Digital Library for Nuclear Issues

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Project Background

The next database I'm examining is The Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues, viewable at

http://alsos.wlu.edu/default.aspx. The stated goal of the library is to "to provide references for the study of

the Manhattan Project and its consequences to a broad audience" while strengthening "the quality of

education by connecting different disciplines, issues, and ideas involving nuclear issues as well as

providing resources for specific disciplines". Rather than containing articles or film clips itself, the

library instead functions as a massive annotations database, providing "detailed bibliographic information

and the annotation, which describes the content of the reference".

According to the article "Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues", the library was founded by

Dr. Frank A. Settle for use in teaching an undergraduate course on the Nuclear Age. Publicly available as

of 2001, the Alsos Digital Library was funded by the National Science Digital Library program of the

National Science Foundation, via the following grants: #0434253, 026152, and 0085657. Currently,

funding from the NSF totals $525,00. The library itself is hosted by the Washington and Lee University at

Lexington, Virginia, and partially supported by the R. E. Lee Summer Scholars Program of that same

university. The National Advisory Board is the main body overseeing operations of the ALSOS Digital

Library. They provide advice to the library, suggests resources to be included, and evaluate the listed

annotations for accuracy and usefullness. The Board is currently comprised of 32 prominent individuals

from across the country that have been selected "on the basis of their knowledge and experience in areas

of importance to the Alsos library." These include Dr. Charles D. Ferguson II, President of the American

Federation of Scientists, Mr. Charles Loeber, retired manager for Sandia National Laboratories and Ms.

Michelle Mittrach-Garcia, librarian for Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Organization of Resources

The Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues contains over 3,000 annotations for a variety of materials, including books, articles, films and websites all focusing on the general theme of nuclear issues. The intent is to provide access to a truly multidisciplinary database, facilitating access for a broad range of users, from general readers to subject specialists. From the website: "The references trace the development of nuclear science, the Manhattan Project, which produced the first atomic bombs, the Cold War arms race, and the post-Cold War world of proliferation and terrorism, as well as nuclear power" .

The material is organized into six main categories: Issues, Science, Discipline, Warfare, Places and People, with each main category leading to an alphabetical list of subtopics. Clicking on a subtopic brings the user to a page displaying the available annotations, organized into a table with the headings showing the creator, title of the item being annotated, and type of media, be it book, article, etc. Clicking on a selected title brings the user to the material in question's main page, which, in addition to providing an annotation, provides full bibliographic information. There is also a link available to add the annotation to the user's bibliography. When available, this page also provides active links to the material if it is an article, website or book, or information on where else the material might be found. Additionally, there is a box on the right side of the materials page showing links to related topics.

Service Features

Materials can be accessed a variety of different ways in addition to the method of browsing by category as listed above. The home page of the ALSOS Digital Library contains a simple search box that is available on every page. This search box allows for searching by title, keyword or creator, and brings the user to the normal results page when a term is entered. Somewhat unusually, the home page is mostly taken up by an "Advanced Search" box, which can also be accessed by clicking on any link labeled "revise search". In addition to providing the qualifiers of All, Any and Exact to the basic search

categories of Keyword, Title and Creator, the advanced search allows the user to narrow results by Media type, Genre, educational discipline and education levels of General, Advanced and Youth. The user can further narrow their search by time period by selecting Pre World War II, World War II, Cold War or Post Cold War.

At the top of every page, the basic search is available, as well as links to browse the material by category, an "about" link granting information on the library itself, and a link to the user help page. On the far right side of each page is a link labeled "My Bibliography", which functions as a history page allowing the user to see what articles they have viewed, assuming they clicked the provided link to add the material. Lastly, there is a link to a "Help" page, explaining all the facets of the site in clear terms. The help page provides information on performing basic and advanced searches, an explanation of all the icons available, and an overall explanation of how to use the site to research a topic.

Technologies

The Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues is registered with Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs-NonCommercial 1.0 Generic. This means that all users are free to copy, distrivbute and transmit the work, with the understanding that the work cannot be altered, used for commercial purposes and must be properly attributed. Unfortunately, very little information on the technology used for the Alsos Digital Library is readily available. However, as it is hosted by Washington and Lee University, it can be assumed that as with the University itself, the ALSOS Digital Library is designed for access from multiple operating systems, including Windows and Mac OS, "Windows 7, Windows Vista (SP2) or Windows XP Pro (SP3), For Apple systems we require Mac OSX 10.4 or later". Testing shows that the ALOS Digital Library website is accessible from most browsers and on both Mac and PC operating systems.

Comments

This site is an excellent resource for those researching nuclear issues. The website itself is very intuitive; with an excellent help section in the unlikely event the user gets confused. The search functions are infinitely better than that of the Kentuckiana Digital Library, allowing the user to easily switch from one topic to another, and easily save the annotations they find useful. The website allows the user to print out either individual annotations, or all the ones that they have saved through the My Bibliography function. An excellent addition not often seen in other databases is a link to WorldCat at the bottom of book and journal article pages, allowing the user to find the material in question at a nearby library. Furthermore, all the material posted has been vetted by a number of experts in the Nuclear Industry, granting reassurance as to the information's accuracy. The only negative pint readily apparent is that, in the case of articles, the actual article itself is not hosted on the site, and must be sought through other means. This simply means that although the Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues is an excellent resource, users will have to perform additional searching to find the actual article, book, journal or other item in question.

References

Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues. Accessed February 18 from http://alsos.wlu.edu/default.aspx.

Recommended Technical Specifications. Accessed February 18 from http://www.wlu.edu/x49941.xml

Settle, F., Whaley, T., Blackmer, E. (2003). Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues. *The Journal of Military History*, 67 (3), 921-923