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A Website Review — Cabell’s International: A Welcome Tool in a World of Predatory Journals

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Despite a wordy alert about the use of cookies that distracts the eye, the new Cabell’s International database interface is spacious and bright — you can easily click the cookie message away. Website designers at Cabell’s have done their homework and utilize color, shades, intuitive tabs, and dropdowns to save space and keep things clean. At the institution, the site defaults to a basic “Journal” search. Words keyed in here result in a keyword search. Because there is little description beyond the journal supplied “Aims and Scope” or any meta-data other than the assigned discipline and topic categories, users not looking for a specific journal need to search using broad terms in order to get results. Clicking on the advanced search option greatly expands your options and allows for customized filtering: by discipline (and then by topic within discipline), difficulty of acceptance, peer review type, acceptance rate, time to review, and more.

The database is geared for three main user groups: scholars looking to identify a suitable journal for their work, librarians involved in collection development, and tenure committees looking for additional measures upon which to judge the value of a candidate’s work. Scholars may initially be excited to see a special search tab entitled “Calls for Papers,” but after getting little or no results here, they may abandon this tab. Searches for “algebra,” “sustainability,” and “ocean” resulted in zero hits. Or rather, the searches resulted in an ominous field of white where presumably there would be a list of results — it would be nice to at least get an indication that there were zero results and, even better, to get a suggestion for a different but related term that might bring up some hits. A search for “marketing” did bring up two journal titles.

A third search tab, Institutional Publishing, or IPA (Institutional Publishing Activity), is geared to appeal to administrators — Deans, Department Heads, and even Provosts and Presidents — or scholars contemplating a move to another institution. Although I am not in a position where institutional level information would be useful, this search tab too has limited use in my opinion. If one is able to filter for a discipline and topic area that is relevant, you only get a list of institutions broken down into three somewhat elusive categories reminiscent of cup sizes at Starbucks: Premier, Significant, and High Influence. There is also another category “Accredited” where “those institutions whose faculty members publish in journals without citation counts but are accredited by national accreditation associations.” Although it is possible to filter here for Humanities, you get no results. It is unclear why this is even an option since there are no humanities journals in the database. The list continued on page 51