*Editors' note:* This month's column is devoted to Internet site portal sites.

**Academic Info.** *Access:* http://www.academicinfo.net/.

On its homepage, Academic Info is described as "a subject directory of Internet resources tailored to a college and university audience." That is essentially what it is. The intended audience is undergraduate or advanced high school-level students.

The site is divided into the following sections: The Subject Index, The Search Page, The Reference Desk, The Student Center, and Comments & Suggestions. The Subject Index is alphabetical by broad topic. Under each broad topic, types of resources are listed. When a type of resource is chosen, the viewer can then make selections by subjects or titles, which are arranged alphabetically. The viewer begins with a broad topic and narrows the search until the information needed is found. On The Search Page, the viewer can type in keywords to perform a Boolean search (which is explained on that page). A list of documents or sites is the result of the search. An explicit search will not take the viewer to particular sites, only to general sites that are likely to pertain to the topic of the search. The viewer should not expect this to work as an article search.

The Reference Desk is divided into two parts: Gateways, which includes links to guides, gateways, search engines, directories, encyclopedias, and almanacs, and Pathfinders, which includes links to language, world, United States, health, medicine, space, publishing, news, people, weather, and money sites. The Student Center lists sites pertaining to information about colleges and universities. The viewer can link to sites on admissions, financial aid, college life, graduate school, travel, etc.

Mike Madin, who is a library specialist at Gallagher Law Library at the University of Washington, maintains the site. He previously maintained Comparative Religion: A Directory of Internet Resources for the Academic Study of Religion. Earlier this year, Comparative Religion was incorporated into Academic Info, which is a new site. Viewers can suggest sites to be incorporated into Academic Info, but Madin only accepts about 20% of suggested sites. By using a strict collection development policy, he can maintain the high quality of the site. A few of the sites viewed required subscription and passwords, but nearly all of the sites were readily accessible. Such information as the weather in Chicago, videos of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, history of the Hollywood sign, and who won Pulitzer prizes in 1953, was unearthed during an examination of this site.

Academic Info is a very good, general index to academic related Web sites. High school and university students should be made aware of its existence and take full advantage of its resources.—*Mary Wise, Central Washington University Library, wisem@tahoma.cwu.edu*

**Snap.** *Access:* http://www.snap.com.

Snap is a new portal service developed by NBC and CNET. As a gateway or portal, the site gathers information from various sources on the Internet, including Deja News, MSNBC, CNN, and the Discovery Channel online. Due to the brand name recognition of its developers and content providers, Snap has quickly become popular.

Snap offers the usual features of portals including a directory of Web sites, a search facility powered by Inktomi, news and current events (one of the sites strengths) with headlines drawn from a variety of reputable sources such as MSNBC (with interesting features such as links to the "Web's Best" and polls on the topic), and message boards (jointly developed with Deja News). Special features include the ability to customize using "My Snap" to select news feeds, bookmarks and topic areas, and the ability to view regional information such as

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weather and news on one page using the "Local" feature that is customized using zip codes.

The overall structure of the site is excellent; is it easy to navigate to different sections, and you always know where you are (and how to get back). Importantly, when you select a Web site from its listings, you actually go to the site itself and not another browser window within the Snap site. The organization of the site is clear and logical. Despite the amount of information available, the site's pages do not appear cluttered and design elements are maximized to be visually attractive and meaningful. The ubiquitous advertisements of commercial sites, while not exactly low key, are not visually abrasive.

The site has a range of content from popular to undergraduate levels of research (with the exception of news feeds, which are of interest to all levels in research and academic libraries). I searched under art history and did not find several sites or categories I expected to be included. While some content areas of the site have excellent coverage (such as "Computing and Internet,") others seem uneven (such as "Art History").

Suggestions for improvements might include: a full disclosure of the site's content providers, preferably available in one location (it is hard to ascertain the origin of much of the data/services); information on selection policies for Web sites included in the directory (what are the selection criteria?); information about how frequently the site is updated (which is also dependent upon the content providers' policies); more reliable checking of links (a dead link is included to "Roadmap 96" in the Computing and Internet section); inclusion of relevancy rankings; and a more intelligent or intuitive search for Web pages. Overall, the site needs work to become useful to serious researchers, but is currently recommended for undergraduates and research in news and current events areas.—*Angela Elkordy, The Sage College Libraries, elkora@sage.edu*

**Encyclopedia Britannica's Eblast: A guide to the Web's top sites,** chosen by Britannica's editors. *Access:* http://www.eblast.com/ or http:/www.ebig.com/.

Eblast cuts down on the frustration of Internet overload by narrowing choices to selected sites. Formerly known as Encyclopedia Britannica Internet Guide, this recently redesigned hierarchical index to the Web is unclut-

tered and easy to use. Britannica editors choose, annotate, and rate each site, as well as provide

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lots of other information at a glance to help you decide if a link is worth the visit. It is a great site for students looking for quality research.

Annotations generally include the title, author or responsible party, a star rating, and a concise description for the site. In addition, Site Statistics features useful details such as site registration, number of visits, speed, and related topic links. The site's place in the Britannica subject hierarchy completes the annotation, providing links for further exploration.

Searching can be as simple or complex as you wish. Search by keyword or phrase via a clearly marked search engine. More focused search options are a click away. In addition, you can choose from categorical subject listings until you find what you want. Various levels allow you to pick and choose along the way. Site of the day, site of the week, and related archives provide links to staff favorites.

The downside of any selective list is that there may not be enough links for your purposes. In fact, it appears that some topic areas are better developed than others. For instance, History/United States/Civil War provides superb sites that may be hard to find through Alta Vista or Yahoo. While Environmental Science, under Science Technology and Math, is lackluster by comparison. Although Eblast provides a spot to hook into an Alta Vista search, it will not (as does Yahoo) do this automatically when your keywords fail.

In addition, you have to put up with advertising, which is comparatively unobtrusive, but still annoying. The site can also run slowly on older technology.

Still, Eblast is a good place to start for finding information on any topic because it is easy to use and the sites you find are generally worth the visit. The statement of authority alone, included in each entry, will save students and scholars hours of online guesswork in the quest for research-worthy sites.—*Barbara Valentine, Linfield College, bvalen@linfield.edu* ■