# The New Kansas Library Card: Remote Access to Electronic Resources

by Eric Hansen

Small and rural libraries face a continuous struggle to meet users' needs for information with limited library materials budgets. New means of document delivery must be pursued and made possible. The new Kansas Library Card makes reviewed electronic sources of proprietary information available for remote access to residents of Kansas. The card is therefore a partial solution to the problem of information delivery to small and rural library users.
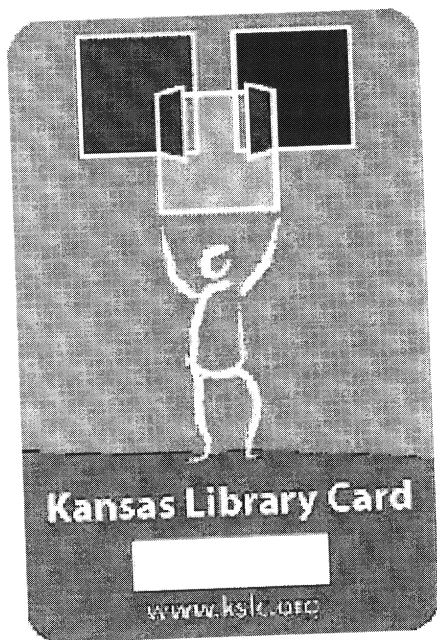
The Kansas Library Network Board (KLNB), a division of the Kansas State Library, was created by Kansas statute in 1981 to promote resource sharing among libraries of all types in Kansas. It includes representatives of each of seven types of libraries, one representative each from the Kansas Board of Regents and the Kansas State Department of Education, and the State Librarian. The KLNB had authorized a Kansas Library Card as long ago as 1985. The purpose of this original library card was to identify the cardholder as a borrower in good standing at their local library, one that would be a good risk for statewide interlibrary lending. Because library participation in that statewide library card program was voluntary, there was no guarantee that any given library would honor a cardholder's ILL request. Furthermore, local libraries that did participate could require the cardholder to first obtain a local borrower's card before ILL would commence. And local libraries could levy fees for honoring the statewide card. Partly for these reasons, the original Kansas Library Card had fallen into disuse.

In reflecting on the means to revive the card, it occurred to me that a basic problem with the original program was that it was entirely tied to physical library materials, when expedited delivery of information in electronic form might make it more relevant to library users' needs today and in the future. A more viable concept for the card might be as a means of user authentication for remote access to online databases furnished for the state by the Kansas State Library. While attending a "Web-wise" conference hosted by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in Washington, D.C. in March 2000, I spoke with Sue Medina of Alabama, who apprised me of the home access card for database use that was part of the Alabama Virtual Library (AVL). Realizing that this home access card could very well serve as a model for the remote access card I had envisioned for Kansas, I asked her to share information about the inner workings of the program with me.

She, Josie Morgan, and Dr. Lamar Veatch were all more than forthcoming in response to my repeated requests for information about the AVL home access card in the months that followed. By November 2000, the Network Board had given approval for a pilot project to test the utility and user appeal of the new Kansas Library Card concept. The result was a test project that involved the Network Board as administrative body; the division of Library Information Technology at the Kansas State Library for technical advice and vendor negotiations; members of the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC) Internet Development team for patron authentication database creation, Web site design and hosting, and card and bookmark design; SIRS Mandarin, Inc. for provision of Discoverer Deluxe for remote access by means of the new card; and the Southwest Kansas Library System for distribution and promotion of the new card. The official beginning of the pilot can be dated from a training session I conducted in the administrative functions of login and card issuance for school and public librarians in Dodge City, Kansas, on January 19, 2001.

The project was set up to be as simple to operate as possible. Any resident of the state of Kansas can apply for a Kansas Library Card by appearing in person at their nearest participating library or school media center. Library or school media center staff points a Web browser to the Kansas Library Card homepage at www.kslc.org and clicks on the link called "Administrative Access for Librarians." The administrative screen that follows calls for keying in the institution's login and password, which have been generated for all libraries and public schools in the state by the University of Kansas Medical Center staff mentioned above. Once logged in, the library or school staff validates the applicant's residency (that which constitutes proof of Kansas residency is left to the discretion of the local library or school media center), keys in the patron's full name with middle initial and date of birth, then click on the "Submit" button. The next screen tells that a new account has been created with a specific personal identification number (PIN). The staff person

writes or types this PIN in the box provided for it on the front of a Kansas Library Card, writes or types the day's date on the back of the card in the box provided, and gives it to the patron for their signature in the box for it on the back of the card.

