

Bel Jour: a discipline-specific portal to periodicals

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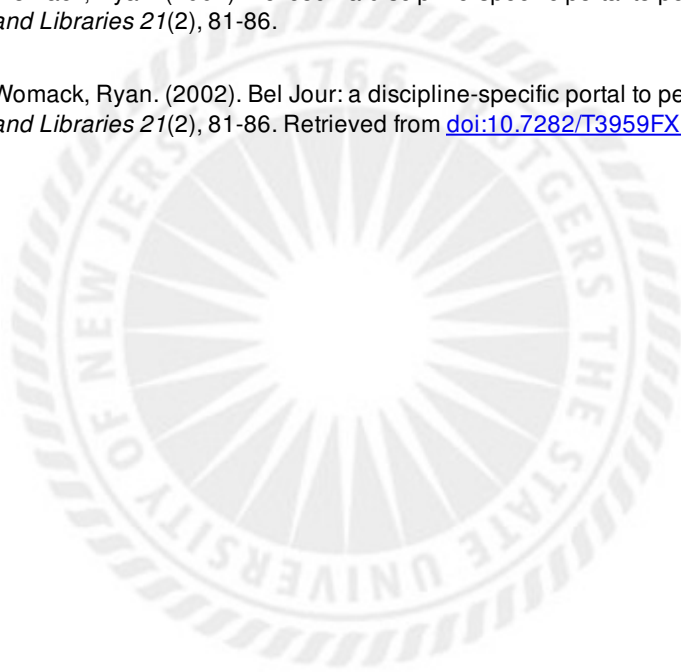
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ABSTRACT

Convenient, subject-based access to current periodicals can be difficult to achieve in today's mixed and changing journals environment. This paper describes the creation of a web-accessible database of journals in business and economics, using Microsoft Access and ColdFusion. Bel Jour, the Business and Economics Locator for Journals at Rutgers, provides value-added descriptive information about a specific subject-based journal collection, along with convenient access to content from this collection. Although the actual journal collection is dispersed among many physical and online locations, Bel Jour provides a single, virtual point of access for researchers in the discipline.

Introduction

Printed lists of journals in a particular subject area or academic discipline were once a common sight in libraries, filed along with pathfinders and other handouts that have now migrated to the web. These lists were quite popular with patrons who wanted a convenient way to survey resources in their field. Although libraries now provide lists of e-journals alongside subject-specific indexes and databases, few of these services give a complete picture of the library's holdings in the current environment of mixed online and print resources. Furthermore, it is difficult to extract a complete list of journals in a particular discipline from the online catalog, given the complexities of the subject headings assigned to journals. Providing institution-specific information about the full

spectrum of journals available in print, online from the publisher, or available through an electronic aggregator is difficult. *Bel Jour*¹, the Business and Economics Locator for Journals at Rutgers, is a project designed to overcome these difficulties and provide a useful tool for researchers in the fields of business and economics. Within its subject area, *Bel Jour* attempts to provide a complete listing of journal holdings available to Rutgers patrons, along with other descriptive data that adds value beyond the online catalog record. *Bel Jour* is a virtual space that defines a coherent collection of sources that are physically and electronically dispersed among many locations.

Many libraries have integrated their electronic journal holdings into their online catalogs, providing a necessary point of entry to these resources. However, catalogs have some disadvantages as quick finding aids for journals. The catalog serves as a detailed record of all of the library's holdings. A search for an individual journal title frequently does not point to a single record, but to multiple records referring to variant titles, alternative formats, and differing holdings among branch libraries. While this level of detail is necessary for definitively describing the library's collection, it is often superfluous for someone who is seeking the most convenient way to retrieve a known item from a 1999 issue of the *Review of Economic Studies*. *Bel Jour* abbreviates the catalog record so that only the most frequently used information is reported.

