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The *North Carolina Periodicals Index:* History,Changes, and Challenges

The *North Carolina Periodicals Index* (*NCPI*) was developed in 1992 as an online resource to assist undergraduate students in term paper research on North Carolina related topics. State-oriented publications lacked efficient indexing, and the North Carolina Collection (NCC) at J.Y. Joyner Library found a way to fix this by creating an online subject index. In the years since its implementation, the *NCPI* has proved to be a useful tool for undergraduate research; since most academic print journals offer free online access to articles, an enhancement in the database now links print titles with online publications.

Readily available information that can be found outside a library's walls is a great resource for students writing research papers. To assist in finding information, the *NCPI* has evolved from an online database providing only subject-bibliography information for print journals to an index that also provides URL links to the online edition. This valuable addition gives students a broader resource to access North Carolina information; quicker and easier access to information helps make research and writing less daunting.

The History of the NCPI

The *NCPI* began as a free online journal abstract resource developed by the NCC–with the help of other library staff. It is maintained by NCC staff. Many titles included in the *NCPI* were not covered by online indexes. Some of the journals had subject indexes that were published annually, or even less frequently. Because most of these titles were not included in an online index, it was necessary to use print indexes. This somewhat limited the journals' use since students preferred online indexes to print indexes. These highly specialized indexes used in undergraduate research became even more useful when they were included in the *NCPI* as an online resource, serving undergraduates more effectively.

The Process – Then

Article abstracts were taken from sixty-eight North Carolina related titles not covered by major indexes. All of the titles were available for use in the NCC; articles could be photocopied or requested through interlibrary loan. Topics included politics, social and environmental issues, history, literature, and others. Selection guidelines were that the article had to be about North Carolina and at least one page in length. Book, performance, and film reviews were generally not indexed, unless the review was considered important to student research. The North Carolina Librarian selected articles for abstracting, and initially graduate assistants indexed and entered data; later, a half-time support staff member began doing the work.

Data was added every two months to the library's Web server. A systems department staff member converted the data to a text file using a word processing mail merge feature. It was formatted as it would display for the public and returned to the NCC staff member for editing. The systems staff then deleted any empty fields and appended the file to the existing database. The extensive process took a long-time and-entailed file processing in several departments, which increased chances of error.

The Process – Now

Today, the same NCC staff member who began the indexing–selects the articles for abstracting and enters data. A NCC librarian edits and approves entries.

The free software tool php/MyAdmin, written in PHP and intended to handle the administration of MySQL over the Web, is used for *NCPI*'s database maintenance. Frequently used operations such as managing databases, tables, columns, relations, indexes, users, permissions, etc., can be performed via the user interface (see fig. 1). Daily inputting eliminates file exchanges between departments and reduces the time required for data entry and chances for error. Direct entry makes it easier to correct information on the input page. Abstract edits can be made on the database's programming side by the NCC librarian. Previously, corrections or changes could be made only from the *NCPI*'s user interface webpage or the input page. Access to the programming side of the index has allowed for extensive database cleanup, resulting in more accurate information.

