



▼ ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

History Study Center

Date of Review: July 19, 2007 / Revised September 6, 2007

Composite Score:

★★★ 7/8

Reviewed by: P. Michael McCulley

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Pricing Options

The pricing details quoted in this section were supplied to me by ProQuest staff.

History Study Center is available on a subscription basis. The price depends on a variety of factors, including the size and type of institution, whether the library has other ProQuest CSA products, and the number of campus libraries. The price for a small academic library to subscribe is typically around \$6,000 per year. Remote access to HSC is included in the price, and unlimited simultaneous users can access the product remotely. Consortia pricing is also available upon request.

Though ProQuest did not specify public library pricing in their details, I assume variable pricing plans for public libraries and systems and consortia are available.

Product Description

History Study Center, hereafter referred to as HSC, is a premier collection of primary and secondary sources for historical study, with content that spans recorded history from ancient times through today's current events. It illuminates and offers good access points to key topics, and it provides students, undergraduates, and general researchers quick and easy access to diverse and reliable information sources and documents. HSC is an innovative research solution that combines rich primary sources, high quality reference books, and the latest scholarship from history journals.

HSC consists of several integrated resources that can be easily cross-searched through a single overarching interface. The contents of History Study Center are divided into five categories that can be searched separately or cross-searched together:

- **Study Units**—material selected by an editorial team of history experts on more than 500 topics to offer highly relevant information that supports key topics for history students identified by College Board AP Central
- **Maps & Reference**—20,000+ articles from atlases, biographical collections, encyclopedias, and research guides, plus over 70 Topic Overviews (essay-length introductions to historical texts and topics)
- **Historical Documents**—hundreds of primary source texts including newspaper articles, historical speeches, government documents, and much more
- **Multimedia/Web**—images and video clips, all captioned to provide historical context, plus links to selected Web sites of interest to historians

- **Journals**—cover-to-cover full-text of 60 journals for runs that often go up to the most recent issue

Quality content from HSC includes images from Hulton Getty Archive, multimedia content from MPI, Chadwyck-Healey interactive maps, and much more. HSC is also available to K–12 schools as part of an eLibrary Curriculum Edition subscription.

The main contents of HSC when accessed can be broken into the below descriptive areas:

- **Title List**—this listing shows the 344 journals where “selected articles” are taken from, in an EXCEL spreadsheet.
- **Sourcebook Details**—this area details the reference articles, maps, and historical documents included. This is a quite detailed listing of 59 titles, including bibliographical data and a link to browse the table of contents of each material source. Several key resources included are up-to-date with resources published in 2007 (such as “Encyclopedia of North American History”).
- **Journal Details**—each journal is provided an entry, with bibliographical, Web site, and contact information, as well as a wonderful browseable index to the contents in HSC. This browseable feature alone might be worth the subscription price to some organizations.
- **Sources Used in Study Units**—At SDPL, this is our brief database description used on our database page: “Access to primary and secondary sources for the study of history, with 40,000+ documents and articles, 50+ reference works, 3,000 images, and links to 2,000 Web sites.”

HSC includes database Administration Resources that give access to the following functions and services:

- HSC and Chadwyck-Healey usage statistics;
- MARC records;
- XML Gateway documentation; and,
- Library branding.

In addition, subscribers can contact their Webmaster and Technical Support easily via the Help page.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Like the prior reviewer (Collin, 2007), I recommend HSC as a good addition for middle and high school library database collections, as well as for academic libraries at smaller or medium-sized colleges serving general undergraduate education. In addition, the wealth of source documents for primary research for amateur scholars and students of all ages means this would be a good database for large or medium-sized public libraries.

Critical Evaluation

CONTENT

HSC's strength is the richness, depth, and diversity of its content. It is not rated a "5" (highest) because it does slant towards British and North American content; though, since it's from Chadwyck-Healey, one could hardly expect otherwise. The journal content begins in 1986, which is early enough for modern history studies; additional earlier journal content would further enrich the product. As Collins suggests in his article in *Choice*, additional journals would make this product better. On this point, ProQuest CSA commented:

The full-text content does start with 1986; there are, however, many older journal articles linked from the Study Units. We have 5 more Oxford University Press titles and 25 Columbia University Press titles coming later this year, including core history journals like *English Historical Review* and *Historical Journal*. Also, we are planning to make the selected journal articles (including older articles from our periodical archives) in Study Units accessible via the Journal search.

HSC includes some video, image, and audio content, but it could be improved with more multimedia as well—especially as this content is becoming more widely available now via online archives and the internet in general. ProQuest CSA made this comment:

We regularly add more images, around 100 per year. We have no specific plans for more audio/video content at present, but we are likely to be looking at this as a future enhancement.

The Web links are excellent, and provide quick access to a wider range of content on the "open" internet.

