at the DoubleTree by **Hilton** tentatively April 10-12, 2014. If you are interested, we can tell you more. www.casalini.it/retreat/

Speaking of which, Cambridge is a charming town, like Oxford but more rural. There’s the **Fitzwilliam Museum** with wonderful ancient artifacts and gorgeous mosaic floors that put wood to shame, tons of charming and walkable colleges, the most impressive of which is **King’s College**

which was founded in 1441 by **Henry VI** (1421-71) and is one of the 31 colleges in the **University of Cambridge**. (Did you know that **Anthony** himself studied at Peterhouse?) Since I have a son in the Army, I was very interested in the **Eagle Pub** when our cab driver told us about it. Since it was on flat land, Cambridge was where many RAF WWII missions originated. Of course the **Eagle** fed and watered many pilot types. There is a ceiling in a back room that is decorated with mementos from the pilots and also a plaque to them in the pub. And

continued on page 49