National Biological Information Infrastructure. *Access:* http://www.nbii.gov.

National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) provides access to biological data, images, maps, and other information from a broad range of sources, including government, academic, and industry.

Created in 1993, NBII serves to connect American research in biological elds to its various end users in government, the scientic community, and education.

To achieve this end, NBII does two things. First, it provides the necessary organization and structure to coordinate the research output of the biological community into a system that makes sharing and access easy. This structure is largely invisible to the end user. NBII is organized into a series of research nodes that focus on a speci c ecological topic (such as invasive species or aquatic resources), a geographic region, or an infrastructure issue (such as metadata or network standards). The second aspect of NBII is a Web portal that allows end users to access the information, publications, and data from the various nodes in a seamless, uni ed portal.

The NBII Web site provides access points that allow users to browse the wide variety of databases, GIS sources, images, maps, and other biological information sources. Information and data are organized by organism, habitat, ecological topic, and geographic perspective. The portal allows researchers to nd specialized data without knowledge of which organization or center maintains a particular database or resource. The NBII

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site is also keyword searchable. Results of a keyword search are conveniently sorted by media type, so researchers seeking GIS data, for example, can quickly   lter out nonrelevant media types. The portal also provides research tools, such as thesauri, a publications library, and an image library.

There are some issues to watch for when searching NBII. One is that a great deal of persistence may be required to nd a particular database. Some valuable resources are found four or ve layers into the site s hierarchy. Also, lists of resources may be hidden below the fold on the screen, making it easy to miss relevant content. Occasionally, one will encounter a dead link.

NBII will be a valuable resource to those researching biology, sheries, forestry, conservation issues, environmental science, and policy issues related to natural resources and the environment. *Nicholas Schiller, WSU-Vancouver, schiller@vancouver.wsu.edu*

Scirus. *Access:* http://www.scirus.com/.

Elsevier s Scirus aims to help reduce the time it takes for a person to nd relevant scientic information online. As an alternative to Google, Yahoo, and other general Web search engines, Scirus is a free Web search engine that retrieves results from 300 million preapproved scientic Web sites and databases. For example, a medical researcher could use Scirus to look for information on spinal tap and retrieve pertinent results on the procedure without having to scroll through irrelevant results about the band and the movie.

At the Scirus homepage, the user is presented with a basic search screen. Along with the single search box, the homepage offers a link to the most recent science news as reported by *New Scientist,* and has some interesting options, such as the choice to receive e-mails about new features, usability testing, and technology updates. The homepage also provides a link to Submit Web Site, which allows users to enter a Web site address

to be reviewed for inclusion in the pool of scientific Web content. Scirus provides interesting downloads such as a Scirus toolbar for Internet Explorer, a search box that can be added to a personal Web page, and a Firefox plug-in search box.

With the basic search, researchers can immediately limit results to journal and/or Web sources on a topic. The advanced search screen has two search boxes for Boolean searching as well as limits by date, information type (articles, books, company homepages, patents, preprints, etc.), file format, source, and subject area.

Search results can be resorted by date or by relevance. Unlike many search engines, Scirus does not rank page relevance based on metatags, which can be skewed by the page author. Instead, relevance is determined by the number of times the search words appear, and also by the number of links pointing to a site. Another useful feature is the ability to checkmark the results and save them, e-mail them, or export them.

Scirus is recommended for those who need to carry out scientific research on the Web, and it is also useful as a reference tool for verifying citations. It helps to bring the online scientific world down to a more manageable size, and its clear layout makes it very usable, even for a novice researcher. Scirus is useful for students of all levels, as well as for professors, researchers, and librarians who use the Internet for scientific research. *Allison Thompson, McMaster University, thomall@mcmaster.ca*

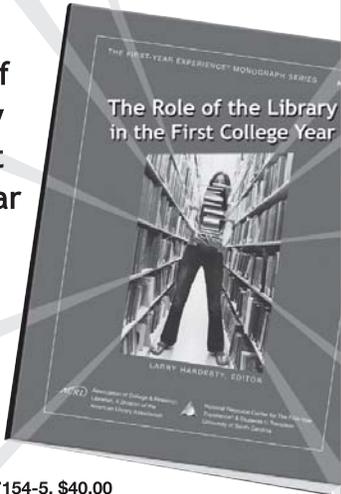**Urban Institute.** *Access:* http://www.urban. org.

