

**Kudos for ISI<sup>®</sup>'s ASCA<sup>®</sup>  
Service from Abroad!**

September 30, 1970

The Office of Scientific and Technical Information of the U.K. Department of Education and Science has sponsored a number of studies designed to evaluate various kinds of information services. It is particularly pleasant to be able to quote from recently published reports that include evaluation of ISI's *Automatic Subject Citation Alert (ASCA)* service at the University of Sheffield.

Two important parameters used in a study<sup>1</sup> reported by Barkla at Sheffield were 'sole-sighting' and 'first-citing' of articles relevant to a special research topic. ASCA is reported to have alerted the researchers to 80% of all papers in the field within a few weeks of publication. Of particular interest to me, however, is the fact that ASCA was found to be far more efficient, and cheaper, in 'sole-sighting' and 'first-citing' of papers of interest than other methods of selective dissemination of information. Only one technique of information retrieval excelled ASCA, an impractical method for which few scientists will find the time: perusal of every article in every issue of every journal in the data base.

Barkla found that much of ASCA's efficiency as a retrieval tool stems from its unique use of "citation" or "cited-reference" questions, which he calls a very "cheap" method for retrieval of

important information. Of the articles retrieved by use of citations as search criteria in his study, 12.5% were not identified by any other method of search.

Readers of *Current Contents*<sup>®</sup> may recall my suggestion<sup>2</sup> that browsing through *Current Contents* should be supplemented by ASCA for early identification of papers which, by title alone, may not reveal an important methodological or theoretical connection between two or more otherwise seemingly unrelated papers.

Any reader can himself verify how well he might have fared using ASCA over a given period of time simply by examining the *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> in a library, or by requesting an *ISI Search*. List references that would be "citation" questions in an ASCA profile. The *SCI*<sup>®</sup> will tell you, as ASCA would have done on a current weekly basis, what subsequently published papers cited your references. These will surely include many you have encountered in scanning *Current Contents*; but there will usually be a number of papers that eluded you in scanning *Current Contents*, and, as Barkla has shown, that would have eluded any other method of retrieval you might have employed.

1. Barkla, J.K. The University of Sheffield Biomedical Information Project. *Information Scientist* 3(1): 13-27 (1969).
2. Garfield, E. ASCA, insurance for CC<sup>®</sup> readers. *Current Contents/Physical Sciences* 8(52): 4 (1968).