The patron is now registered and can use the Kansas Library Card from any computer anywhere with Internet access and either Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator to access information. Either Web browser must be version 4.0 or better and must be set to accept cookies. The cardholder simply points their browser to the KSLC homepage at www.kslc.org, keys in their PIN and date of birth, and clicks on the "Login" button (figure 1). The next screen they see contains hotlinks to online databases (figure 2). When clicked, each link opens in a new browser window, so that the original screen full of links remains present in the background. When the user is finished with their Kansas Library Card session, they need only point their browser somewhere else; no logoff is necessary.
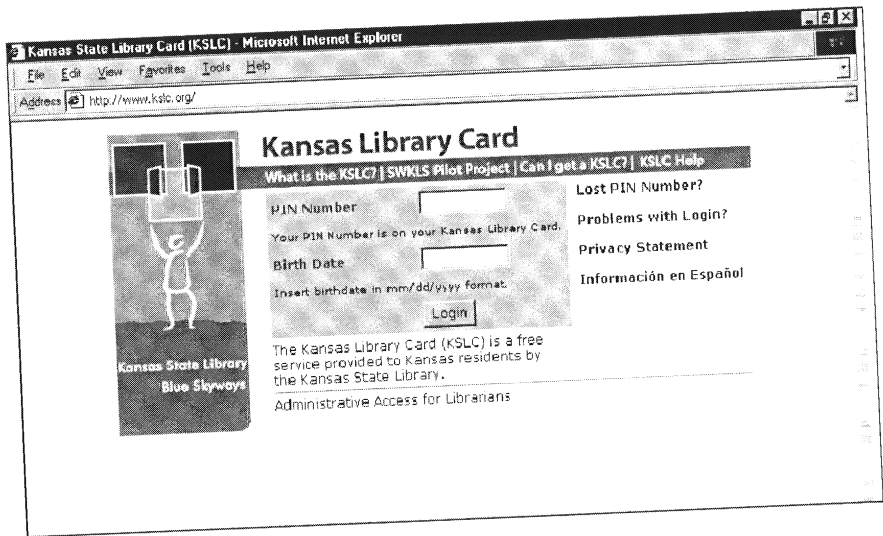

Figure 1. Kansas Library Card login screen.

Upon the eighth time the user logs in to the Kansas Library Card, a new browser window pops up with a brief online survey. Survey results are collected and assessed for future modifications of the program. The card will expire in one year from the date of issuance. At that time, the cardholder must reappear in person at their nearest participating library or school media center to renew their account. This requirement ensures that library or school staff has a means to revalidate the patron's Kansas address. It also gives the staff at least one chance every year to make that Kansas Library Card holder a walk-in library patron.

A policy of "one patron one card" is adhered to in order to make usage statistics meaningful, and to be compliant with vendors' contracts, which generally prohibit universal access to their products. No family, corporate, or classroom cards are issued. Technically, no simultaneous logins are possible with a single Kansas Library Card account; each successive user login results in the prior login being disconnected.
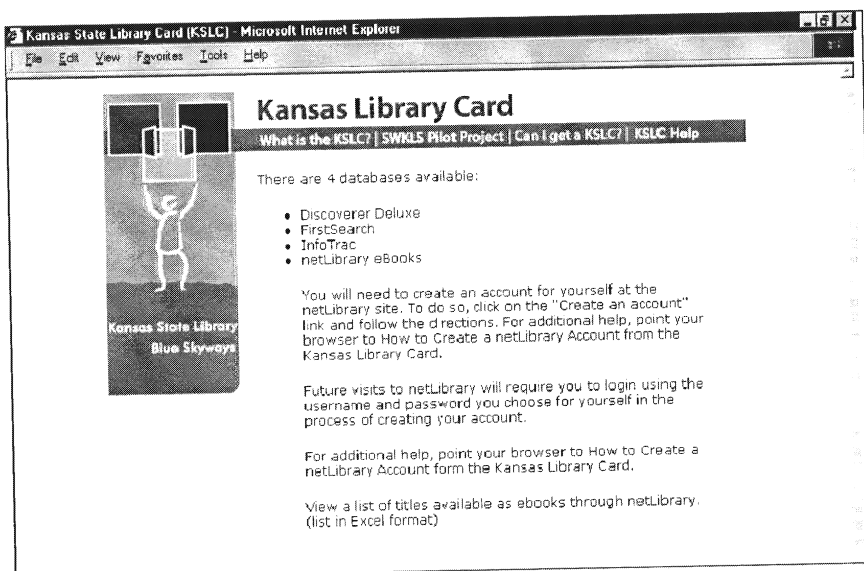

Figure 2. Kansas Library Card databases available page.

