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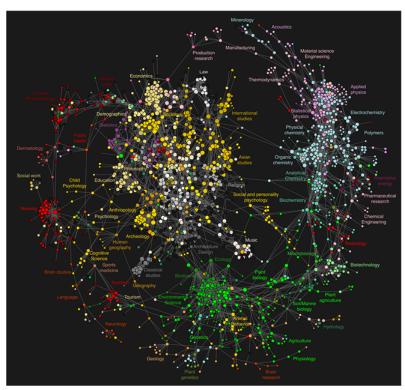




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Map of Science Looks Like Milky Way

By Brandon Keim March 11, 2009 | 5:08:23 PM Categories: Science, Science Tools, Web/Tech



The pursuit of human knowledge has a shape.

By crunching data from more than a billion user interactions on scholarly databases, Los Alamos National Laboratory researchers produced a high-resolution map of the relationships between different fields of science.

They're not the first to map science, though they insist that their map is best. Other topographers of knowledge, they say, aren't up to date on what modern scholars search for, and rely too much on natural science databases.

(Maybe that's why the Los Alamos map, published in *Public Library of Science ONE*, looks a bit like the Milky Way, while this lovely scientific paradigm map—a favorite of *Nature* and *Seed* magazine—looks like an amoeba.)

The Los Alamos team analyzed click streams from 23 databases — Thomson Scientific, Elsevier, Jstor, Ingenta and multiple campuses of the University of Texas and California State University — and mapped patterns of interest and cross-journal citations. (For anyone concerned about anonymity, no worries: queries weren't user-identifiable. Your search for "Termination of Intractable Hiccups with Digital Rectal Massage" is still a secret.)

 $Map makers \ say \ that \ visualizations \ of \ knowledge \ help$













EDITOR: Betsy Mason | email

STAFF WRITER: Alexis Madrigal | email | Twitter
CONTRIBUTOR: Brandon Keim | email | Twitter
CONTRIBUTOR: Aaron Rowe
CONTRIBUTOR: Michael Wall
CONTRIBUTOR: Adam Rogers



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researchers frame discipline-hopping questions and

 $identify\ neglected\ cooperative\ opportunities.\ I'm\ not\ entirely\ convinced-though\ the\ gap\ between\ organic$ chemistry and plant genetics is pretty surprising — but then again, one person's frivolous distraction is another's breakthrough-in-waiting.

And that's what science is all about.

Citation: Clickstream Data Yields High-Resolution Maps of Science. By Johan Bollen, Herbert Van de Sompel, Aric Hagberg, Luis Bettencourt, Ryan Chute, Marko A. Rodriguez, Lyudmila Balakireva. Public Library of Science ONE, March 11, 2009.

Note: Anyone interested in maps of science should visit Maps of Science.

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Image: 1. PLoS ONE 2. Nature

Brandon Keim's Twitter stream and Del.icio.us feed; Wired Science on Facebook.



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