

Online streamlines research

By Li-Wan Chang

Research requires time—time to locate information, time to read, time to digest and synthesize. An online search, which can be performed in the UTD McDermott Library, may save you time and make your research easier.

With the advent of online searching, the nature of academic research has undergone dramatic change. Hours of tedious manual searching through volumes of indexes and abstracts and perusing catalog files, although still profitable for many types of research, is no longer the only way of securing information for term papers, theses, and dissertations. More and more researchers are choosing the online option, which provides a simple, quick and cost-effective way to access information or compile bibliographies on almost any academic subject.

In order to have a search performed, you must make an appointment. Searches are performed only on weekdays. When you arrive at the library, you explain your topic to the

searcher, listing key terms, concepts and ideas important to your topic. The searcher translates this information into a search statement or strategy and enters this statement into the computer. The computer searches a relevant database and prints a list of articles or facts which have been indexed under the key terms.

The real advantage of the online search over the manual search is flexibility. The searcher can combine and manipulate ideas while the search is going on in order to create a unique search and bibliography for use. For example, if you were interested in studying water resources in Texas and had to do a manual search, you might have to look through all of the articles indexed under "Texas" to see which ones had to do with "water" and all of the articles indexed under "water" to see which dealt with "Texas." This is very time-consuming to do manually, but the computer does it instantly. The searcher instructs the computer to re-

trieve only those articles that mention both "water" and "Texas."

During the 1983-84 academic year, UTD librarians performed over 500 online searches for students, faculty and community members in subject fields as diverse as psychology, education, management, technology or physics. Since an online search is an individualized product, the library requires that direct costs of a search be covered by the user. These costs include charges for telecommunications, online computer time, and offline prints if desired. A 25 percent surcharge also is assessed but UTD students are exempt from this charge. Total costs for an average search fall between \$15 and \$25.

For more information or answers to specific questions regarding online searching services offered by the library, please contact Li-Wan Chang, Online Search Coordinator (690-2957). Information is also available at the Reference Desk (690-2955).