President Lyndon Johnson spawned the idea for what in 1968 became the Urban Institute (UI), an independent, nonpartisan think tank that analyzes the challenges facing the nation's cities and residents. To this day UI endeavors "to promote sound social policy and public debate on national priorities" by conducting research, evaluating programs and services, and educating the public on relevant issues.

Indeed, the officers, trustees, and senior fellows affiliated with this group sport impressive credentials and experience. A class act, the Web site offers students and scholars a wealth of information in an attractive, functional package.

The bulk of UI research derives from ten policy centers that each focus on an issue, such as housing or education. UI also hosts conferences and discussions year-round, which bring together independent, government, and community representatives. Although the full scope of material available here is unclear, the site offers access to UI-sponsored monographs, papers, reports, audio files, podcasts, rss feeds, press releases, commentary, Web sites, publications for sale, and other information. Although a disclaimer cautions that all content reflects the views of the authors and not those of UI, trustees or funding sources, on the face of it, research appears sound and objective.

Deaths

Ridley R. Kessler Jr., 65, retired documents librarian at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC), died January 11, 2007, of congestive heart failure. Kessler served as federal documents librarian and regional depository librarian at UNC s Davis Library from 1973 until his retirement in 2003. He also served as assistant head of the library s reference department. Kessler previously held the positions at UNC of assistant documents librarian (1970 71) and international/state documents librarian (1971 73). Kessler was well known for his extensive professional activities. He was a member of the federal government s Depository Library Council, which he chaired (1989 90). He was a long-time member and of cer of ALA s Government Documents Round Table and was active in the documents section of the North Carolina Library Association. Kessler testi ed before congressional subcommittees in 1991, 1999, and 2000, on behalf of groups including ALA, American Associa-

Ridley R. Kessler Jr.

tion of Law Libraries, Association of Research Libraries, Medical Library Association, and Special Library Association. His testimony focused on the services of the Government Printing Of ce s (GPO) Federal Depository Library Program and the importance of free access to government information. In recognition of his work, Kessler was awarded the James Bennett Childs Award for lifetime contributions from GODORT in 2002. In 1992, he received the CIS/GODORT/ALA Documents to the People Award. In 1990, he was the recipient of GPO s Distinguished Service Award and gold medal, the highest honor that the GPO can bestow upon an individual.

Audrey Taylor, director of library services for distance education in the University of Houston System, died November 29, 2006. A librarian in the University of Houston Libraries for more than 35 years, Taylor graduated from the University of Houston, where she had worked as a student employee. After earning a master s degree at the University of Texas-Austin, she returned to the University of Houston Libraries, where she held a variety of positions over the years. A leader on campus, she was also a leader in the profession, particularly in ALA s Black Caucus.

Researchers will appreciate the no-nonsense layout. Current research dominates the center of the homepage. The left sidebar offers browsing by topic or author. Drilling into topics reveals lists of neat, brief annotated entries with full citations and links to the documents.

Google-style searching offers further access with results sorted by relevancy or date and links to Find Similar documents. Almost every page offers a button to e-mail or print content.

Topics break down into Issues (crime/justice, economy/taxes, education, health/healthcare, housing, welfare, work/income), Sectors (civil society, federal government, nonpro ts), Places (U.S. cities, international), or People (adolescents, children, families, immigrants, race/ethnicity/gender, seniors).

Lengthier reports contain a table of contents, executive summaries and other features to facilitate scanning.

Unfortunately, it is easy to miss one of the most useful sections under Toolkit located on the lower right sidebar. Issues in Focus provides facts and ndings on a sampling of hot issues and seems a good place to start research on broader topics, such as welfare reform, health insurance, or low-income housing. Toolkit also links to an explanation of data methods and more resources.

Students and researchers investigating urban environments need to visit this site. It is chock-full of a variety of material and provides multiple, straightforward ways to nd it. *Barbara Valentine, Linfield College, bvalen@linfield.edu*