In 2011, a URL field was added to the entry page and a "Find It!" tag was displayed on the Search Results page if an abstract contained a link to an online article (see fig. 2-5). Clicking
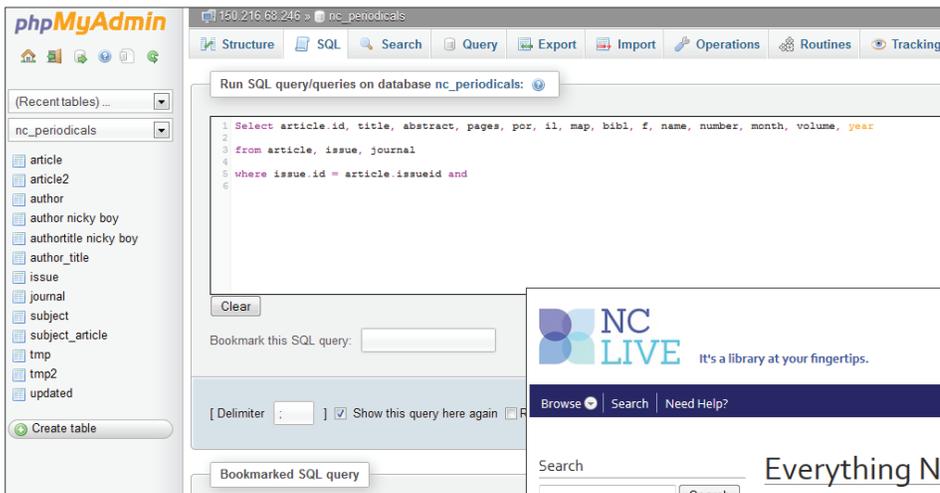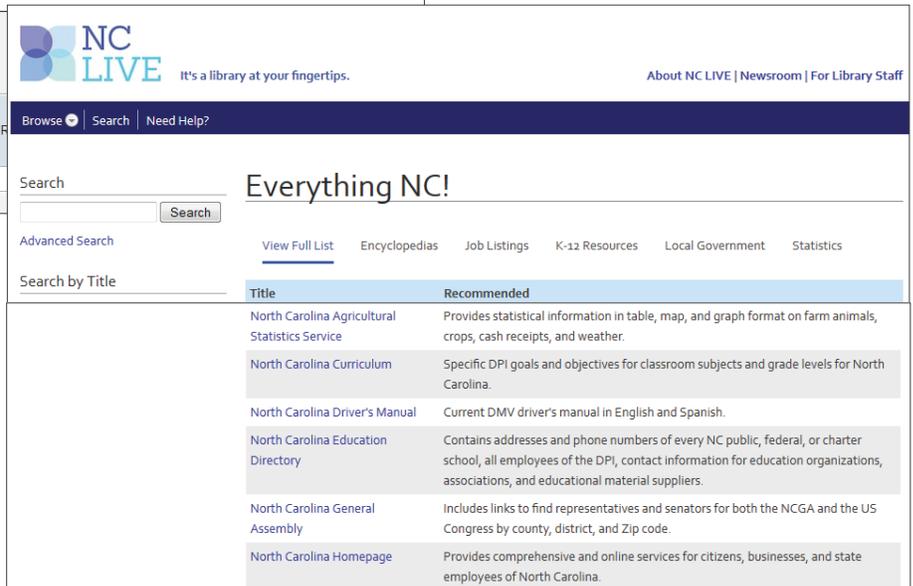
Figure 1. php/MyAdmin query page

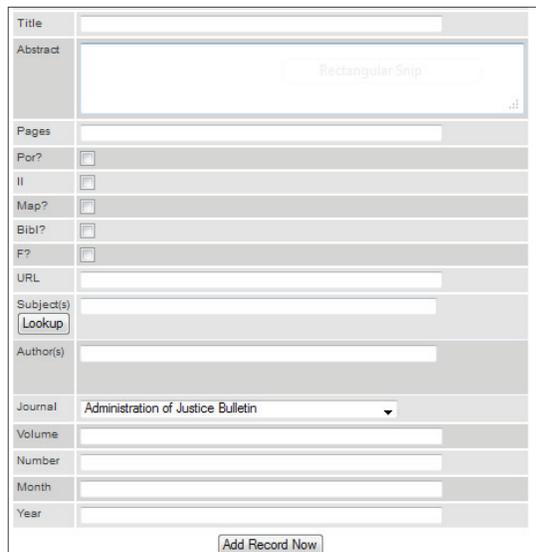*Figure 2. NC LIVE Everything NC! link to the North Carolina Periodical Index*
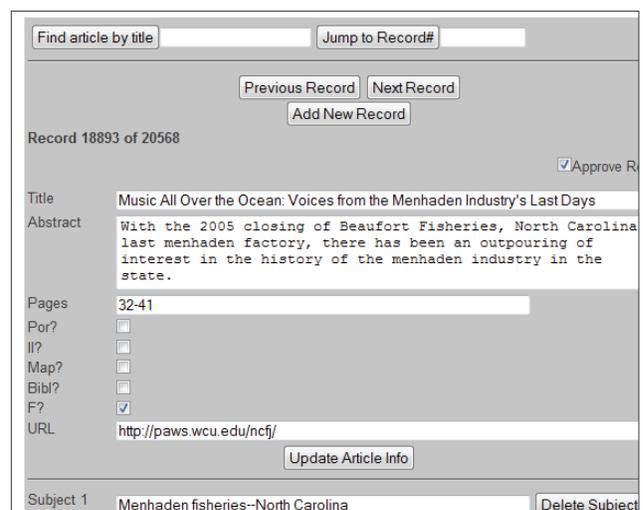