INTEGRATED RESOURCES

Study Units

Collin's *Choice* review of HSC, though brief, is both recent (May 2007), and good. He compares HSC to EBSCO's History Reference Center, but he also notes the superior 500 or so "study units" in HSC. These units are so well-organized and contain so many key subtopics for further exploration that they set HSC apart from EBSCO's product and other similar overview history databases. The units are searchable by keyword, title, or subject, and browseable (Canadian History's "browse" leads to 10 time and event subtopics). A basic outline for a study unit includes an overview essay, articles and reference materials, biographies of key historical figures for the unit's topic, relevant documents and media, links to external Web sites, and links to related units. It is a wonderfully well-designed hyperlinked key part of HSC, and the depth of information in context that sets HSC apart from other historical databases. To further see a typical unit's depth, if we explore further in Canadian History's subtopic "British Colonialism," we see these results:

- 5 highlights—don't miss items;
- 1 topic overview essay;
- 16 reference articles;
- 20 major biographies;
- 2 historiography items;
- 31 maps;
- 26 primary sources;
- 5 images;
- 2 videos;

- 29 journal articles;
- 8 Web links;
- 6 related study unit links.

Historical Documents

You can search by keyword, all documents, or any or all of the eight subsets of historical documents in HSC. In addition, you can browse the Historical Documents' table of contents for each Historical Document Sourcebook in HSC. A broad search by keyword for "colonialism" found 17 documents. A suggested improvement here would be to provide a limit by years feature, so you could obtain key documents for given research periods or topics.

Maps and Reference

You can search by keyword and item title, and limit that to biographical material, or not. You can search all maps and reference sources, or select subtopics such as just atlases or encyclopedias for specific searching needs. In addition, you can browse the table of contents for each Maps and Reference sourcebook.

Multimedia

In the multimedia section, you can search by keywords or titles, and limit the searching to images, video, Web links or all of these. A Web links only search for "African AND colonialism" produced three good results—to African timelines; the Historical Text Archive; and to *Jouvert: Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. Links are briefly identified first, with a note about the contents and source, and the link is provided with a note that it will open in a separate browser window. The search was rerun for video (no results), and for images (three were found).

Journals

Journal searching in HSC provides some of the most powerful search tools in the product. You can search by keywords (limit to citations/abstracts only is an option); article titles; article authors; or, journal titles (with a link to pick a title from the listing). In addition, these searches can be set to include or exclude book reviews, as well as limited to specified date ranges, beginning in January, 1986 to the present. The Journals' section also allows you to browse through the table of contents for each journal issue, a great way to read some current articles in history from your favorite journals. As a test search, I searched keyword "Darfur" from January to July 2007, and found 11 relevant articles. The results are sortable, as in most areas of HSC, by relevance or most recent first listing.

Contact Information

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History Study Center Review Scores Composite: ★★ ★ 7/8

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

HSC's strength is the richness, depth, and diversity of its content. It is not rated a "5" (highest) because it does slant towards British and North American content; though, since it's from Chadwyck-Healey, one could hardly expect otherwise. Additional earlier journal content would further enrich the product.

HSC includes some video, image, and audio content, but it could be improved with more multimedia as well. Web links are excellent.

Searchability: ★★★★★

Most users will find the Basic and Advanced (including Boolean) search functions easy and intuitive to use. The search Help files are good but could be improved and updated.

Pricing Options: ★★★ 1/2

Though flexible pricing is available, and \$6K for a small academic library sounds reasonable, the pricing model seems higher than it should be given that most of the content is preexisting and previously published. Customers are not notified of updates as they occur, which makes the product seem more static than it really is. Offering consortia pricing is a plus.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

Additional linking granted to results and contents are a plus.

SEARCHING

Basic and Advanced Searches are supported, though the Advanced Search is not that different in operators as it is in allowing ticking on/off the content type that is searched. You can limit to biographical material, as well as various multimedia formats, and journal content; you can include or exclude book reviews from the journal searches.

HELP AND ACCESSIBILITY

HSC's help files are context sensitive, and provide enough detail to get you moving when stuck and showing the features of the product that need more explanation. The Help files would benefit from screen shots. I liked that links to Help information opened in a separate tab/browser: you don't lose your place or work in the product.

The Accessibility link appearing on each page is more than just about ADA (U. S.) access, or those with impairments. It provides help on navigation throughout the product, as well as customizing the contents for the best user experience.

MY ARCHIVE

History Study Center comes complete with an online My Archive tool, where you register a username and password, and have a small study space for your research or investigations. Here you can store saved searches and items between your sessions online. Unfortunately, I did not see any way to get RSS (Real Simple Syndication) results

from the searches or the My Archives searches or items. I hope HSC adds this feature to this great product soon.

Contract Provisions

HSC contract provisions are standard; distance education access is permitted. Libraries are granted the right to link to search results or materials for on-site or authorized users.

Authentication

Authentication is supported via IP or username and password.

Author's Selected References

Collins, C. A. "History Study Center. Bucks County Community College." *Choice* May 2007, vol. 44, issue 9, p. 1513-14.

"History Reference Center," EBSCO Publishing <<http://www.epnet.com>>.

Product Information, ProQuest <http://il.proquest.com/products_pq/descriptions/hsc.shtml>.

About the Author

P. Michael McCulley is the Electronic Resources Librarian at San Diego Public Library in California. An M. L. S. graduate of U. S. C. (South Carolina), Michael is a.k.a. "DrWeb." You will find his personal blog at <<http://drweb.typepad.com/>>. ■