

# An Unexpected Discovery: One Library's Experience with Discovery Service Evaluation

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Recognizing the potential benefits to users of discovery tools, Auburn University Libraries formed a committee to explore acquisition of a web-scale discovery service that would be in keeping with its values, vision, and institutional mission. As part of this process, we conducted an extensive literature review, offered informational workshops, held three onsite vendor presentations, gathered feedback from library staff, and interviewed other libraries with discovery systems.

## Testing Vendors with Real Reference Questions

In advance of their on-site presentations, we supplied vendors with five reference questions received at our Reference Desk. We asked vendors to show us how they would approach these questions using their discovery tools. Below are a sample reference question and the vendors' demonstrations.

**Question:** I am looking for the letters of Thomas Jefferson relating specifically to his views on Indian removal. I would like to find them in book format if I can.

Vendor A	Search Strategy	(1) Advanced search: Thomas Jefferson AND Indian removal and applied "searching within full text" function (2) Thomas Jefferson as author AND Indian removal
	Search Results	(1) 45,550 results (2) 38 results; selected title #8, <i>Indian Addresses</i> [this book contains addresses given by Jefferson to Native American audiences; these pieces do not refer to Indian removal]
Vendor B	Search Strategy	(1) Thomas Jefferson letters and applied Book/eBook facet (2) Performed search for "Indian" within full text of title #4, <i>Letters and Addresses of Thomas Jefferson</i>
	Search Results	(1) 16,082 results; multiple <i>Letters and Addresses of Thomas Jefferson</i> (2) Various "snippets" on Indians; vendor displayed pg. 157, noting that it contains "info on his views on Indians and how they should be treated"; [passage contained no reference to Indian removal]
Vendor C	Search Strategy	(1) Thomas Jefferson Indian removal (2) Thomas Jefferson Indian removal and applied book facet (3) Thomas Jefferson Indian removal (same search as #1 above, but in a different library's discovery service) (4) Thomas Jefferson Native American removal
	Search Results	(1) 1,520 results; no relevant sources on first page of search results (2) 2 results, neither of which were relevant (3) 3301 results; no relevant sources on first page of search results (4) 3374 results; no relevant sources on first page of search results

### Our Global Discovery Vision

Global unified index  
Designed for both novice and expert  
Normalized metadata  
Easy, intuitive user experience  
Context aware  
Supports development of information literacy skills  
Less duplication of systems, data, & cost

### Our Findings

Multiple versions of unified indexes  
Targeted at undergraduate audience  
Mixed metadata  
Inconsistent, non-intuitive user experience  
Non-context aware  
Geared more towards "get in - get out" searches  
Duplication of systems, data, & cost

