

Case Study

Evaluating new Futures for Academic Ebooks at the University of California Libraries

SERVICE AREA: CALIFORNIA

» BACKGROUND

The **University of California Libraries** are made up of over 100 libraries on 10 campuses. Each of these campuses licenses on average over 1.2 million ebooks. Collectively, they have digitized over 48 million items and hold over 40 million print volumes.

» INTRODUCTION

The University of California Libraries (UCL) studied its users' phone and tablet ebook reading experience and discovered it was less than ideal. To begin addressing this situation, a working group was formed to test out the Palace app. The first of these tests involved installing an instance of Palace and populating it with open-access ebooks. This low-cost test allowed the working group to do preliminary user experience and accessibility testing of the app. It also allowed the group to test administrative functions and ILS metadata loading.

Based on this work, the group wrote a report that garnered approval from all ten University of California campus library leaders to proceed with a fully functioning Palace installation at one campus (the University of California, Davis) as a step toward determining if UCL should adopt Palace. This installation is now in place. It is being used to test integration with campus single sign-on with Duo MFA, to evaluate the licensed content user experience, and to test methods for automating the loading of Palace ebook metadata into the UCL ILS.

» CHALLENGE

A difficult phone and tablet ebook reading experience for UCL library users. UCL's Ebook Usability Common Knowledge Group produced two studies of ebook usability—the [Ebook Usability Report](#) and the [Ebook Usability Report on Aggregator Platforms](#). These studies described a problematic landscape for phone and tablet users of UCL ebooks. Among the problems:

- Different ebooks require different reading apps.
- Each app has a different authorization system.
- Each app has a different way of downloading ebooks, requiring users to follow complex, time-consuming download instructions.
- Each app has a different user interface, requiring users to familiarize themselves with it before they can read an ebook.

A significant gap exists between the ideal ebook reading experience and the current UCL ebook reading experience. The Mellon Foundation-funded [Project LEND study](#) revealed a considerable gap between UCL's current ereading systems and the optimal academic ereading systems. Needs identified included:

- a single user interface for all ebook reading
- a reading app that worked on the web, on phones and tablets
- a method for creating annotations and citations that didn't store user content in a proprietary system
- a system that used standards to preclude vendor lock-in

» STRATEGY

Take the first step toward the optimal academic library ereading experience by doing the following:

- Testing Palace within the UCL system; and

- Joining the Academic Palace Working Group to learn from other academic libraries and to work with them on improving the academic ereading experience.

» IMPLEMENTATION

Lyrasis set up a Palace test site for UCL. This site does three things. First, it allows all UCL users to access open-access ebooks via Palace. Second, it will enable users at a test campus, UC Davis, to access both open source and licensed content from various vendors. Third, it allows campuses to provide access to The California State Library's licensed collection of ebooks and audiobooks. In addition, UCL joined the Academic Palace Working Group.

» RESULTS AND OUTCOME

A better ebook user experience on phones and tablets: The UCL Palace App enables users to search for and access ebooks with just three clicks. Every ebook, regardless of the publisher, is displayed in the same user interface. Users can access the app's ebooks both on campus and off-campus, online and offline. They can also access them without VPN software and without having to navigate to third-party sites.

More open access content availability: Because Lyrasis has already assembled open access collections in coordination with the Digital Public Library of America, much of the work involved in making them available was eliminated. Open access materials made available include Open Research Library, the University of Michigan Press (Fulcrum) and OAPEN.

An opportunity to offer a shared ebook reading experience with our state's public libraries. Many California public libraries offer Palace, and the California State Library provides a licensed collection of ebooks to all California residents. As a result, UCL users can access ebooks from all three sources in the same app.

An opportunity to collaborate with other academic institutions to develop the most effective ereading system for academic users.

Through the Palace Academic Working Group, UCL has been able to work collaboratively with other academic institutions to both improve Palace and the larger academic ereading environment.

» ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Key Insights:

- Palace setup is straightforward.** Because Palace operates on a software as a service (SaaS) model, Lyris does most of the setup work. It configures the service, works with the campus IT group to set up single sign-on, and assists the metadata management team to load records into the ILS. Both the Lyris staff and the Palace Academic Working Group members offer good support for this process.
- Palace offers a starting point for meeting the digital services needs of academic library users.** Project LEND researched academic library users' digital services needs and the types of technologies that can meet those needs. It concluded that Palace can currently meet a significant amount of users' ereading needs. It also showed that Palace's technology architecture will allow it to incorporate most of the other digital services users requested.
- Being part of the Academic Palace Working Group connects us with the many efforts to improve academic library digital services.** The Academic Palace Working Group connects us with work being done on digital standards like OPDS, ePub and LCP. It keeps us abreast of work on underlying technologies like Radium. It provides insights into publishers' thinking because members of the group are in direct and regular contact with publishers' staff working in this area. And, it offers an opportunity to participate in grant proposals that can further our work.

Challenges Faced:

- Publishers have been slow to make their ebooks available in a format Palace can use.** The UC Davis Palace test involves only one major publisher. To allow Palace to live up to its potential, the Academic Palace Working Group needs to work with major publishers to make their ebooks available in a format that works for Palace.
- Matching Palace metadata and resources to existing records in our ILS has been a challenge.** This is primarily due to the different needs of academic libraries and an expected adjustment period. However, in collaboration with New York University, UCL is developing automated processes to streamline discovery system integration. Lyrisis is also making a concerted effort to offer improved metadata in multiple ways.
- Promoting Palace to campus users takes time and effort.** Developing promotional materials to introduce library users to Palace takes time and effort. However, the burden is considerably lessened because Lyrisis provides support for this work and libraries in the Academic Palace Working Group offer practical examples of successful promotional campaigns.

» CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusion:

- The barriers for campuses to try Palace are low.** Because Palace is a Software as a Service application, all technical setup for the app is done by Lyrisis. If the test installation is done solely using open-access content, that is all the technical work that has to be done. If the test includes licensed content, Lyrisis has staff who can work with campus IT to integrate campus single sign-in to Palace. Because the cost of this installation work and of running the system for a year is low, even smaller campus libraries are likely to find it fits their budget.

- **Palace has a strong support network.** Lyrasis paid staff respond quickly to support requests and provide solutions that reflect an understanding of the broader library ecosystem that Palace inhabits. The Academic Palace Working Group members are generous in offering their experience and expertise in Palace to campuses testing the system.
- **The Academic Palace Working Group provides an essential community of practice for implementing a better ereading experience and for influencing the ebook landscape.** The Project LEND study indicates that academic libraries have much to do to provide users with an optimal ereading experience. The Academic Palace Working Group provides an avenue for collaboration with other academic libraries and publishers to deliver an optimal experience.

Next Steps:

- **Work with the Academic Palace Working Group to create an improved academic library ereading experience.** UCL continues to participate in the Academic Palace Working Group as they work to improve the Palace app, to gain more licensed content for Palace users, and to improve the overall ereading landscape.
- **User Experience and Accessibility Testing.** UCL is getting ready to conduct further user experience and accessibility testing of its prototype system with faculty, students and librarians.
- **Creating an Academic Palace Cookbook.** The University of California, Davis is developing a cookbook that other academic libraries can use to make Palace available to their users. This will help other UCL campuses that want to try Palace.
- **Automating Metadata Upload.** UCL, NYU and Lyrasis are working on automating the ingest of Palace metadata to ILSes.