SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

At the urging of school media specialists, public and academic library staff, and others, the MINITEX/Minnesota State Library Standards Review Task Force established a working group charged with identifying terms or phrases that can make:

- library web sites more understandable for typical users
- it easier for users to navigate to services and resources offered by libraries.

Library staff and users alike have complained that finding their way around library web sites is made more difficult by the use of differing terms and phrases.

In particular, school media specialists and library staff have questioned whether using consistent terminology on K-12 media center and academic or public library web sites would help students make the transition from K-12 to college-level education or to lifelong use of public libraries.

The goal was to suggest terminology for common, or standardized, usage by Minnesota libraries.

OUTSIDE RESOURCES

The Working Group undertook a literature review to identify current practices and research on the topic. “Library Terms That Users Understand” (http://www.jkup.net/terms.html) was found to be a particularly helpful resource for web site terminology, results of usability studies in different types of libraries, test methods for usability studies, and links to a number of different sources with the same topic. Maintained by John Kupersmith, a reference librarian at the University of California, Berkeley, the site is widely regarded as a major resource in its field.

We did not identify major resources to provide guidance about standardization of library web terminology.

RESULTS FROM WORKING GROUP’S TERMINOLOGY SURVEY

Through our review of existing documents, we found 10 activities or services available through many libraries’ web sites – regardless of whether the library is academic, public, or special. Working group members gathered information about how Minnesota academic, public, school, and special libraries labeled these common activities on their sites. As expected, there was a wide variety of terms used to describe the same service on different library web pages.

We combined and reworded the terms in each category. It was this group of terms that we decided to test to see whether we could form a recommendation for standardized, user-friendly terminology. With the help of MINITEX staff, an online survey was created that presented a
single question, selected by randomizing software, to the library user at a time. The survey included 10 questions and provided multiple choice options or an “Other” response to ask users which term they would find most useful to describe the action or resource.

The survey was posted on the web sites of more than 50 academic, public, state government, regional library system, and school media center web sites during December 2005-January 2006. More than 7600 responses were received. There was an excellent response rate from public libraries users (5021 responses, or 66% of the total) and academic library users (2196, or 29% of the total), but K-12 participation was low (232, or 3% of the total). (The survey responses are included as Appendix 2 to this report.)

Because of the low response rate by users of K-12 media centers, we were unable to draw conclusions about the benefit of employing the same terminology for library web pages serving users from K-12 through higher education and in public libraries. (This issue, and other questions raised by the survey, will be discussed more fully in REMAINING QUESTIONS, p. 7.)

**TERMINOLOGY RECOMMENDATIONS**

After reviewing responses to the survey questions, we formulated the following terminology recommendations for Minnesota academic and public libraries.

1) **You want to find a book, DVD, or other item owned by the library.**
   We recommend: “Library Catalog.”

2) **You want to find magazine or newspaper articles.**
   We recommend: “Find a magazine or newspaper article.”

3) **You are looking for entire books that you can read on the computer.**
   We recommend: “eBooks.”

4) **You want to search the library’s collection of online encyclopedias and other reference materials.**
   We recommend: “Online Reference Tools.”

5) **You are looking for web sites recommended by library staff.**
   We recommend: “Library Favorites.”

6) **You want to ask a librarian a question.**
   We recommend: “Ask a Librarian.”

7) **You want something (for example, a book or a DVD) that is not in the library’s collection.**
   We recommend: A term/label that includes “Interlibrary Loan.”

8) **You need help using the library from a computer outside of the library**
   We recommend: “Using the Library from Your Home or Office”

9) **You want to find out if you have any books checked out and if you owe late fees on any of them.**
   We recommend: “My Account.”
10) You want the library to set aside a book so you can pick it up.
   We recommend: “Request an Item.”

NEXT STEPS

We have decided to present this interim report to further engage the Minnesota library community in our work. As we noted, many libraries contributed to our Group’s exploration by hosting the survey on their web pages. We ask Minnesota libraries to continue their participation in our fact-finding.

As we mentioned, we could not make recommendations about terminology for school media center websites because of the lack of response from K-12 students. We plan to do another survey this spring to specifically target Minnesota primary and secondary school students.

As you will see in REMAINING QUESTIONS, we have identified additional questions that we want to investigate to add more specificity to our recommendations.

So, this exploration is truly a work in progress. To support participation by library staff, users, and others in that progress, MINITEX Office staff have created a wiki through which you can comment on this report, provide information about experiences you have had with web page terminology and navigation, and suggest other options for us to explore. We will post updates about our work to that wiki as we proceed.

Check out the wiki (http://wiki.minitex.umn.edu/StandardsTaskForce) and join our conversation.

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METHODOLOGY, DISCUSSIONS, & REMAINING QUESTIONS

The Working Group, which included staff members from Minnesota academic, public, K-12, and state government libraries and from a Minnesota regional public library system, began its work with the charge:

This working group of the MINITEX/Minnesota State Library Standards Review Task Force is to identify terms or phrases that:
- Can be used to standardize library web page language to make the pages understandable for the typical library user.
- Can help users navigate easily to services and resources offered by libraries, such as online information resources.

