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LOST IN CYBERSPACE: TRACKING FUGITIVE WEB RESOURCES

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Can researchers in 2006 locate web resources cited in graduate theses from 2001-2004? Data from a citation analysis study reveals the astounding number of altered, moved, or lost websites. This study quantitatively describes a particular manifestation of the ubiquitous but often undocumented problem of web resource instability. It points to many possible innovative solutions, such as instructional and archival interventions by librarians.

2001-2004 Dissertations: 237 dissertations containing 29,480 bibliographic citations of which 1140 citations or 3.8% are for web resources.

Percentage of Web Resources by Year				Percentage of Students Citing Web Resources by Year			
	Web	Total	%		Web	Total	%
2001	126	5826	2.16%	2001	21	53	39.6%
2002	249	8364	2.98%	2002	40	66	60.6%
2003	420	7431	5.65%	2003	36	51	70.6%
2004	345	7859	4.39%	2004	46	67	68.7%

Type	Number
Fact sheets	230
Instructional materials	48
Legal information	41
News	194
Research	214
Statistics	106
Traditional sources now online	192
Other	82
Unable to determine	33
	1140

Domain	Number
com	279
edu	224
foreign	73
gov	144
indeterminable	39
net	36
org	307
state gov	38
	1140

Fact sheets: Information highlights, overviews, general historical information

Instructional materials: Professors' websites, 'how to' information from .edu websites, class notes, etc.

Legal information: statutes, laws, court cases, congressional information, testimony

News: newspapers, magazines, newsletters, television & radio websites, press releases, other general news websites

Research: research reports, pre-published research on the web

Statistics: websites that are chiefly statistical in nature

Traditional sources now online: books, journals, dictionaries, encyclopedias, sources that once were print but now being used through a digitized version

Other: software, survey instruments, online calculators, directories/table of contents/pages of links, product websites, vendor websites

Web resources that could not be found using the URL given in the citation:

798 or 70%

After searching, the number of web resources not found by year:

Year	Not Found	Found	% Not Found
2001	38	88	30.2%
2002	66	183	26.5%
2003	105	315	25%
2004	64	281	18.6%
Total	273	867	24%

Common citation mistakes

The most common web resource citation error was **omission of the date accessed**: almost one-third of citations--32%--did not contain an access date (237 out of a sample of 735).

Another common mistake was the **omission of explicit and helpful information about the "host organization."** The following APA style guide advice is too often ignored: "If a document is contained within a large and complex Web site (such as that for a university or a government agency), identify the host organization and the relevant program or department before giving the URL for the document itself. . . . When the author of a document is markedly different from the provider (e.g., the host organization), explicitly identify the latter in the retrieval statement"

American Psychological Association. (2001). Publication *manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed., pp. 274-5). Washington, D.C.: Author.

Web resources that could be found using the URL provided in citation:
342 or 30%

Of the web resources that were found, the number that had been clearly updated after being cited in the dissertation is as follows:

	Worked as Cited but Updated	Found after Search and Updated	Not updated
2001	3	9	76
2002	18	23	240
2003	28	21	134
2004	28	35	252
Total	77	88	702

Example of lost data on updated websites:

Grade 3 Reading CSAP scores from 1998-2001 were cited in a dissertation. Currently only 2001 data is available at the site with the following notes:

"2000 CSAP State Summary Results

Note: Spanish Results and rescaled Grade 3 Reading results not currently available for this year.

1999 CSAP State Summary Results

1998 CSAP State Summary Results

Note: Spanish Results and rescaled Grade 3 Reading results not currently available for this year."

In 1999, there is no note about Grade 3 Reading results, but only scores for grades 4 & 7 are available.

Colorado Department of Education, Unit of Student Assessment. (2006). *CSAP summary data 1997-2006*. Retrieved November 3, 2006, from the Colorado Department of Education Web site: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/csap_summary.html