INNOVATIONS

A HyperCard call number directory:
Using stacks to find stacks

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Wayne State University Libraries now use a dedicated Macintosh terminal running a custom-built HyperCard stack to assist users in locating items by call number. This automated Call Number Directory leads patrons through a series of questions until the exact floor and stack for a particular call number appear on the screen.

Purpose
Since WSU unveiled its online catalog LUIS in October 1987, the formerly routine determination of floor location by call number has become more complicated. Users and librarians must answer (at least implicitly) a series of questions before heading to the stacks. The revered Collections Directory—an in-house chart that indicates an item's whereabouts according to its card catalog number and deciphers some quaint card catalog stamps—has been rendered obsolete by the online system. Because WSU hosts DALnet (Detroit Area Libraries network)—a consortium of libraries which participate and whose records appear in the LUIS catalog—users can search WSU's catalog and find call numbers for books in libraries throughout southeastern Michigan. Despite obvious on-screen indications of the holding library and/or any special location within, patrons can ignore such vital information and have been known to search the wrong building's shelves for the books they need.

Description
Patrons use the Macintosh mouse (no keyboard is required) to click on a series of "buttons" which lead them to a variety of informational "cards" or screens culminating in the on-screen presentation of a digitized floor plan with call number ranges indicated on the stacks. Arranged hierarchically, the HyperCard stack explicitly asks patrons to answer the following questions for each call number:

• Did this call number come from LUIS or the card catalog?
  • If LUIS, is this a WSU item?
  • Which library within WSU is indicated (there are four libraries on campus)?
  • Are there any special locations or collections such as Reserves or Documents or Reference?
  • Is it a Dewey or LC call number?
  • Is the item oversize?
  • What is the first letter (or number) of the call number?

Only upon this kind of analysis is the patron shown the particular stack of the particular floor of the particular library for each call number.

Moreover, on-screen warnings about the items in the card catalog (which hasn't been updated since 1981) and in the Dewey collection (WSU switched to LC in 1966) compel the patron to think about looking for more current materials.

Practical information
The WSU Call Number Directory stack currently consists of 60 cards and 198K of memory while the HyperCard utility itself occupies 622K. For this reason, and since opportunities for revising and expanding the Call Number Directory stack are virtually limitless, a Macintosh SE hard disk is recommended. WSUL's terminal is installed prominently among the main library's other OPAC terminals in the reference area. Ideally, patrons can move from the LUIS terminal to the Macintosh to the shelf.

The program is designed for automatic loading
using the Mac’s “Start up” program and by embed­
dding a script into HyperCard’s Home stack that
goes to the desired card upon opening. Thus, the
Call Number Directory stack is enacted merely by
turning on the main power switch to the terminal.
This is an important programming feature in an
environment with many public terminals, each of­
fering different files with different passwords and
protocol. Similarly, the machine can be shut down
at the click of a well-scripted button enabling Ap­
ple’s ResCopy tool.

The familiar menubar at the top of the Macin­
tosh screen is easily hidden through “openStack”
scripting and, with no keyboard in use, essentially
off-limits. Further, since the stack is “browsing”
only in the public mode, and since a password is re­
quired before any modifications can occur, the
stack is protected from tampering. The automated
Call Number Directory—turned on in the morning
and off in the evening—has an introductory screen
that states its purpose and invites patrons to click
away.

Simple scripts can be written that keep track of
patron use by counting in invisible fields. Peak pe­
riods can be similarly identified by comparing
these use statistics with the Mac’s internal clock.

Use

Installed with no fanfare or announcement, the
terminal has attracted attention—if for nothing
other than curiosity. A Macintosh in an IBM-
dominated area demands attention despite its com­
petitively small screen size and lack of color. The
presence of even imperfect graphics compares fa­
vorably to the lack of same in the online and CD-
ROM terminals. The Reference and Information
Desk staffs have been gradually introducing pa­
trons to the terminal’s function—particularly
when faced with the general question of “How do I
find books by call number in this library?” More­
over, the program is now being introduced through
the Center for Bibliographic Instruction—an office
which administers BI to all new students
through a required one-credit course—to familiar­
ize a new generation of library users with the pro­
gram. In the meantime, however, some patrons prefer
to bypass the system in favor of asking a quick ques­
tion of a staff member. Despite an inherent “Short
Cut” in the program (which allows users to skip
some screens once comfortable with the system),
some patrons simply are confounded by the num­
ber of questions that must be answered before find­
ing out the correct floor or location. Indeed, the
terminal is sometimes abandoned mid-stream. Al­
though scripts are written to bring the program
back to its introductory card after a certain amount
of inactivity, programmers can make the “Payoff”
of the location as exact as possible (down to the ex­
act shelf) to keep the users’ attention.

Future

In a multi-institutional database environment
like WSU’s online catalog, the HyperCard Call
Number Directory could eventually be expanded
to include all system-wide libraries’ collections.
Wayne State University Libraries are currently ex­
ploring the possibilities of adding features to the ex­
isting program: larger screen, color monitor,
touch-screen response. Eventually, these features
may evolve into an automated Information Kiosk
that includes tours (with floor plans culled from the
Call Number Directory), instruction (a required
HyperCard BI program is in the final stages of de­
development), and general campus information.
Meanwhile, the HyperCard stack is a noticeably
innovative alternative to an otherwise mundane
transaction.

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Call Number Directory, please contact: William
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The academic reference librarian:
Serving graduates in their job search

By Laura Windsor
Reference Librarian
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Academic reference librarians will encounter
reference questions each quarter or semester from
those students who are on the verge of graduating,
or have already graduated. They can range from
“Do you have any books on how to write a re­
sume?” through “Who’s hiring in the field of elec­
tronics?” to “Do you have some sort of list of com­
panies in the import-export business?” Most of us
will show them adequate reference sources, but
our role in a student’s quest for employment is