Anecdotal feedback from the pilot project was so good that the Network Board approved statewide rollout of the Kansas Library Card at its quarterly meeting in May 2001. The seven Regional Library Systems in Kansas agreed to manage the distribution of the cards and promotional bookmarks, and to include the card in their training exercises and promotional efforts (for the location of and information about the seven regional library systems in Kansas, see www.skyways.org/regions.html).

Continuing attention to existing Kansas State Library contracts with GaleGroup and OCLC eventually led to the addition of InfoTrac and FirstSearch databases, respectively, to SIRS Discoverer Deluxe for remote access by Kansas Library Card users. Another sort of resource was added as a direct result of the creation of a Kansas Virtual Collection Consortium for the purchase of access to netLibrary ebooks. The consortium consists of the Kansas Regents schools, Washburn University, the Kansas Library Network Board, and the Kansas State Department of Education. In Summer 2001, this consortium approached BCR for the purchase of its collection of about 4,400 netLibrary ebooks (this collection is now closed to new subscriptions). The Network Board's access to these titles is by way of the Kansas Library Card. Other members in the consortium have or are in the process of loading MARC records for these ebooks to their OPACs, but the Network Board, not being a library as such, has not done so as of this writing.

To access the KLNB netLibrary eBook collection, Kansas Library Card users must login to their accounts on the Kansas Library Card Web site, and then point their browsers to the link to netLibrary. Once connected to the KLNB eBook Collection for the first time, they must then create an account for themselves with netLibrary. On subsequent visits, they need only login with the username and password they have created for themselves to search, browse, read online or download and read offline the ebooks available.

Statistics gathered since February 2001 by the KUMC Internet Team about Kansas Library Card usage indicate a steady increase in interest in and use of the card. At the end of the first quarter of the pilot project in southwestern Kansas (March 29, 2001), there were 800 total accounts, with 156 accounts logged on more than once, 34 logged on five or more times, and six logged in 10 or more times. By June 27, 2001, the number of total accounts had increased to 1188, with 306 logged on more than once, 86 logged on five or more times, and 20 logged on 10 or more times. The most recent report (September 24, 2001) showed 3,327 account holders, with 3,735 logons, 685 logged on more than once, 193 logged on five or more times, and 51 logged on 10 or more times. At this writing, statewide rollout of the program is well underway and registration and use are expected to continue to increase.

The Kansas Library Card has not been without complaints. The major philosophical disagreement with the program is grounded in the notion that promotion of the card to library users will cause them to abandon attendance at the library in favor of remote access to databases by means of the card. Because registration for the card requires a trip to the library itself, the library is assured of at least one visit per year by the user, even by individuals interested in the card that might not otherwise ever set foot in the library. It is incumbent on the library to use this opportunity to promote its own resources and services to the applicant. And it should be remembered that not all information is available in the whole world of online resources, including those available with the Kansas Library Card. Local news, history and cultural documents are just some of the resources the library might have that are available nowhere else. And the library often serves as a community-meeting place, something no online resource can replace.

Some could interpret the fact that access to a computer with Internet access is required for use of the Kansas Library Card as onerous. Due to the expense involved, not every home will have access. Yet, the card is set up so that users can login from any computer anywhere with Internet access. For those without home access to the Internet, the nearest library with a public access Internet machine might be one more reason for the cardholder to continue to visit the local library. It is the fact that the databases are computer-accessible that adds the value of round-the-clock availability to the information.

In the near term, the future for the Kansas Library Card will include increased functionality in the library administrative module. At present, entering their last name and date of birth can search a patron's account. The addition of a "Renew" button for patron accounts and a means to delete incorrect or expired accounts will all be added by the end of the year. Training for librarians and school media specialists in the issuance and use of the card is now underway and will continue in workshops into November. Finally, the Kansas Virtual Collection Consortium is exploring collection development with netLibrary to produce titles specific to the needs of Kansas residents for later addition to the collection now available with the Kansas Library Card.

Though not a panacea for the collection development challenges that face rural and small libraries, the Kansas Library Card is one way a state with a significant rural population like Kansas can begin to breach the divide between patrons' information needs and limited library resources. As a means of extending services to all residents of the state; at any time from anywhere, it represents an advance in service that is worthy of consideration by libraries in other states.