

Chapter 11

Setting a Direction for Discovery: A Phased Approach

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ABSTRACT

While many other academic libraries are currently or have recently faced the challenge of setting a new direction for their discovery platforms, the University of Minnesota is perhaps unique in its phased approach to the process. In the spring of 2011, the University of Minnesota Libraries appointed a Discoverability task force to identify a Web-scale discovery solution, the third phase in the Discoverability research process. Discoverability 3 Task Force members are now synthesizing the work of two previous phases and other relevant internal and external analyses to develop requirements and selection criteria for the solution. Some of these requirements and criteria are standard for any large-scale system implementation. Others were derived from the findings of the previous two phases of the Discoverability project. The authors discuss the Libraries' phased approach to developing a vision for discovery and selecting a solution that puts the Libraries on a path to fulfilling that vision.

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INTRODUCTION

As library users become more and more comfortable with each new innovation in the Web-based world, libraries have found themselves struggling to provide an experience that seems as effortless as Google yet directs users to resources owned or licensed by the library. The path to the perfect search tool is further complicated by the range of needs an academic library must meet. If users are to rely on a single search tool, that tool must provide a balance of ease of use and breadth/depth of results that is appropriate for:

- The freshman who needs five credible sources he or she can read, understand, and synthesize.
- The upperclassman who is capable of reading and synthesizing academic work, but still may want to find articles and books from popular sources to provide context for a topic.
- The graduate student who must find and review any and all literature related to his or her topic.
- The researcher who needs to know about new publications in his or her field, but also understand the basics of other disciplines as interdisciplinary work grows.

University of Minnesota Libraries has approached this challenge by charging successive groups with exploring aspects of user expectations and needs, inventorying data sources both within and external to the Libraries, developing a vision for an ideal discovery tool and, finally, issuing a request for proposal (RFP) for the Libraries' next discovery platform. The groups have each operated under the umbrella term "Discoverability," and each has built on the work of the previous Discoverability groups.

In this chapter, members of the three Discoverability groups describe what they found in each phase of this approach and how theoretical

discussions and explorations of the current state of the art in discovery led to a series of requirements for the Libraries' next discovery solution.

BACKGROUND

The University of Minnesota is a large public research university, with a flagship campus located in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and four coordinate campuses across Minnesota. About 52,000 of the 69,000 enrolled students are on the Twin Cities campus. The University community includes over 4,000 faculty members among its 25,000 employees. The University offers Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in a wide variety of majors, with strong programs across disciplines.

A core value of the University of Minnesota Libraries is offering appropriate services and tools to meet the Libraries' diverse user population's needs. Over the last decade, Libraries staff members have expressed that value through projects such as:

- The Undergraduate Virtual Library, a library-novice-friendly portal for key resources, implemented in 2004 as part of a University-wide focus on undergraduate learning and retention (Prescott & Veldof, 2010).
- The Multi-dimensional Framework for Academic Support project, which analyzed user behavior and resulted in numerous initiatives to create a more productive research support environment (University of Minnesota Libraries, 2006).
- The myLibrary service, a site within the University's institutional portal with content customized according to the user's *affinity*: their role, college, department, and degree program (Hanson, Nackerud, & Jensen, 2008).

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