Bound by the MARC format, flexible as it is, the catalog lacks detail in some areas that

are useful to researchers. When links to e-journals exist, dates of online holdings are often lacking. Without clicking through several links, it is difficult to determine whether a particular issue of a journal is available online or not. Also, descriptive information about the journal is based on historical cataloging. Most notably, the publisher of a journal may have changed several times since the catalog record for the journal was created. Information about where the journal is indexed and descriptions of its editorial practices are available elsewhere on the web, but not within the catalog record. *Bel Jour* adds this information to the journal descriptions in order to increase its utility to researchers.

Libraries have often created lengthy lists of e-journals to create a more convenient way to access a known title. However, these lists are usually separate from other finding aids, and they quickly become unbrowseable as libraries add more and more electronic holdings. Some libraries have created subject-specific finding aids that include e-journal listings², but these lists are static. *Bel Jour* is an interactive, searchable database of journals that offers a flexible presentation of its contents.

While some libraries have used database-driven web sites to provide access to their journal collections³, these efforts do not have the subject focus or enhanced information for the end user that motivates the *Bel Jour* project.

Indexes and full-text databases are another place that researchers may turn to in search of journals. Indexes such as *EconLit* are comprehensive within a discipline, but lack convenience since they are not tied to a particular institution's holdings. Full-text databases such as *ABI/INFORM* may provide many full-text journals, but they fail to indicate journals available online from other sources, or available in print at the library. *Bel Jour* is designed to answer the question, "Do we have access to this title?" as quickly as possible, and to provide the answer regardless of the source's provenance.

The future promises a fully integrated online environment where journal articles will seamlessly link to one another through DOIs, OpenURLs, and the like.⁴ At present, however, a collection-specific journal portal such as *Bel Jour* can add value by making searches more convenient and bridging some of the gaps between print and online journal collections. Since *Bel Jour* is built on a database and a flexible web interface, it can be expanded and customized to meet changing user needs.

Description

Bel Jour is built from a Microsoft Access database that contains descriptive information on nearly 1000 journals in business and economics. Fields include title, publisher, publisher URL, multiple URLs for online access to the journal, a URL for descriptive information about the journal, locations of print holdings, dates of print and online

coverage, flags to indicate where the journal is indexed, the number of citations in *Web of Science* over the previous five years, the *Web of Science* abbreviation for the journal, and journal pricing information. There is also a Notes field to indicate any special access instructions or content restrictions.

Web access to the database is provided by ColdFusion software, which allows for the dynamic presentation of search results. An initial search screen allows searching by title, publisher, and keyword, along with the ability to restrict results according to whether or not the journal is indexed in *EconLit* or *ABI/INFORM* [see Figure 1]. The search results are displayed in a brief format, which includes journal title, dates of print and online holdings, and URLs that link to the online locations of the journal [see Figure 2].

Clicking on the title of a journal on the brief results screen brings up the detailed results screen, where most of the fields listed above can be viewed [see Figure 3]. The format is deliberately simple in order to allow quick access to online journals with a minimum of mouse clicks.

Goals

Cameron describes the creation of a database of computer science journals and outlines some useful criteria for an internet electronic library, which apply equally to the *Bel Jour* project. These are 1) authoritativeness and currency of information, 2)

comprehensiveness within a well-defined focus, 3) integrated access to print and electronic resources, and 4) efficiency and reliability.⁵

Bel Jour is designed to function as its full title, the Business and Economics Locator for Journals at Rutgers, implies: it is a way to locate journals in business and economics held by the Rutgers University Libraries. Journals are selected for inclusion if they fall within these subject areas. *Bel Jour* lists only currently subscribed journals under their current titles. It is meant as a guide to the active holdings of the library in business and economics. It strives to be current, accurate, and comprehensive within these guidelines. *Bel Jour* provides a single point of access for both print and electronic holdings.

Bel Jour is designed to function as a fast finding aid. The web interface comprises only three screens, the search entry screen, a brief results screen, and a detailed contents screen. The minimal interface speeds page loading and navigation. The brief results screen includes abbreviated holdings information and quick links to online versions of the journal. This allows the researcher to go to the online journal from this screen with a minimum of clicks. Information about print holdings allows the researcher to quickly ascertain whether a trip to the library is necessary. Also, multiple links to online journals are included, including a special category for JSTOR journals. The full spectrum of journal coverage is thus present on one line, avoiding the need to go back and forth among multiple records to determine where the appropriate version of the journal is

located. Holdings information is abbreviated to the year of coverage only. Users are referred to the online catalog for more detailed information when it is necessary to resolve ambiguities.

The detailed record screen is designed to provide value added information about the journal for researchers and librarians. From this screen, the searcher can connect to the journal home page describing editorial and submission policies, which is often separately maintained from the publisher's homepage where the journal text is available. The researcher can check to see how many times the journal was cited according to *Web of Science*, to gauge the journal's relative standing in the field. The researcher can determine where and if the journal is indexed. Currently *Bel Jour*'s indexing information is limited to *EconLit* and *ABI/INFORM*, but other indexing services may be added in the future.

Bel Jour is intended to facilitate browsing of journal titles as well. Clicking the "Search" button without entering any title retrieves the entire list of journals in the database. One can also restrict the search to journals indexed in *EconLit* and/or *ABI/INFORM* or to journals from a particular publisher. Future enhancements will include further subject classification of journals so that the researcher can easily access lists of journals within a subfield, such as accounting. A field to indicate whether or not the journal is peer-reviewed is planned.

Bel Jour's primary intended audience are graduate students and faculty. The interface assumes familiarity with the scholarly journal environment and with the basic tools for searching and accessing these journals. The descriptive information about the journals was selected with this audience in mind.

Bel Jour is also designed to function as a tool for subject bibliographers. *Bel Jour* allows a librarian to monitor a controlled list of titles and selectively include material from large, heterogeneous packages, from subscriptions that are outside of the selector's direct control, or from freely available government and web publications. At Rutgers, for example, there are three business libraries on different campuses, and there are many full-text databases that are not cataloged in the libraries' online catalog. *Bel Jour* is one way to integrate these holdings so that a bibliographer can easily determine if a journal is available somewhere else in another format, and make informed collection decisions. The database also includes information on subscription prices for many journals. Although this information is not currently available via the web interface, it can easily be added should this become desirable.

Maintaining the journal information in database format facilitates the addition of notes and fields that inform subject selectors about the collections, such as the fund code associated with a journal. Rutgers, like many institutions, uses a central fund to purchase

electronic resources. Many journal titles that were formerly part of individual subject collections have been transferred to the central electronic fund as a result of the purchase of large packages like *ScienceDirect*. However, the subject bibliographer still needs to be aware that the relevant journals from these packages are available as part of the subject collection. *Bel Jour* facilitates tracking these titles.

The overarching goal of *Bel Jour* is to provide added value to the existing online catalog, journal collection, and related web resources. It does this through the integration of these sources into one interface, and through the addition of extra search capabilities and descriptive information.

Development of the Database and Interface

The Scholarly Communication Center of the Rutgers University Libraries has developed several web-accessible databases using ColdFusion software to connect to Microsoft Access databases.⁶ Ron Jantz, Data Librarian at the SCC, made available template Cold Fusion files that provided the basic structure for the search interface. These files were easily modified to search the specific fields of the Bel Jour database and create an appropriate interface. The SCC provides technical support to librarians involved in creating digital projects and maintains the ColdFusion server that hosts many of these projects. This in-house wealth of expertise made the creation of the database and

interface quite simple.

The journals data originated from Excel spreadsheets that were created by the author as part of a serials cancellation project in 1999. These spreadsheets contained pricing and holdings information for a large percentage of Rutgers' subscriptions in business and economics. The author added fields for indexing, citation counts, publisher information, URLs for online access to these files, and the other fields described above. Full-text titles from ABI/INFORM were imported as a separate process. A searchable interface to ABI/INFORM titles was a high priority since these important business journals were not included in the library's online catalog. Converting the data from Excel to Access was a simple process from within Access. The resulting Access database is mounted on the Scholarly Communication Center's ColdFusion server so that the interactive web pages can be delivered.

The initial phase of the project focused on entering complete information for economics titles, since these were the most complete in the original spreadsheets. Ongoing updating of the database is expanding the level of detail and inclusiveness for business-related journals across the Rutgers University Libraries system. Currently just under 1000 titles are included. Over time, the database will grow less rapidly and require only maintenance updates for changes in the information. The first version of *Bel Jour* was developed in the summer of 2000, and has been undergoing gradual revision since that

time.

The web interface was modelled on existing SCC projects, and is written in the ColdFusion Markup Language. CFML is very similar to HTML, and so is very easy to learn and modify. For a journals database, searching by title is obviously the most important feature. The option to search by publisher and general keyword were also added. While Boolean searching is not enabled within search fields, there is an implicit "and" between fields. One can, for example, search for all of the titles containing the word "international" that are published by Elsevier. Pull-down boxes allow for the optional limiting of results to titles that are indexed in *EconLit* or *ABI/INFORM*. Future enhancements to the interface will focus on additional search capabilities, such as support for Boolean searching, limits for peer-reviewed journals, and the like. Changing the interface takes relatively little time compared to the creation and maintenance of the database itself.

Discussion

While anecdotal evidence suggests that *Bel Jour* is a useful service that meets the goals outlined above, no formal study of its impact has yet been done. The author plans a survey of *Bel Jour* users, combined with a study of database usage as recorded by the webserver logs. Information about the actual user population of the database would

allow services to be designed that better meet the audience's needs. A survey would reveal which services would be the most useful additions to the database, and which aspects of the current service are not meeting user needs.

A database that focuses on current resources requires regular maintenance to maintain its usefulness. It remains to be seen how much maintenance *Bel Jour* will require. If publisher's URLs remain relatively stable, and the library does not frequently switch among different journal providers, the maintenance burden should be manageable. However, if the web environment changes more rapidly, the database may require frequent and intense reworking.

Bel Jour's utility is also closely related to developments in the library's online catalog and the web environment. One inspiration for the development of *Bel Jour* was the increasing popularity of link lists of online journals in economics, such as those available from the *EconLit* website⁷ or through *WebEc*.⁸ Due to their simple format and convenience, such lists are often the first stop for researchers, who may be daunted by the complexities of the library's online catalog. Such global journal lists are not linked to the library's holdings, and may cause frustration when the researcher discovers that many of the journals referred to are inaccessible. Projects such as *jake*⁹ or databases like *Ulrich's* online may serve as the foundation for future finding aids, but at present they are more comprehensible to librarians than the general scholarly audience. However, if linking

and authentication mechanisms become more seamless, so that patrons can check library holdings or authenticate themselves for access directly from an index or other intermediary, then the need for a locally developed service like *Bel Jour* may diminish.

Also, as the information reported by the library's catalog changes, the information provided by the intermediary service must change. For example, at Rutgers, our online catalog is beginning to integrate records for some journals in full-text databases, like ABI/INFORM, that were previously missing. If e-journal holdings information becomes available through the online catalog, *Bel Jour* will lose some of its value-added qualities. The information provided by *Bel Jour* must evolve to add new features of use to patrons, otherwise it will unnecessarily duplicate other efforts.

The question of which features to add becomes critical. Having the journal information in a flexible database format combined with an interactive web interface opens many possibilities. One possibility is to develop a MyLibrary-style service, where user profiles are stored and researchers can create "hot lists" of their favorite journals, along with customized views of the related journal information. *Bel Jour* should also take advantage of linking technologies as they develop to deliver more information to the end user. The service should function as a central node that links together the many information retrieval services available to library patrons. *Bel Jour* can thus evolve to retain its place as the virtual center of the business and economics journal collection.

Conclusion

Bel Jour demonstrates the benefits of using new database and web technologies to create value-added library services that meet the needs of a specific group of patrons. Although the initial metaphor for *Bel Jour* was the printed list of journals, using an interactive database allows the service to be much more than a mere list. With only a few clicks of the mouse, *Bel Jour* allows patrons to search for and access the contents and descriptive information of journals in a carefully selected subject-specific collection that crosses the boundaries of publishers, formats, and physical locations. Just as a pathfinder or web-based research guide can direct patrons quickly to valuable resources, *Bel Jour* gives researchers greater access to the diverse journal collections of a large, heterogeneous institution. The additional descriptive information on citation rates, indexing, and links to pages about the journal provide a more complete picture of the journal than the static catalog record. Since the contents of *Bel Jour* are under the control of the subject bibliographer, the collection has a well-defined scope. Free resources can be added if they are of scholarly quality, and irrelevant journals that may be part of a subscribed package can be removed from the database. As the scholarly journal environment experiments with e-prints and other forms of online collaboration that compete with more traditional, and expensive, commercial publications, this feature of the database takes on added value.


The benefits of such a subject-specific enhanced journal finder must be weighed against the costs in time and effort required to develop and maintain it, and against the potential for fragmentation among different gateways to library resources. While the online catalog remains the foundation and database of record for the library's collections, there is room for projects that build on this foundation and expand it in new directions. Given the heterogeneous and physically dispersed nature of business and economics collections at Rutgers, along with the current fluctuating environment for journals, *Bel Jour* clearly meets a need. However, as the scholarly publishing and library environments evolve, *Bel Jour*, and similar projects, must change to meet the patron's greatest needs for information organization and access. Further study is needed to determine exactly what kinds of customized services will most benefit patrons. Because *Bel Jour* is built on a flexible and adaptable platform, it can be easily adapted to patrons' changing needs in the future.

Netscape: Bel Jour (Business and Economics Locator for JOUrals at Rutgers)

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Location: <http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/beljour/details.cfm?ID=523> What's Related

Find a broken link? Inaccurate information? Please send corrections, additions, and suggestions to Ryan Womack, rwomack@rci.rutgers.edu

 Detailed Results **Journal of economic behavior and organization** [Search Again](#)

Title: Journal of economic behavior and organization
Full Text: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/01672681>
Dates of online availability: 1995 - current
About the Journal: <http://www.elsevier.nl/locate/issn/01672681>
Publisher: Elsevier
Publisher homepage: <http://www.elsevier.nl>
Print holdings at: ALEX DANA
Dates of Print Availability: 1982 - current
Web of Science Abbreviation: j econ behav organ
Citations to articles in this journal from 1995-1999 (from Web of Science) 717
Indexed in: EconLit

[Search Again](#)

Taskbar: [Icons for network, volume, power, help, etc.]

Netscape: Bel Jour (Business and Economics Locator for JOUrals at Rutgers)

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Bookmarks Location: <http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/beljour/> What's Related

Bel Jour (Business and Economics Locator for JOUrals at Rutgers)

Enter your search below.

Title:

Publisher:

Search All: (Searches major database fields)

Indexed in EconLit?

Indexed in ABI/INFORM?

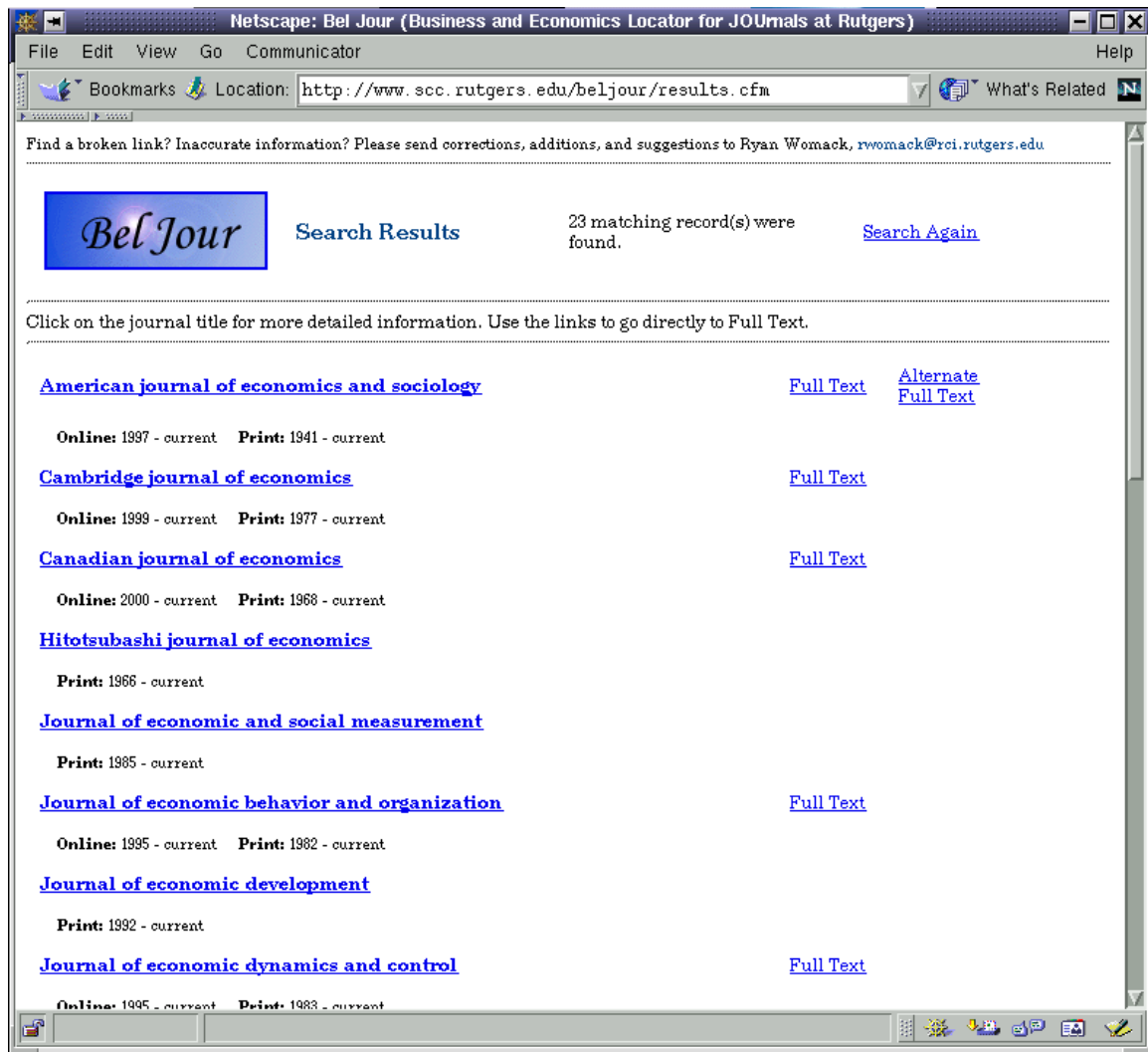
Tip: to see a list of all journals covered in Bel Jour, click "Search" without entering any search terms.

Bel Jour provides information on currently subscribed journals in Business and Economics at Rutgers University -- including links to online full text journals, dates of coverage, links to journal homepages, and citation and indexing information. For full information on exact dates and locations of journal holdings, historical titles, etc., consult [IRIS](#). You must be affiliated with Rutgers to access the full text of the online journals. For links to journals beyond the world of Rutgers, try [Business Electronic Journals](#), [EconLit's](#) link list or [WebEc's](#) list of economics journals.

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Last updated April 12, 2001

Taskbar: [Icons for system tray]



1 Available at <http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/beljour>.

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4Herbert Van de Sompel. "Generalizing the OpenURL framework beyond references to scholarly works". *D-Lib Magazine* 7, no. 7/8 (2001): available online at <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july01/vandestompel/v07andestompel.html>.

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7Available at <http://www.econlit.org/econlit/ellistjn.html>.

8Available at <http://www.helsinki.fi/WebEc/journals.html>.

9Daniel Chudnov, Cynthia Crooker, and Kimberly Parker. "jake: overview and status report". *Serials Review* 26, no. 4 (2000): 12-17.