Figure 3. Blank NCPI input page with the URL field

Figure 4. Partial view of completed input page with URL added

Figure 5. Search Results with "Find It!" tag linking to article online

on the tag brings up the article in a new webpage (see fig. 6). Currently, the *NCPI* includes 130 titles; coverage extends back to 1901 for historically significant publications. Some historical publications, including the *North Carolina Historical Review* and the *North Carolina Booklet*, have been digitized, and links to articles in these publications are in the *NCPI*. URLs for articles abstracted prior to 2011 were entered in the database in a retrospective project. Students have reacted positively to the additional features that provide easier and quicker access to information.

Google Analytics is used to collect statistics on data usage for the *NCPI*. Collected data include pages browsed or viewed and number of searches performed; data is combined to give a total number of hits. To date, usage data doesn't report the number of users or demographics. The technical support analyst in the library's systems departmentis exploring a statistical analytic tool to report the number of users or demographics.

NCPI Changes and Challenges

Most of the periodicals included in the *NCPI* are print publications held in Joyner Library's NCC. Some titles are now only available electronically. In 2011, North Carolina's Office of Archives and History began publishing its newsletter, *Carolina Comments*, only online because of state budget cuts. The University of North Carolina's School of Government publishes twenty-one bulletins online for the same reason. Online publications are available for viewing, downloading, or printing. To keep up with new issues published, the NCC staff routinely browses journal webpages.

Almost 50 of the periodicals indexed in the *NCPI* are published online. Some publications, such as *Our State: Down Home in North Carolina,* publish all or most of the articles in the current issues on the Web; some titles, including *Wildlife in North Carolina* and *Coastwatch,* display a sampling of articles from

current and archived issues. All of the online titles provide at least some articles from past issues in their archives. Linked articles in the *NCPI* can be accessed without a subscription to the magazine or using a library database.

Database users expect accurate, complete, and current information. Library information managers realize databases have limitations and require periodic database maintenance to uphold integrity and usefulness. In order to keep *the NCPI's* URL information accurate, current, and complete, the library staff periodically runs a URL check software program to find broken or redirected links. Most URL check software can be downloaded for free, though some developers may request a nominal fee. Currently, NCC staff use a free URL check program from Firefox with good results. The program is run in the *NCPI's* search results page and working URLs are highlighted in green; broken or re-directed URLs are highlighted in pink (see fig. 7). Links are then corrected in the input page.

Figure 6. Full Record of Abstract

Figure 7. A broken link is highlighted in pink from the NCPI search results page

Some of the reported broken URLs actually worked, but the links took too long to load and so were reported as non-working.

In 2011-12, Joyner Library successfully partnered with NC LIVE to add the *NCPI* to its list of electronic resources. Founded in 1997, NC LIVE is a consortium of North Carolina libraries that provides digital content and services to public and academic libraries statewide. Users can access online resources through library websites and through www.nclive.org. Resources include complete articles from over 16,000 newspapers, journals, magazines, and online print books. Including the *NCPI* in NC Live provides more extensive access for users.

Conclusion

Ensuring student success drives the *NCPI's* continued growth. Making sure that resources are accurate, available, and accessible is important to the staff in the NCC. Broken or redirected links and deleted articles should not occur during research paper crunch time. In order to encourage use of the *NCPI*, regular database maintenance must be provided. This quality control measure ensures the value-added content remains value-added and not an exercise in frustration.

Selected Bibliography

Maury York. "Value-Added Reference Service: The *North Carolina Periodicals Index*," *Computers in Libraries*," 17 (May 1997), 30-33.

"About NC Live." NC Live. http://www.nclive.org/. Accessed 11/29/2013.