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Teaching Google Scholar: A Practical Guide for Librarians

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***Teaching Google Scholar: A Practical Guide for Librarians.* Paige Alfonzo. Rowman & Littlefield. 2016, 169 pp., \$65.00. ISBN 978-1-4422-4358-3.**

The mission statement of *Teaching Google Scholar: A Practical Guide for Librarians* can be summed up in one line from the preface: “If students and faculty members are using Google Scholar, then it is up to librarians to ensure that they know how to use it properly” (p. xiv). Early on, Alfonzo states that her inspiration for writing this book was the need expressed by the students and researchers at her institution to better understand and utilize Google Scholar. This is a need with which many of us can commiserate, myself included (having had many faculty members readily admit to regularly using Google Scholar over our library’s discovery tool.)

While traditional library instruction tends to focus on subscription databases, our users are relying more often on Google Scholar (whether for usability, accessibility, or the appeal of the simplified single-search), yet are challenged by its drawbacks (e.g. lack of full-text access, or inability to discern the scholarly quality of an article.) As a result of this shift, we owe it to our users to provide instruction where it is needed, and *Teaching Google Scholar* provides a framework to do so. It is an excellent introduction to Google Scholar for those who are not familiar with its advanced features, and also a very useful collection of lesson plans, worksheets, and other ideas of how to integrate Google Scholar into library instruction.

The first chapter consists of an overview of Google Scholar, including a summary of the lesser-known features, such as citation management and bibliometrics. Chapter 2 goes on to the technical aspects of integrating your library’s collections using an OpenURL-based link resolver, while later chapters focus on curriculum design, lesson plans, and suggestions for in-class exercises on the topics discussed. These exercises fill the need for the average user, whose primary use of Google Scholar might be searching for articles, but after reading through this

book it's clear that the value of Google Scholar is not limited to its indexing. Detailed Caselaw and Patent searching are also covered. Several lesser-utilized but important tools are covered in Chapters 7, 8, and 9, including customizations for article alerts, creation of researcher profiles (a valuable feature for graduate students and early-career researchers), and citation analysis tools. While the latter is admittedly superseded in quality by subscription-based citation ranking tools (Alfonzo discusses the lack of transparency in Google's algorithms), many institutions may not have access to those proprietary resources and Google's version is an adequate substitute.

For instructors, the sample lesson plans are a useful starting point to go further in-depth during classes. Provided with each chapter, each lesson is broken down by skill level, with different exercises provided for beginner, intermediate and advanced users. (One caveat to all of the lesson plans is that they are designed to assume a level of familiarity with library databases (p. 137), and so should be adapted accordingly for populations who are new to searching databases.) Alfonzo also makes it a point to cover evaluation of content found within Google Scholar, reiterating the importance of showing users that not all results will be scholarly, and the evaluation process should remain a key component of instruction.

One of the biggest challenges librarians face in today's information rich environment is the notion that everything is available via Google. While many of our users have become savvy to the limitations of the quality of information found on the Internet, we still face the limitations of the usability and design of our proprietary databases and as such, need to embrace the tools our users exhibit preference for. Google Scholar is an excellent research tool when used effectively, and *Teaching Google Scholar* is an excellent guide to doing so.

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