



**Focus Group 3: Academic Libraries
Summary
Austin, Texas - March 7, 2002**

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1. Introduction

The Library of Texas is a program of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) and the Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund Board (TIF). The LOT hopes to bring the resources of Texas libraries to all Texans. The LOT will build upon the existing network infrastructure of Texas libraries and will encompass a number of components including:

- Online databases licensed by TSLAC for statewide access
- A government information locator and digital government information preservation program
- A virtual catalog enabled through the use of the ANSI/NISO Z39.50 information retrieval protocol
- An integrating search and retrieval interface to the LOT's multiple components
- A document delivery service based on interlibrary loan and other mechanisms.

The Texas Center for Digital Knowledge (TxCDK) at the University of North Texas, through the ZLOT project, has a contract with the TSLAC to demonstrate the feasibility of a Z39.50-based approach for distributed access to Texas' library resources. Specifically, ZLOT will develop specifications for critical components of the Library of Texas (LOT): a virtual catalog, an integrating search and retrieval interface, and a document delivery service framework.

1. Virtual catalog: To search across multiple library catalogs from a single interface to identify library resources without regard to geographical location of either the searcher or the resources.
2. Integrating search and retrieval interface: From a single interface, to integrate access to library catalogs, the state licensed online databases, and other resources.
3. Document delivery service framework: Once resources are discovered and identified, to provide resource delivery services, e.g., interlibrary loan for materials or electronic access for digital resources.

The purpose of this focus group was to collect qualitative data in three areas:

- User resource discovery needs currently not being addressed
- User expectations of the integrating search and retrieval interface
- User expectations of the ZLOT document delivery services.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of the Participants

Participants were from academic libraries in Texas, primarily in the southeast area of the state. In all, 16 persons were invited and eleven agreed to participate. Nine of the participants represented a range of 2-year and 4-year, private and public colleges and universities that ranged in size from an estimated 4,000 to 50,000 students. One participant represented a medical research institution and one was a library automation system administrator with the TSLAC.

As a group, this was an experienced and knowledgeable gathering of library professionals who had been involved in developing, implementing, and supporting virtual library efforts for several years. Participants' average time in their current positions was 15 years. Many of the participants were acquainted with one another professionally and worked together in various professional activities. Each of the libraries that participants represented provided both remote and in-house access to TexShare databases.

2.2 Description of the Process

The meeting was held on March 7, 2002 from 9:00 a.m. to noon in a conference room at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. The three-hour meeting began with introductions of the ZLOT staff, the TSLAC observers, and the focus group participants. The principal investigator presented an overview of



the Library of Texas and the ZLOT project focus. Participants signed consent forms for participating in the study. After a 15-minute break, the focus group discussion began.

Participants were asked to complete a brief form describing their background and their library's experience with TexShare. Participants were directed to consider the needs of their patrons as a primary focus for their comments; however, the needs of library staff were also elicited. The ZLOT project manager, who guided the discussion through the following five areas, facilitated the focus group.

1. Definition of LOT
2. Information discovery services
3. LOT search and retrieval interface
4. Resource access and delivery services
5. Concerns about LOT

At the close of the focus group, participants were asked to complete a feedback form, which allowed them to echo their contributions to the group meeting or make additional contributions regarding issues and user needs vis-à-vis the Library of Texas. Overall, participants communicated in an open and interactive fashion and the meeting had a respectful collegial climate.

2.3 Data Analysis

Notes were taken during the meeting by the ZLOT principal investigator and a research assistant. Both the principal investigator and the research assistant analyzed their notes in accord with the needs and expectations specified in the purpose of the focus group:

- User resource discovery needs currently not being addressed
- User expectations of the integrated search and retrieval interface
- User expectations of the ZLOT document delivery services.

In additional area of discussion emerged during the focus group discussion:

- OCLC WorldCat

The focus group moderator, who also contributed her analysis based on summary notes compiled after the focus group, integrated these two analyses. Additionally, participants' responses to the information and the feedback forms completed during the focus group were evaluated and are included in this summary report.

3. Needs and Expectations

3.1 Virtual Libraries

In feedback forms completed anonymously at the end of the focus group meeting, participants identified three characteristics of virtual libraries. These characteristics are listed below along with participant comments that exemplify them.

