Digital Library Projects: Beyond the Beltway

DIGITIZATION PROJECTS UNDERWAY

The National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature (NRCBL) is involved in two major projects in the creation of its “in-house” digital library. First, the National Information Resource on Ethics and Human Genetics (NIREHG), with grant support from the U.S. National Human Genome Research Institute, has digitized three federal reports important to the history of ethics and genetics. Two are by the President’s Commission, and the third is a draft report of the congressional Office of Technology Assessment that never was officially published. All three can now be viewed, downloaded, and/or printed from NIREHG’s website:


The second major project involves scanning the back issues of two journals: *Hastings Center Report* and *IRB: Ethics and Human Research*. The current year plus one additional year are excluded from this cooperative undertaking between the Kennedy Institute and the Hastings Center. To date, any articles cited in the

“ETHX on the Web” or “Genetics and Ethics” databases, appearing between July 1999 and December 2001, link to full-text versions hosted at Georgetown University. This published research is truly open access—i.e., available freely without licensing or password requirements to any interested reader under the “fair use” provisions of the Copyright Law. (The Hastings Center holds copyright.)

These two efforts are part of an “in-house” digital library, but the development of a “virtual digital library,” reliant upon documents stored digitally elsewhere, is also underway. Two databases—ETHX on the Web and Genetics and Ethics, each accessible at http://bioethics.georgetown.edu—provide the key to accessing all full-text materials identified to date by information services staff. More than 15,000 citations in ETHX on the Web are linked to full-text sources as of April 2004. Those database searchers without ready access to a traditional library are encouraged to check the designated box on their selected search screens to display only citations with links to full-text documents.

WEBSITE REDESIGN

The array of information services accessible at http://bioethics.georgetown.edu has been redesigned to enhance navigation, readability, and present a more uniform appearance. New features include a site map, a site index, and graphics that incorporate the ceiling murals that grace the library’s present home in Healy Hall. Representing early languages and classic sources of text, the images were painted by Br. Schroen in the last years of the nineteenth century. Comments about the site, as well as any questions regarding use of the features, are welcome and should be emailed to: bioethics@georgetown.edu.

The National Library of Medicine is revamping its website as well; visit http://www.nlm.nih.gov to view changes there. NLM supports via contracts both the National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature and the Bioethics Information Retrieval Project (IRP), two major information services at the Kennedy Institute. NRCBL is responsible for collection development and reference; whereas the IRP contributes citations to the “bioethics subset” of PubMed and is instrumental in creating a strategy that searches the entire PubMed database for citations in the clinical literature pertinent to bioethics research. See the projects’ respective home pages for details on collections, reference services, and indexing operations and terminology (http://bioethics.georgetown.edu).

NEW TITLES IN BIOETHICS HAS GONE DIGITAL

Beginning with the January–March 2004 issue, New Titles in Bioethics is freely available on the web at http://bioethics.georgetown.edu as a NRCBL publication. This quarterly current awareness tool identifies new monographs, including not only books but also audiovisuals, reports, and special issues of periodicals devoted to a specific bioethics topic. Arranged by subject, approximately 250 citations in each issue indicate resources acquired by NRCBL in the preceding three months. Citations for items from less familiar sources include the ad-
dresses of suppliers. Useful to both librarians and researchers, *New Titles* is now in its 30th year.

QUICKBIBS HELP NOVICE SEARCHERS IDENTIFY LITERATURE ON BIOETHICS TOPICS

The most recent innovation on the bioethics website at Georgetown is the implementation of QuickBibs. Inaugurated on the NIREHG pages, QuickBibs are dynamic bibliographies on major topics in genetics, drawing on the Genetics and Ethics database. Retrieval is designed to be selective, focusing on recent, more substantive literature, when possible. Since QuickBibs are created from the most recent version of the database, they are “refreshed” automatically.

Other examples of QuickBibs are the home pages of NRCBL’s special collections: The Max M. and Marjory B. Kampelman Collection of Jewish Ethics, the R. Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver Collection on Christian Ethics, the Shigeo Morioka Collection on Asian Bioethics, and the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Collection on Women, Infants, and Children. Of special interest to an international audience is the Morioka home page, which offers QuickBibs on all the Asian countries represented in NRCBL’s collections, as well as on Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam. For example, clicking on “Islam” retrieves more than 250 citations to literature about Islamic views, news items, and research on bioethical issues. Those titles that appear as links lead the searcher either to an abstract or, in the case of a book, to the table of contents. The search strategy used to generate the QuickBib appears at the top of the retrieved list.

ADDITION OF BOOK RECORDS TO THE WEB DATABASES

ETHX on the Web and Genetics and Ethics include all articles and reports received in NRCBL since January 1988. However, a project to add retrospectively records for all the books in NRCBL acquired since its establishment in 1973 has now been completed. Citations always are displayed in descending date order. Searchers will find a mixture of books and articles for the recent years, and primarily books for the more distant past.

Users should note that searching can be restricted by publication type through a pull-down menu. Other pull-down menus can be used to limit the search by broad subject category (e.g., genetics, reproduction and abortion), approach (e.g., philosophical), language, or span of years. One can choose to assign one or many limits, but selecting more limits results in fewer—or perhaps no—citations. The remedy for a nonresponsive retrieval is to click on the “back” button of your browser to reformulate the search. If searching still is unsuccessful, complete an online search request form, and a reference librarian will contact you.

GENETICS SCOPE NOTES UPDATED ON THE WEB

Targeted annotated bibliographies—Scope Notes—on major topics in genetics and ethics appear in full text on NIREHG’s website. Topics covered are: eugenics, gene therapy, genetic counseling and testing, human genome mapping,
and patenting. Reference and research staff in the library, who monitor the literature routinely, add selected citations to each Scope Note annually. Please see these Scope Notes for updated information.

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY DIGITAL LIBRARY (GUDL)

NRCBL is participating in the development of GUDL, a new website that will highlight digital resources on all three campuses of Georgetown University and develop new pathways to access these resources. Librarians, information systems personnel, and faculty involved in new learning methodologies are working together in this important undertaking. NRCBL’s relatively long experience serving an international audience brings a different perspective to the project.