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Information Technology at NYU



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## RedLightGreen Begins Pilot Phase at NYU

By **Dylan Tweney**

This fall, NYU is participating in the pilot phase of the RedLightGreen project (<http://www.redlightgreen.com/>), which aims to provide useful, authoritative research information for college students—beyond what library catalogs and Internet search engines can provide.

By taking the large, multi-institution RLG Union Catalog—containing millions of bibliographic descriptions for library collections worldwide—and mining it for conceptual relationships and holdings data, RedLightGreen exposes reliable resources largely hidden from Internet search engines, while using searching and ranking models already familiar to Web users. Library catalogs, by contrast, are usually optimized for tracking books and checking them in and out, not necessarily for finding specific information.

Once students have found the books they want using RedLightGreen, just a few clicks will take them right to the entry for that book in BobCat (NYU's main Libraries catalog). A few more clicks, and RedLightGreen can create a properly formatted bibliography according to MLA, APA, Chicago, or Turabian rules. Of course, the system also provides detailed bibliographic information on any book, including data about editions, contributors, subject classifications, and more.



The main page of the RedLightGreen website, <http://www.redlightgreen.com/>.

## Search, Find, Get

After a year and a half of intensive development, supported generously by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, RedLightGreen begins its pilot phase this fall at four institutions: Columbia University, New York University, Swarthmore College, and the University of Minnesota.

Carol Mandel, NYU Dean of Libraries, has been working closely with RLG to implement RedLightGreen at NYU. Says Mandel: "We joined this project because RedLightGreen is the most important effort yet to combine our years of expert library catalog creation with the power of contemporary search engines and the impact of Web delivery. While there is still much to learn from this iterative design and testing process, RedLightGreen has the potential to be the library access catalog we have all been waiting for."

During this phase, the RedLightGreen website will be available to the general public, not just students at the participating pilot institutions.

From the beginning, the development of RedLightGreen has been informed by user testing. The goal is to deliver a website that excels at addressing undergraduates' research needs, without diluting or compromising the quality of their research (a charge sometimes levied at other online search tools, particularly Internet search engines).

The goal of the pilot study, according to RLG program officer Merrilee Proffitt, is to see how well the system works to solve actual student research needs. "We've really focused on using a user-centered design approach," says Proffitt. "We are listening to our users and learning from them. Someone put a note on the whiteboard in our office that we've left up there for months—it says 'We are not our users.' I think this is a good adage to keep in mind while we're in the middle of system development—it

keeps us honest."

By studying the actual usage of RedLightGreen at the four pilot institutions, RLG will be able to tell which features are working, which need more improvement, and what aspects of the system students actually use. To solicit user feedback directly, RLG will also conduct usability studies on the pilot campuses. Informed by data gleaned during the pilot phase, RLG will continue to enhance RedLightGreen.

### **A Gateway to the Library**

Through RedLightGreen's local catalog links, students can check on the status of any book in the search results list, letting them move quickly from initial discovery (finding relevant books) to in-depth research (obtaining and reading those books). Ultimately, this too should improve the quality of student research.

To help spur student usage, RLG is working with library staff at the four pilot institutions, and will also target students directly. RLG will report on the results of the pilot study in early 2004; information can be found on the RLG website, <http://www.rlg.org/redlightgreen/>.

### **More About RedLightGreen**

RedLightGreen searches nearly 130 million records describing library books to put the most widely held, most relevant items near the top of any search results list, which helps users to quickly zero in on the most credible books and authors. If a book appears in dozens of libraries' collections, it's a good bet that the book is considered an important source of information in its subject area: its selection by dozens of librarians is an implicit endorsement. Data mining, provided by Recommend Inc.'s MindServer software, helps students using nonspecialized vocabulary to get better results from the bibliographic data in RedLightGreen.

RedLightGreen supports RLG members' desires to:

- support the discovery of authoritative print resources for college and university students
- create an entry point to the larger range of web and library resources
- increase the presence of library resources on the Web

For more information, see <http://www.rlg.org/redlightgreen/> and <http://www.redlightgreen.com>, or contact Merrilee Proffitt ([mgp@notes.rlg.org](mailto:mgp@notes.rlg.org)).

Text courtesy of RLG.

### **Author Biography**

*Dylan Tweney is a representative of RLG; if you have questions about this article, please contact Merrilee Proffitt at [mgp@notes.rlg.org](mailto:mgp@notes.rlg.org).*