The Group quickly learned that a wide diversity of practice exists concerning web page terminology among Minnesota libraries, and there are relatively few high quality reference resources on the topic. The John Kupersmith site, “Library Terms That Users Understand,” (http://www.jkup.net/terms.html), was one of the most useful. Group members also brought their own experiences with webpage terminology and design to the project.

METHODOLOGY

As noted above, the Group decided to undertake a survey of Minnesota library users to explore user terminology preferences. An online survey was selected as the best means to draw in responses from users of a variety of library types and sizes. MINITEX Office staff developed the online survey, which was housed on the MINITEX website. Individual libraries were invited to host the survey icon on their site with all responses and statistics being recorded on the MINITEX site.

The survey’s final results showed numerous responses by public and academic library users, but limited response from K-12 and other (primarily, state government) libraries. The final response statistics were:

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<th>Library Type</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2196</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K – 12</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tr>
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DISCUSSION OF RESPONSES

In looking at the responses, the Group observed:

1) In most cases, the two major response groups (academic and public library users) agreed on their preferred answer. (See questions 1-3, 5-6, 8-10).
2) Some questions showed strong, clear cut preferences (see questions 1-2, 5-6, 9), while others had smaller margins (in particular 4, 7, 8, 10)

3) In most cases, respondents picked a more direct or descriptive choice (e.g. “Request from Other Libraries (Interlibrary Loan)” or, simply, “Interlibrary Loan”) as opposed to one that library staff might regard as more engaging or informal (e.g., “Can’t find it? Request it!” or “Get It!”). (See question 7.)

- One exception to this general pattern came in the question that dealt with web sites recommended by library staff. Here, responders preferred “Library Favorites” over “Web Links” by a margin of 9 percent. (See question 5)

The responses corresponded frequently with the information provided on the John Kupersmith web site (http://www.jkup.net/terms.html) – both in the preference for direct, understandable language and in avoidance of terms that Kupersmith identifies as “misunderstood or not understood by users.” (See question 2)

4) Generally speaking, choices that could be regarded as library jargon (“Remote Access”) were rejected in favor of plain English (“Using the Library from Your Home or Office” or “Library Access from Your Home or Office”). (See question 8.)

5) In some cases, terminology from the world of e-commerce was a strong favorite (“My Account” over “Check Due Dates and Renew Items,” which was a distant second). (See question 9.)

6) On each question, the respondents were given an opportunity to provide their own suggestion for a label. Some of these mirrored the language in the options provided, while some illustrated user preferences for procedures that library staffs may wish to explore. (For example, two responses to question 7, which dealt with a patron receiving an item not owned by his/her local library, suggested “Buy It” rather than the standard, “Interlibrary Loan.”)

Discussing the individual questions and responses (See Appendix 2 for the individual questions and the responses):

1) **You want to find a book, DVD, or other item owned by the library.**
   Recommendation: Library Catalog
   We noted that “Library Catalog” was the most frequently cited response, by a margin of 20 percent. Also, the next three options all contained the word “Catalog” with other nouns in the label. As a group, these options totaled 90 percent of the responses.

2) **You want to find magazine or newspaper articles.** Recommendation: “Find a magazine or newspaper article.”
   Here, the preference margin was even greater – “Find a magazine or newspaper article” received 69 percent of the responses. The responses with the less specific, more confusing term “databases” received only 10 percent. Group members suggested that inserting the term “journal” into the most preferred label would be appropriate for academic library web sites. We also discussed the possibility that the phrasing of the survey question may have influenced users in their selection of a response.
3) **You are looking for entire books that you can read on the computer.**
   Recommendation: “eBooks”
   Two options, “eBooks” or “E-books,” received 55 percent of the responses. These choices illustrate the fluid state of capitalization and hyphenation of terms related to the Internet -- as well as, perhaps, familiarity with the terminology used with the Electronic Library for Minnesota (or ELM, the group of databases available to all Minnesota library users through statewide subscriptions funded by MINITEX and the Minnesota Department of Education through State Library Services, the state library agency). eBooks is the styling of the term as used in ELM.

4) **You want to search the library’s collection of online encyclopedias and other reference materials.** Recommendation: “Online Reference Tools”
   “Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, Etc.,” was the most popular single choice, but three options including the word “Reference” had a higher combined total. Less specific labels, “Quick Facts” and “Online Databases,” were preferred by only a small number of respondents.

5) **You are looking for web sites recommended by library staff.** Recommendation: Library Favorites
   Here, the Working Group discussed confusion that could result from the label or term used. The term preferred by the majority of respondents, “Library Favorites,” could be understood to mean either web sites (or information about other resources) most frequently consulted by library users, or web sites and resources recommended by library staff, or some combination of the two. Group members suggest that library web site developers carefully consider their intent and common usage when selecting web page labels.

