Women's Resources International. National Information Services Corporation,

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Anyone interested in the exploding field of American women's history and those hoping to keep up with the burgeoning and exciting field of women's studies will be grateful to have readily available the resource material offered by this product. Bibliographic guides in print have been invaluable to both undergraduates writing papers, graduate students doing research, as well as scholars and readers interested in tracking down the latest findings in their respective fields of study or interest. But being able to use this resource in its CD-Rom form (with over 116,000 records) allows for a more thorough and speedy retrieval of data--and a compact form for holding a ton of material in one slim shiny diskette. <p> The availability of a CD-Rom guide to these databases makes research so much easier. Those of us who feel the need to keep up with working papers and periodical material will be well supported by this combination of resources, and the update discs available with an annual subscription can keep us abreast of work as it appears. <p> The databases are terrific: Women's Studies Abstracts (from 1984/32,000 records), Women's Studies Database (from 1972/60,000 records), European Women from the Renaissance to Yesterday: A Bibliography from 1610-present (10,000 records), an annotated bibliography on Women's Health and Development (1995/200 records), Women of Color & Southern Women: A Bibliography of Social Science Research (1975-present/7,800 records) and several data banks from the University of Wisconsin's "Women Studies Librarian," including New Books on Women & Feminism (1987 to present/ 26,000 records), a guide to Audiovisuals in English (800 records), and a race & ethnicity bibliography (1970-1990/2,400 records). This partial listing of what is available reveals just how diverse and useful the disk can be. It is especially important that these databases are updated and new discs are issued to replace old ones--making it an ongoing value. <p> For my own work, I have found it crucial in the past to consult the working papers at the University of Memphis (Tennessee) clearinghouse, available through the Women of Color & Southern Women database. It is incredibly useful for those of us looking to see what work is in progress and to hook up with a network of scholars. In this single storehouse, over eighteen categories of ethnic groups are available for research data and the directory of scholars facilitates easy contacts. Students working on dissertation topics would be well advised to make a stop here before proceeding. <p> I will not claim to be computer impaired, but I am certainly software impaired by continuing to use a Macintosh system. I was sent the IBM version of the disk and told it would read Microsoft Windows 95, should I be so lucky to have an interface (I don't!). Luckily, my co-author for the Columbia University <cite>Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century</cite> had an available system that I could borrow, and I was able to use computers owned by my graduate students at the University of Richmond--for my own

purposes and to see what their response was to the disk. <p> My grad students were charmed by the ease of using the CD-Rom guide. They felt it was easy to follow directions on the screen, rather than the usual hassle of having to resort to the manual. One of my students was especially impressed that the entire guide was available in Spanish as well. They like the fact that the search process was divided into three categories "Novice," "Advanced," and "Expert", and they found themselves able to bounce into "Advanced" in no time at all. <p> They were working on papers and happy to keyboard forth into the databases to try to track down references. The system seemed to be very easy for them to grasp and plunder within a relatively short time. For those who have been brought up with computers and online systems, the NISC design seems to be instantly accessible and easily maneuvered. For those who were not brought up on computers, it does take a bit longer, but clearly the system has been designed for those with minimal skills. <p> For that reason, it is not really possible for me to offer any insight into what might be wonderful technicalities this software offers. I found the detailed technical explanations accompanying this resource gave me a headache. I know that the programmers are clearly setting forth important matters with "Use of the Field Connector Box" and "Selecting a New Field for Lateral Research," but I have my suspicions that most users of "Women's Studies International" will be, like myself, more concerned with content than style in this particular. For that reasons a brief print guide would have been nice, but, I know, I know, it's all on the computer, just install and take off! <p> My co-author of the <cite>Columbia Guide</cite> and I were grateful that we could select a category, then generate selective bibliographies printed on the topic we wanted. This makes the product an ideal tool for both teaching and research. <p> We explored the various category listings and were not stumped or disappointed by headings offered. The "major topics" listing still presents a challenge for the researcher. If you are interested in "sexuality," you could search this as a keyword. Then, of course, the major topics list includes "mental health," "psychology," "family planning," "law," "prejudice and sex discrimination," "reproductive rights," and "lesbianism," which would perhaps overlap and intersect. So, as a result, we are all still struggling with the language issues and the problems all researchers face, but with this electronic process it is a much less tedious effort to surf and seize. <p> More distressing was the glitch that my students and I encountered when it came to author searches. In my course in southern women's history, we were trying to look up articles and I asked them to find pieces by Jackie Jones and Jackie Hall. They typed in Jones, Jacqueline. Nothing came up. Then we tried Hall, Jacquelyn. Again, nothing came up. <p> Now, as anyone in the field knows, both of these Jackies have produced pathbreaking work, and their names should pop up with a list of publications--instead, we were stumped until we found J. Hall and J. Jones were listed--and if you tried Jacquelyn or Jacqueline or Jackie you got nothing. We found this problem rather peculiar, downright odd, and disconcerting. <p> I'm not sure how this can be corrected, but surely it must be ironed out, to help those of us looking up authors we've been told to seek. It was only through trial and error that we finally found the right pieces, which were indeed listed in the databases. <p> So the WRI CD-Rom is a much more satisfying "subject" and "title" friendly tool in its current incarnation. And for that we should all be grateful. <p> For scholars not plugged into a major research library system which offers this feature, and for those of us with latenight footnote problems, this disk could be a lifesaver. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to keep up in the field and enjoy the bounty women's studies has wrought. It's a major investment, but one which will doubtless prove worth every penny. <p>

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