

International Information Programs.

Access: <http://usinfo.state.gov>.

The U.S. State Department's International Information Programs (IIP) site offers an intriguing gateway to current issues and events in the fields of foreign affairs, diplomacy, and national security. Undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, policy specialists, and researchers can review timely briefings on global affairs that carry the authority of an official U.S. government site.

Created in 1999, the Office of International Information Programs is described as the "principal international strategic communications service for the foreign affairs community," and the site offers a variety of useful resources ranging from transcripts and interviews to backgrounders and document links.

**INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS**

IIP's site has a clearly organized and user-friendly layout that features six main category headings. Students pursuing research topics will most likely be drawn to the categories "U.S. Policy" and "Issues in Focus," which offer a wealth of resources.

For example, the "Global Issues" subheading includes topics such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, and refugees. Each provides links to the full text of many State Department documents and other resources such as background statements, reports, congressional resolutions, and international organizations.

The six geographic areas in the "Regions" category offer the user a similarly impressive display of resources. The "Near East" section offers an extensive guide to "Middle East Peace," transcripts of Secretary of State Colin Powell's Middle East press conferences, a fact-finding report, and a Middle East Peace Process chronology. These clusters of resources, arranged by popular headings, are one of the site's main strengths, since they pull together background information as well as primary source material needed by academic library users.

Users should note this site offers full-text publications in several languages. Five full-text journals are available, highlighting policy issues such as economics, democracy, and global affairs; current editions and archives are provided. Faculty and students who follow specialized international topics may also benefit from e-mail delivery of transcripts, speeches, and briefings offered for several subject areas. There is also a section providing excerpts of foreign media reaction to U.S. events. Academic librarians will also appreciate the up-to-date "Public Diplomacy Calendar," which provides a timely list of upcoming worldwide conferences, summits, meetings, and official visits.

This site offers ease of use, currency, and a variety of full-text resources that will be appreciated by those involved in the foreign affairs field. Commercial databases, such as CIAO and PAIS, obviously lead the way as standard tools for international topics, but academic librarians with strong foreign affairs collections will find that IIP's site offers timely and well-organized documentary material.—*Barbara Hillson, George Mason University, bhillson@gmu.edu*



Nupedia: the Free Encyclopedia. Access: <http://www.nupedia.com>.

Software produced under the GNU General Documentation License is called "open source," meaning that the source code behind it is freely available and modifiable provided that the user references the original producer in the derivative code. The GNU open source concept has come to Web publishing in Nupedia.

Nupedia aims to become "the world's largest international, peer-reviewed encyclope-

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dia." At the moment, however, the main page is dominated by a plea for participants.

Nupedia's editorial process is open; becoming a member (through free online registration) allows one to see articles in one of seven stages of development. When articles reach the sixth stage of "open copyediting," the general public is free to comment on them, and until that point a peer-review process is in place. Nupedia editors usually possess a Ph.D., but the author's or peer reviewers' primary qualification is an interest in the subject.

Nupedia's search mechanism is rudimentary. At present, only keyword searching is available; a searcher cannot use Boolean operators and must search for one word at a time. Links to subject and alphabetical lists lead to a sample page and a list of 20 "newest articles." Because articles appear in short and long versions, search results are misleading. At the time of this review, a search on "music" retrieved five articles but only three unique subjects. Keywords are not highlighted in search results.

It was difficult for the reviewers to determine the number of articles currently available in Nupedia; it appears as though the 20 newest articles are in fact the total content. In the members-only "Article Production Area," 332 articles are in preparation. However, only officially approved articles are searchable.

Nupedia's completed articles contain elements that other online encyclopedias would be wise to imitate, such as mouse-over pronunciation guides and pop-up box links to footnotes within articles. Also, biographical information is readily available for an article's author and for members of the subject group who approved the article.

The project editor, Larry Sanger, believes that Nupedia will someday rival Britannica Online, but Britannica subscribers should not view the current version of Nupedia as an alternative. Instead of considering Nupedia as an extensive resource at this time, academic librarians should view it as a new method of disseminating information. Additionally, librarians and faculty may want to consider participating in this unique venture.—Heidi Senior, *senior@up.edu*, and Carolyn Piatz, *piatz@up.edu*, University of Portland

ORB: The Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies. Access: <http://orb.rhodes.edu>.

ORB is a medieval site created and maintained by medieval scholars and intended for use by instructors and students. The publisher and founder of ORB is Lynn Harry Nelson, professor of History at the University of Kansas. The rest of the editorial board includes 25 highly qualified scholars and academicians in the areas of medieval history, philosophy, religion, music, architecture, and language and literature. Articles are subject to review by at least two peer reviewers.

The major sections of the site are "Encyclopedia," "Textbook Library" (which includes the full text of about a dozen books), "Reference Shelf," "Resources for Teaching," "Of General Interest," and "External Links."

The ORB Encyclopedia is indexed by a timeline followed by a topical index. The user clicks on the topics to view the articles. The articles are written in a clear, easy-to-understand style, and are very informative. The extent of the information varies depending on the topic and the author.

The language and tone of the full-text books and encyclopedia articles range from straightforward to highly technical. Access to full-text sources, including primary sources, is usually available. There are also links to other medieval studies sites.

Under "Writing a Research Paper," the authors of the site offer suggestions on how to get the most out of the ORB site. If all fails, the user is instructed on the protocol to contact a contributor or editor for additional information.

Some of the texts and articles have no link back to ORB, and the user must use the back button repeatedly until a link to ORB appears, which is a little frustrating. Also, the "Reference Shelf" contains a number of inactive links.

Overall, the site is an excellent source of information about the medieval period of history and is easy to use. The vast amount of information is valuable for anyone doing research, and, for additional information, the links to other sites are very useful. This site is highly recommended for a wide range of users, from those with a casual interest in the field to serious medieval scholars.—Mary Wise, *Central Washington University Library*, wisem@cwu.edu ■

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