Report of the EGIIG Subcommittee on Legislative Information Resources

The ESLIR Subcommittee recommends acquiring the Web-based CIS "Compass" system, plus subscriptions to the Web-based versions of CQ Weekly Report and CQ Researcher.

The ESLIR group was composed of librarians from six campuses. Five of the six currently work as government publications librarians, and the sixth, now a political science bibliographer, previously worked as a government publications librarian.

The committee was charged to review the Web products produced by CIS (Compass), CQ (Library), Lexis-Nexis, Legi-Slate, Library of Congress (Thomas), and GPO Access.

The committee had a difficult time agreeing on what its recommendation should be. Among the commercial sites, we were comparing a Web system which is fairly complete with others that have excellent potential but are only under development.

Four members recommend acquiring the CIS Compass system, and two would prefer to wait a year to see what these new Web-based systems look like when they're more complete. The two who recommended waiting would prefer the CQ Web system if they had to make a choice now, but are amenable to recommending CIS.

Free government services, e.g. Thomas, GPO Access, congressional committee members' home pages, and other sources are developing into more comprehensive, reliable and user-friendly services. However, they lack the retrospective coverage needed for research, and don't provide as many databases as CQ or CIS Compass.

Legi-Slate's Web product isn't complete enough for the subcommittee to consider it a viable candidate at this time, although it looks promising enough that it should be included in any future review of legislative information resources.

The group agreed that these factors had the most influence on their decision:
- Most users are ready to move to a Web-based product, away from the notoriously difficult CQ Washington Alert telnet interface to Melvyl.
- UC librarians do not want to be beta-testers of a new system. We feel safer choosing a more completely developed system, and we don't have time to cope with unstable systems. This is most true at the beginning of the school year.
- A user-friendly interface is of particular importance. We want an easy-to-use, logically organized system that patrons can navigate from home, or after the reference desk is closed.
- Librarians (and students) will be using a combination of Web-based resources, rather than just one resource, for research on legislative issues.
- There was some concern about the difficulty of printing from a frames-based system. Printing problems are a public service librarian's nightmare.

While the ESLIR subcommittee didn't use cost as a deciding factor in its final decision, there were negative comments about CQ's history of bringing up new databases, then charging additional costs for them. The group also did not feel that the Lexis-Nexis system was a viable selection because of its prohibitive cost.

The subcommittee also took into consideration the perceived responsiveness of each vendor. It's the general opinion of the group that CQ considers its library customers of less importance than its customers in Washington DC. CIS, on the other hand, has seemed to have a better understanding of issues we librarians consider important, and has been very responsive to questions and comments during our trial period using CIS Compass. While CQ has been paying more attention to us as a client in recent months, we feel they were less responsive in previous years.

At UC Davis, students in a political science class in spring, 1997, provided written evaluations of CQ (telnet version) and CIS Compass. The response was almost overwhelming in favor of Web service, and strongly supported the CIS system.

CIS will be producing another new system in January 1998, called Statistical Compass (a Web equivalent of the Statistical Masterfile CD-ROM). Selecting the CIS Compass system might give us a financial advantage should UC wish to pursue acquiring the statistical database also. We recommend that this be discussed now in any negotiations for CIS Compass.
Although the majority of the group prefers the CIS Compass system, we recommend that UC also acquire subscriptions to the Web-based versions of CQ Weekly Report and CQ Researcher. CQ Weekly Report and CQ Researcher are among the most heavily used periodicals in all UC libraries, and Web access would make them extremely popular, high-use electronic journals. The librarians who preferred CQ noted that their "news" section is more thorough than the other vendors, and one reason for this is the presence of "Weekly Report".

The appended individual reports written about topics and databases researched in the systems reviewed provide further details about their coverage and performance.

Cynthia Jahns, chair, UCSC
Ronnie Coates, UCSD
Kay Collins, UCI
Sherry Dedecker, UCSB
Marcia Meister, UCD
Andrea Sevetson, with Christof Galli, Jim Ronningen, UCB