

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 25, 2024.

Virtual Library: Chemical Abstracts Service

The American Chemical Society (ACS) is one of the premier professional societies of its kind in the world, with a global membership of more than 150,000 chemists, other scientists and engineers, technicians, educators, and students. “As a non-profit scientific organization with more than 140 years’ experience, we are a champion for chemistry, its practitioners and our global community of members” (<https://www.acs.org/about.htm>).

Chartered to “have, hold, and administer all the property, funds, and affairs of the Society,” the ACS Board of Directors of 16 individuals is composed of: (1) six District Directors elected by regional membership; (2) six at-Large elected by Councilors; (3) President, President-elect and immediate Past President, all chosen by the full membership; and (4) Executive Director. The ACS is headquartered in Washington, DC with a large staff in Columbus, Ohio as well.

Among its many services and resources, the ACS includes a Library, an on-line Library accessible to ACS members as Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS). “The Chemical Abstracts Service, a division of the American Chemical Society, has provided the most comprehensive repository of research in chemistry and related sciences for over 100 years.” It commemorated its 100th year in 2007.

In that centennial year CAS databases already “contained more than 27 million records of journal and patent literature, more than 170 million citations and more than 30 million substance records in the CAS Registry.” This is no small Library, and no small operation.

The ACS portfolio includes more than 75 peer-reviewed journals and conducting a National Meeting & Exposition twice annually, in both the spring and fall, each attended by 11,000 – 16,000 professionals typically. The live meeting site is different each time. For spring 2024 the site is New Orleans. This past fall it was San Francisco. Next fall it will be Denver. These are opportunities for live interactions among members, chances to exchange ideas and present ongoing research. But the conferences are also live/virtual hybrid since COVID, with all the advantages that brings without travel. The Library collection, however, is maintained purposefully as a virtual collection, having no roots in COVID, but meant for 24/7 global accessibility. It was ahead of its time when begun in the early 1980s; the WLN, for example, came to on-line service countywide only in late 2007.

How does the on-line service work? Well, each subscribing member has an ACS membership card and number, which is the access vehicle. But ACS membership is not free; it is standard or premium, and each comes with different cost and access rights, The premium package, for example, includes the right to 50 free article downloads per year from ACS journals and books and 25 free search activities with CAS SciFinder, a powerful tool for finding a wealth of material specific to a particular scientific area of interest or question. When I was actively working in R&D, before retirement, SciFinder was my go-to of choice on a frequent basis. In retirement, if no longer dependent on such searches on any regular basis, the standard package, which excludes SciFinder, is the more likely choice for membership category.

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 25, 2024.

I sometimes find that people think of virtual as only a secondary option brought on by COVID, to be left behind as the COVID threat subsides. The deep-rooted and purposeful Library example set by the ACS serves, I hope, to affirm that virtual really has its place, and it, not just the traditional live meeting or paper copy, is the future's way too.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation