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State Starts Vast Online Database
Digital Library Wins Praise From Users

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Whether you're a sixth-grader researching chocolate for a science project, a senior citizen learning about osteoporosis, or a graduate student studying the economy of India, the Web address www.iconn.org should be in your computer vocabulary.

Available since last spring, iCONN, the Connecticut Digital Library, has been catching on around the state, among users at homes, businesses, libraries and public schools. Its extensive databases of magazine and newspaper articles, reference books, academic journals, Spanish-language periodicals and other resources are available to anyone with a library card from any Connecticut library. It can also be accessed on computers for public use at libraries, colleges and schools in the state.

"It's become essential to our program here," said Marie Shaw, librarian at East Lyme High School.

The databases, she said, are easy for students to use and open up a wealth of reference materials that students wouldn't otherwise have. Many of the journals on the site are not in the library's collections, Shaw said. For one blind student at East Lyme High, the website is particularly valuable because he can get articles there read aloud on text-to-voice software, Shaw said.

Through the site, users can find biographies of 72,000 people from ancient times to the present, as well as information on companies and health topics. There are places designed for elementary, middle and high school students.

On "What Do I Read Next?" users can find suggestions for books that suit their tastes.

Sharon Brettschneider, a development director for the Connecticut State Library, said the digital library was created to enhance the collections of all libraries in the state. It ensures more equity in the resources at school libraries around the state, she said, and the site includes special databases for academics.

The full texts of many articles from academic journals are available, and users can find citations for other articles and a list of the libraries in the state that have the journals.

"These (articles) are pulled from very reputable peer review journals and reference material," Brettschneider said.

The state spent \$2 million in the current fiscal year to create and operate the iCONN. Brettschneider said that if every town library purchased equivalent databases on its own, it would cost about \$20 million statewide.

Use of the site went from 99,000 searches in August to 500,000 in October, according to Brettschneider.

“I’m very pleased,” she said. “But we want to make sure everyone knows it’s out there.”