Digital Content

- Importance of full-text electronic content
- Full-text digital content

Ease of Delivery

- 24x7 document delivery to the desktop

Challenges

- Document delivery and loan policies
- Quality of existing databases and cataloging



3.2 The Library of Texas

Also in the feedback forms completed anonymously at the end of the focus group meeting, participants identified three key concepts that characterized their perception of the Library of Texas. These concepts are labeled as: Single Interface, Document Delivery Service, and "Nothing New Here". Comments typifying these concepts are listed below.

Single Interface

- Possibility of across platform (catalog and database) searching

Document Delivery Service

- New ways to think about document delivery

"Nothing New Here"

- Provides nothing beyond what is provided by OCLC in WorldCat

3.3 Resource Discovery Needs

Participants envisioned that the LOT would provide resources beyond TexShare databases, especially in regard to full-text electronic monographs. In general, participants agreed that their vision of the LOT was characterized primarily by electronic content and secondarily by access to special collections within Texas libraries. Several participants commented on the need to provide online content to users. The more that can be served up electronically the better. Making Texas libraries' special collections available for searching could be a good thing and should be considered. A number of people said they have cataloged their special collections. Additionally, the Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO) project is creating machine-readable collection descriptions or "finding aids" for archival, manuscript, and museum collections at five universities and the Texas State Library and Archives.

One participant expressed the view that the Library of Texas could address peoples' information needs by letting them know what libraries can offer and informing users of available resources. Participants generally agreed with one person's caution not to "assume that [all Texans] would have access to everything" the LOT offered. For example, while an item in a library's special collection might be "discoverable" through the LOT, it might not be "available" for resource sharing. Another participant questioned, as either desirable or realistic, the idea that the Library of Texas would provide access to all collections for all people.

One person was concerned that the LOT's focus on Texas resources could be a limitation and a "barrier to information." For example, if the virtual catalog only accessed the holdings of Texas libraries that would exclude access to resources available outside of Texas. One participant from a large academic library suggested that there's a "potential sadness to committing a lot of resources to something we won't recommend to users." In this case, the library has a protocol for searching: first look locally and then go to the largest resource available, namely OCLC WorldCat. Adding an additional step to look for resources in Texas is not something this person would recommend to users. The participant noted that their patrons initiate ILL through OCLC, which satisfies the need for users when searching for monographs. On the other hand, one participant could see value in a tiered approach to searching, (i.e., going from local to Texas to WorldCat resources). One participant commented that students might not be interested in searching resources if "they can't get it in the building." Another participant thought a geographic proximity search (e.g., searching libraries within 25-50 miles) would be a "very attractive" feature.

Serving distance education students is one challenge for some academic libraries. The ability to search across databases presents an opportunity to serve these students better. Also, the ability to search across catalogs using an integrating search interface would provide a "rich user interface" to resources. A virtual catalog would transform a library catalog that now points to local resources and would "redefine what local is" to include resources from other Texas libraries. One participant noted that their library has



about 200,000 volumes as well as a cooperative arrangement with another academic library. In this latter case, it would be beneficial to search across both libraries' catalogs to identify resources.

In summary, there was agreement on the importance of getting online content to users and of including special collections for searching and discovery. However, there was some divergence of opinion on the value of cross-catalog searching and its utility. This divergence was largely coincident with library size, suggesting that the size of an academic library will predicate different resource discovery needs.

3.4 Expectations of the Integrated Search and Retrieval Interface

Some participants thought searching across online databases from a common interface was desirable and possibly more desirable than searching across catalogs. However, participants had differing viewpoints of the LOT search and retrieval interface. One participant thought a single common interface would prohibit people from using the interface they preferred. This person thought users easily adapted to different interfaces and saw no need for a common interface. Other participants had different viewpoints and thought users preferred a familiar interface simply because it was familiar and regardless of if it was "the best one for them." One participant stated that users were often "more lost than found" in terms of using different search and retrieval interfaces. Despite these differences, there was general agreement that keyword searching is the most common method of searching used.

Academic libraries already provide an information-rich environment. Currently, many academic libraries present a discipline-driven or subject-driven interface for searching library catalogs and web resources. It will be important for the Library of Texas to provide a well-organized interface to information.

