

CIC Virtual Electronic Library Z39.50 Project



NEWS RELEASE

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CIC INITIATES LARGE SCALE ASSESSMENT OF Z39.50 APPLICATIONS

Champaign, IL, January 8, 1998 - A ground-breaking assessment of the implementation and application of the Z39.50 standard across 13 major research libraries is expected to provide critical guidance to information specialists throughout the world. As part of the development of their Virtual Electronic Library initiative, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) has commissioned Mark Hinnebusch, Associate Director for the Florida Center for Library Automation and the Chair of the Z39.50 Implementers' Group, to conduct the study.

Z39.50 is an American national standard for information retrieval. It is formally known as ANSI/NISO Z39.50-1995 - Information Retrieval (Z39.50): Application Service Definition and Protocol Specification. The standard enables remote querying of databases on remote servers, and is the technical foundation which allows users on any CIC campus to query the library catalogs of all other CIC universities using a standard web browser.

"This undertaking by the CIC is an exciting and significant opportunity to prove the ability of Z39.50 to support wide area broadcast information search and retrieval in a large, heavily used consortium," said Hinnebusch. "The success of

this venture will be important not just to the CIC but also to the entire information retrieval industry."

"Our efforts to implement the Virtual Electronic Library have been successful to date," said Sharon Hogan, University Librarian, University of Illinois at Chicago, and Chair of the CIC Library Directors, "but we will not realize the potential for a robust and flexible search utility for our 500,000 faculty, staff, and students without some fine-tuning to our Z39.50 applications."

The project will result in a report that will document the Z39.50 situation in each of the CIC research libraries, an articulation, analysis, and description of the most significant problems, a checklist that technical staff can use in defining local attribute sets, and will include a recommendation about how the CIC libraries can generally improve the existing Z39.50-based services to their users. The report and recommendations will be available after May, 1998.

Barbara McFadden Allen, Director of the CIC Center for Library Initiatives and Assistant Director of the CIC said, "Our efforts to implement a robust virtual catalog have been hindered by incompatibilities in the implementation of Z39.50 within the various automated systems used by our member libraries, and by similar variances in local indexing and search features. Through this study, we hope to answer many of the questions we have about the application of Z39.50, and influence the marketplace and our libraries to adopt common protocol."

The CIC Virtual Electronic Library (VEL) -- a project supported by the United States Department of Education through a \$1.2 million Title IIA grant -- aims to deploy a seamless search and request fulfillment system linking together all the information resources within the CIC.

Founded in 1958, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), with headquarters in Champaign, Illinois, is the academic consortium of the Big Ten universities and the University of Chicago. Member institutions include: the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, Indiana University, the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, the University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Cooperative ventures at all levels have arisen, giving the CIC a thirty-eight year history of effective voluntary inter-institutional cooperation among these twelve independent universities. For more information about the CIC, consult their web site at <http://www.cic.net/cic/>.