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Literature Search Strategy Week: Len Levin on Understanding and Finding Grey Literature

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Len Levin on Understanding and Finding Grey Literature

Hello, my name is **Len Levin** and I am a librarian at the [Lamar Soutter Library](#), University of Massachusetts Medical School. Using the databases and search tips outlined in the previous two posts for this week can go a long way to finding good information when conducting research and evaluation projects. But what happens when you still can't find an answer using these tools? Or what if you need to conduct a thoroughly comprehensive search and need to make absolutely certain that you've left "no stone unturned?"

Hot Tips

This is where Grey Literature comes in. Grey Literature usually refers to anything that has not been published in a traditional format or, in library parlance, "lacks bibliographic control" meaning it can be hard to look up. This includes things such as conference proceedings, conference posters, dissertations and theses, government/institutional reports and raw data. But how can you find this type of material?

Luckily, much of it is now online. Many academic institutions now host "Institutional Repositories" where the above materials are collected from faculty and students. If you know of an institution, researcher or evaluator at an institution that specializes in your topic of interest, start on their web page.

Or try Google Scholar, a sub-set of Google that focuses results on scholarly resources, often times pointing directly to the full text. It is estimated that Google Scholar now links upwards of [160 million documents](#). Many libraries have linked Google Scholar to their holdings so if something is not readily available online, you might be able to find out where to get it.

Government agencies – federal, state, provincial, etc. – also generate many reports that contain excellent data. If you're looking for climate data, try the [EPA](#) (Environmental Protection Agency) home page. Healthcare? Try the [NIH](#) (National Institutes of Health) or the [AHRQ](#) (Agency for Healthcare Research Quality). Or professional association sites like the American Public Health Association can provide a wealth of information through online policy statements.

I would bet that many of you are exposed to one type of grey literature on a daily basis – that being blogs, Tweets or Facebook postings. Yes, these social media tools can also be a great place to locate valuable information not found elsewhere.

Rad Resources

Here are some "rad resources" to further help you find Grey Literature:

Google Scholar: <http://scholar.google.com>

Grey Net International: <http://www.greynet.org/home.html>

NTIS (National Technical Information Service): <http://www.ntis.gov>

N.Y. Academy of Medicine Grey Literature Report: <http://www.greylit.org/home>

Clinical Trials.gov: <http://clinicaltrials.gov>

Data.gov: <http://data.gov>