One person suggested that search results be organized in tiers and provide relevance ranking. One example of a product that does this is the Vivisimo search engine, which provides a two-tiered search result list. This participant suggested that for the organization of search results, it is important: to provide relevance ranking and enough information so that users can select appropriate resources. It would be nice to allow the user to set criteria for relevancy.

3.5 Expectations of the Document Delivery Service

Many participants agreed that users of the LOT would want "instant gratification" in regard to information access. Users would expect resources to be available online or in the building. Some participants felt that their patrons would be willing to wait a few days for resource delivery. There was general agreement that users have become accustomed to the "Amazon.com model" in which users are "willing to pay for convenience." Paying for convenience represents a new model for library services and in particular for document delivery. But there were concerns expressed about making something that has traditionally been "free" have a direct cost associated with it. Some library patrons believe they already have paid for library resources and services through taxes.

There was a strong preference among participants for the current "library-to-library" model for interlibrary loan services, in which there is some mediation between the user and the resources, primarily for accountability and reliability reasons. As one participant put it, "document delivery requires the right to use resources while ILL requires mediation." Participants pointed out that user-initiated ILL should not be confused with non-mediated ILL. Some participants indicated that they already allow users to submit their ILL requests electronically via a form and in fact there are benefits in terms of accuracy and efficiency in this process. Additionally, any LOT document delivery service needs to incorporate a load leveling function so "that not all requests go to one library."

Some participants noted that resource sharing is fundamentally a responsibility of each local library and there are important reasons why local libraries cannot be bypassed in the ILL process. The local library has an important role in the safeguarding and control of materials. Additionally, there is a funding issue, since a local tax base supports the local library.

One participant suggested that any new methods of document delivery must make delivery faster and suggested two factors that might affect speed of delivery: control and cost. There are established



methods of document delivery and the LOT should not make changes unless it improves the speed of delivery. One participant said we should work towards direct delivery of resources to users as a way of getting materials to users faster. This could include mailing materials directly to users' homes. However, this can only work if appropriate safeguards for the resources themselves can be developed.

4. Issues

4.1 Role of OCLC WorldCat

Some participants believe that OCLC WorldCat provides an alternative to the LOT for cross-catalog searching and for ILL requests. One participant noted that user-initiated ILL through OCLC is implemented in their library. This capability adequately addresses user needs for obtaining monographs. Two participants believed that the ILL mechanism in OCLC WorldCat was adequate for the document delivery service because "500 or more Texas libraries use OCLC WorldCat" and it is the "largest resource available" to many libraries.

Participants suggested that the LOT search and retrieval interface and document delivery services are redundant to the services currently available through OCLC WorldCat. From the perspectives of effort and funding it is possible that "a fair amount of money going into this [LOT] may not show anything to students." One participant suggested it would be "more cost-effective to have all records of Texas libraries loaded into WorldCat" than to build the cross-catalog functionality into LOT.

4.2 The Added Value of the LOT

Participants from medium-sized and small libraries could envision LOT-accessible resources as (a) an "expansion of local resources" and (b) "supplemental and external to the traditional library." These resources would be an "added value" the LOT would provide. On the other hand, participants from larger libraries thought the LOT would have little impact on their libraries and users. Larger academic libraries already have extensive access to external resources as well as mature mechanisms for searching and retrieval. One participant questioned whether the Library of Texas would add any value.

Another participant from a large health sciences research library where there is "an elaborate online network" that meets the ILL needs of its patrons supplemented this view. For this library, it is not anticipated that any new ILL mechanism introduced by the LOT would add value. However, such a mechanism might be "a value to others who get resources from [them]." This brings into focus the importance of adequately understanding and addressing the consequences of adding any new ILL mechanism to the current "ILL fabric" in Texas.

4.3 Political and Economic

Since resource availability will likely vary, it is important to present clear expectations to users regarding the availability of resources. For example some resources may only be available online at a library while others may be available to computers in patrons' homes. Likewise some resources may only be discoverable but not retrievable. Setting realistic expectations is important, especially for users in rural areas who do not have high-speed Internet access or capabilities.