6) **You want to ask a librarian a question.** Recommendation: “Ask a Librarian”
   The respondents’ choice was clear – “As a Librarian” with 81 percent of the responses.

7) **You want something (for example, a book or a DVD) that is not in the library’s collection.** Recommendation: A label that includes “Interlibrary Loan.”
   Reflecting the language used on Minnesota library web sites, the survey offered a number of options with four of them including the term “Interlibrary Loan.” Taken together, these options accounted for 65 percent of the responses – the most common being “Request from Other Libraries (Interlibrary Loan)” (21 percent) or, simply, “Interlibrary Loan” (20 percent). Other options designed to be less formal and, perhaps, more engaging were preferred by few (e.g., “Can’t Find It? Request It” at 12 percent and “Get It!” at 3 percent).

8) **You need help using the library from a computer outside of the library.**
   Recommendation: “Using the Library from Your Home or Office”

9) **You want to find out if you have any books checked out and if you owe late fees on any of them.** Recommendation: “My Account”
   In this case, the language of e-commerce and other web sites was apparent – “My Account” was preferred by 53 percent – far exceeding more familiar library terminology, “Check Due Dates and Renew Items,” which was preferred by 19 percent.
10) **You want the library to set aside a book so you can pick it up.** Recommendation: “Request an Item”

This was another example of a question where responses were evenly divided, with 33 percent selecting “Place a Hold” as their choice, and 32 percent selecting “Request an Item” as their choice. Noting, however, that “Request Item” was preferred by 17 percent, the Group selected the phrase with the higher total.

**REMAINING QUESTIONS**

Our investigation of the literature and existing library web pages and the online survey provided strong indications of user preference for labels for many of the common activities included on public and academic library web sites. We see five issues that could benefit from further exploration.

- As we said, we would like to do another survey to identify the preferences of K-12 students with the goal of determining whether consistent terminology in K12 and post-secondary libraries can ease the transition of students from one to the other.

- Multiple choice options offered in the survey were not consistent in format, e.g. “Use the Library Catalog” vs. “Library Catalog” – reflecting the label terminology used on library web sites reviewed by the Working Group. Some options used a verb or action word, while some just used the noun. The results for the different categories did not demonstrate a strong preference for one method or the other, but, as we noted above, the responses indicate that identifying the end object in some form was the most popular choice. We would like to do follow-up work to provide more specificity about user preferences.

- On some of questions, the most commonly selected responses closely followed the phrasing of the question. (e.g., question 2, “You want to find magazine or newspaper articles.” Most common response: “Find a Magazine or Newspaper Article.”) The Group discussed how some respondents sought to provide what they thought to be the “right answer” (rather than providing their true preference) and may have been led to select an option by the phrasing of the question. Follow-up work could test whether the same responses would be provided to differently phrased questions.

- Responses to the web-based survey were provided by a self-selected group. Additional work, perhaps using different survey techniques, could test whether the survey’s responses were typical of the broader spectrum of library users.

- Since the survey was made available through library and library community web sites, the responses came, almost exclusively, from current library users. Possible terminology alternatives that might engage (or facilitate the use of library web sites by) non-library users could not be tested through this method of survey presentation.
APPENDIX 1

LIBRARIES & ORGANIZATIONS POSTING THE SURVEY ON THEIR WEB SITES

**Academic:**
Anoka Technical College  
College of St. Catherine  
Concordia College  
Concordia University  
Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College  
Hamline University  
Macalester College  
Metro State University  
Minnesota Community & Technical College (using paper questionnaires)  
MSCTC (MN State Community and Tech College)  
Ridgewater Community Colleges  
Riverland Community and Technical Colleges  
St. Cloud State Univ.  
St. Olaf College  
South Central College – Mankato & Faribault  
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
William Mitchell College of Law  
Winona State University

**Public Libraries:**
Anoka County Library  
Carver County Library  
Hibbing Public Library  
Minneapolis Public Library  
Redwood Falls Public Library  
St. Paul Public Library  
Washington County Library

**Regional Library Systems:**
Great River Regional Library  
Lake Agassiz Regional Library  
Northwest Regional Library  
Plum Creek Library System  
SELCO/SELS  
Traverse de Sioux Library System

**K-12 Schools:**
Big Lake High School  
Eagan High School  
North Branch High School  
Orono Middle School
Pierz High School
Thief River Falls – Lincoln High School

**CALCO Libraries:**
MN Dept. of Employment & Economic Development
MN Dept. of Health
MN Dept. of Natural Resources
MN Dept. of Transportation
Minnesota Historical Society
Minnesota Legislative Reference Library
MN Pollution Control Agency
MN State Law Library

**Others**
Center for Transportation Studies, U of MN (part of the MnDOT catalog)
Metronet
MINITEX
Northern Lights Library Network
PALS for MnPALS & WebPALS