4.4 Technology Readiness

Some participants raised concerns that some libraries would not be technologically ready for the LOT. One participant questioned how realistic it is for smaller libraries to be able to participate, especially if they do not have an automated online catalog. Additionally, quality assurance of data in online catalogs might be an issue.

There were also some concerns regarding Z39.50 compatibility. Would Z39.50-compliant libraries be overwhelmed with requests from other libraries? One participant from a large library noted that their library would "not participate in the LOT" because they "chose not to be Z39.50-compliant." Another participant cautioned that technology employed in the LOT should not be "limited only to Z39.50" since



many online database vendors do not offer a Z39.50 connection to their databases. They advised that alternatives to Z39.50 should be considered (e.g., OpenURL).

4.5 Information Literacy

One participant felt that users need training in the selection of the most appropriate database to meet their needs. This issue relates to the debate regarding the value of a single common interface to the LOT.

5. Analysis and Summary

There was a collegial atmosphere and lively discussion in this focus group, which primarily included representatives of academic libraries. Some agreements were reached regarding needs and expectations of the LOT while concerns were also raised. Participants envisioned the LOT would provide resources beyond TexShare databases, especially in regard to full-text electronic monographs. In general, participants agreed that their vision of the LOT was characterized primarily by electronic content and secondarily by access to special collections within Texas libraries.

Participants agreed that searching multiple databases concurrently would be an “added value” to libraries with limited local resources. The LOT could provide an “expansion of the local library” and redefine “what is local.” Most participants expected the LOT to address the increasing demand from users for “instant gratification” and “instant information availability.” However, participants cautioned that sharing resources via the LOT would likely not mean all resources would be available to everyone. It is worth mentioning that many libraries have databases other than those provided through TexShare. The question of including access to these databases from a common LOT interface is worthy of further discussion.

Participants agreed that priority expectations of the LOT included (a) the assurance of quality content and (b) reliable access to databases. A geographic proximity search would be a “very attractive” feature in the LOT searching and retrieval interface. Users would then have choices and options for either physically obtaining materials themselves or requesting them via ILL, provided “right to use” criteria were met.

Participants also reached agreement that a resource delivery system should be fast and might include delivery from source library directly to individuals requesting items. They suggested Amazon.com as a service model because they believed users “were willing to pay for convenience.” Participants agreed that ILL services should remain at a “library-to-library” level, as they exist today. It is beneficial for individual users to initiate ILL requests but a local library must mediate transactions to assure accountability and responsibility. Participants noted that user-initiated ILL should not be confused with non-mediated ILL services.

Concerns about the challenges and limitations posed by Z39.50-compliance were expressed. Would smaller libraries be able to meet this hurdle? One participant from a large academic library stated their library's previous decision not to be Z39.50-compliant, which might preclude their participation in the LOT. Some of the concerns can be addressed by a better understanding of the options for Z39.50 implementations. At the same time, available technology, standards, and service alternatives can be considered for the LOT.

While discussions in the group focused on the needs and expectation for the Library of Texas in regard to the three components of the ZLOT project, there was a strong opinion expressed by one member of the focus group, and echoed by other members, that OCLC WorldCat and ILL presented attractive options for the LOT. After needs and expectations of the LOT were identified during the meeting, there was a frequent rejoinder expressing the opinion that OCLC could address those needs and expectations. Some participants expressed a strong preference for extending the use of OCLC services, such as WorldCat and ILL, to Texas libraries as alternatives to a LOT virtual catalog, integrative interface, and document delivery service. Some participants were particularly concerned that the LOT would be a duplication of OCLC services and, as such, would involve spending a good deal of money with little or no service improvement to their libraries and patrons. These suggestions point to a need to analyze the extent of holdings and the level of participation of Texas libraries in WorldCat. Such an analysis can provide a



basis for better decisions about the use of WorldCat as a “Texas union catalog” for purposes of discovery and ILL.

There was a clear divergence in regard to the expected added value of the LOT in accord with library size. Larger academic libraries have mechanisms in place to allow their users access to a wide range of resources. The LOT offers no readily apparent value to them. Medium-sized and smaller libraries, on the other hand, perceived added value in both a common search interface, especially to databases, and in the virtual catalog. They were more enthusiastic about the LOT while the larger libraries were more reserved.