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LIS 652 Encyclopedia Assignment  
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For this assignment I compared:

World Book. Chicago: World Book, Inc. a Scott Fetzer Company, 2007.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Micropaedia. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2005.

The Encyclopedia Americana. Danbury: Scholastic Library Publishing, Inc., 2004.

#### 1. Compared Research Topic: Unicorns

##### World Book:

Describes unicorns and their history appropriately. It uses the phrases “legendary” which lends itself to the belief and disbelief of unicorns. Carl Lindahl wrote the entry, which it states at the bottom. It also uses a detail of a tapestry from 1490 – 1500 from the Musee de Cluny, Paris that shows an image of a unicorn as being a cross between a goat with long horns and a horse. This overall is not very precise in the entry; “About 2400 years ago...” is how the entry starts off after the initial description. *The World Book* links a Greek physician named Ctesias to the first written description of such an animal. It also contains big jumps in history and does not provide many details in to the history of the animal’s constructive origins. At the end of the entry it states that “Today, the unicorn remains a popular character in fantasy literature.” This is to me is not enough in modern coverage of the unicorn.

##### Online:

To access the World Book online database you have to be a subscriber, I could not find a way to access this database so I am unable to test the accuracy of this reference source. You can find the access point for this at: <http://www.worldbook.com/>.

##### The New Encyclopaedia Britannica:

The first item I noticed in *Britannica* was that it displays the same tapestry as world book but a close up on the unicorn and describes the tapestry slightly differently: “Unicorn, detail from “The Lady and the Unicorn” tapestry, late 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Musee de Cluny, Paris. *World Book* did not provide a title for the tapestry and the dates are similar but not quite the same. *Britannica* also provides an exact date for Ctesias (400 BC) instead of World Book’s “About 2400 years ago...” which is still accurate but does not give the air of accuracy. This also provides more information about the history of the unicorn and more detail throughout. It does not mention current day at all and actually ends the entry in the Middle Ages: “cups reputedly made of unicorn horn but actually made of rhinoceros horn or narwhal tusk were highly valued by important persons in the Middle Ages as a protection against poisoned drinks” and continues to describe the hunt for unicorn horn during this time.

##### Online:

The unicorn article is a *Britannica Online Premium* topic and was not able to access it without login information although it is a free database and I could active a free trial. The free trial seems to be a bit of a way for them to get information from you so they can sell the print version to you. Closing the box a number of times allows the user to still see the entry for a good span of time, and during this time I found the entry here exactly the same that was listed in the print Micropaedia.

The Encyclopedia Americana:

Provides the longest entry for unicorn, also provides a different tapestry featuring a unicorn, that does not resemble a goat but a white horse with a single horn. The previous encyclopedia's unicorn tapestries had a goat-horse figure with two very long horns. This tapestry has a lengthy description next to it, because there is an entire section in the encyclopedia dedicated to the unicorn tapestries that are housed at the Cloisters in upper Manhattan branch of the Metropolitan Museum. The tapestry shown is from this collection and is described as a gift of John D. Rockefeller; otherwise no information is presented about the date of the tapestry or the heritage of the creator. This entry cites Ctesias as well as the first to describe a unicorn and also mentions that Aristotle, Pliny and Aelian also described unicorns in their writings. No mention of the unicorn cup. This also ends the entry in the Middle Ages and does not bring the usage of the unicorn to modern date. It ends with stating that the horn was a fabled ingredient for potions and used for "alchemical reactions." Overall, its entry is pretty similar to *Britannica* and does feel as if it is well researched and is a good source for information on this subject. No mention of an author on this, although they do list authors for a good number of their entries.

Online:

The *Encyclopedia Americana* has a method for searching I believe at this address: [http://auth.grolier.com/login/go\\_login\\_page.html?bffs=N](http://auth.grolier.com/login/go_login_page.html?bffs=N) however I do not have access to this so I was not able to judge the validity of this source. It is entitled Grolier Online by Scholastic Inc., which is the most recent publisher to take on the *Encyclopedia Americana*.

## 2. Home City, State: Belleville, Illinois

World Book:

Does not have a direct entry in B for my city, which is not surprising, but thought I should check just to be sure before delving into Illinois.

For the state of Illinois it has a large amount of information about the state including: interesting facts, land and climate, symbols of the state, population, map of the state, list of colleges and universities, places to visit, annual events, land regions, terrain map of the state, economy information, government information, and extensive section on the history of the state.

In all of this information I tried to find instances of my home city to see if the information was accurate and actually my hometown although very large in size was not mentioned in their information. It seemed as if the entry mainly focused in on Chicago and the capitol of Springfield. Overall the information seems to be valid, the pictures seem to be out-dated overall in the entry. The information provided in the graphs and tables at latest is from 2002, so that could use some updating as well. Interestingly, the end of the entry closes with the recent scandal involving the governor, George Ryan, which is pretty poorly written, beginning the early 2000's section with Governor Ryan placing a halt on the death penalty and not using much transition to his conviction of racketeering in 2006. Theodore J. Karamanski and William D. Walters, Jr wrote the entry for Illinois.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica:

Does contain an entry for Belleville, Illinois in the B section. This information is brief and fairly accurate. One misstep is that in 2000 the local community college was renamed from "Belleville Area College" to "Southwestern Illinois College", and the encyclopedia does not recognize this change. The information is also overall out of date giving the general economic and population information from the 1991 census data.

Online:

The listing for my city had been updated more recently than the 1991 census and does contain the proper name for the Southwestern Illinois College.

For Illinois the *Britannica* is extremely brief by comparison to the *World Book*. The listing takes perhaps two and a half columns in the book and does contain a good level of information in that covering a wide range of topics from the history to the climate and ending with cultural activities and population from the 2002 estimate. Does not provide any writer information for either of the entries. Overall, the information does seem to be more exact and precise than the *World Book*, but there are clear reasons to choose the *World Book* over the *Britannica* depending on the information you are seeking. The *World Book* contains greater coverage of all points of the state and *Britannica* provides small snippets of information on which you could research further from.

Online:

The entry for Illinois is very up-to-date, extensive, and accurate. Very high quality entry for the state. Also it is not a premium page on the site and was able to access this without having to constantly close the box to activate my free trial to see the article.

The Encyclopedia Americana:

Does contain an entry for my hometown, this has to be though the most out-dated and inaccurate information I have seen yet in any of these encyclopedias. In *Britannica* it stated that the college was Belleville Area College, this still has it down as a name of "Belleville Junior College" which was not used in Belleville during my lifetime. It is also off in its basic information "It is situated 14 miles southeast of East St. Louis" maybe this was correct when this was written now it is 2 miles from East St. Louis. Also this makes the claim that the city had the nickname of "Dutch Town" which is not true, it was nicknamed "Beautiful town" hence the name, Belleville. It is overall extremely outdated in regards to my hometown; it also contains the same census data that *Britannica* provided from 1991.

For Illinois:

My immediate response to this is that it looks extremely outdated, the pictures and fonts are all from the 1960s and it does not really contain much modern information it focuses on the history of the state. The section titled "Modern Illinois" ends in the early 1970s. Overall very disappointing entries for both of these places, the Illinois section was written by Samuel K. Gove, of the University of Illinois and James D. Nowlan a Representative from the Illinois General Assembly.

### 3. Controversial or polarizing person: Salvador Allende Gossens

World Book:

Provides a good background on Salvador Allende, describes that he was the first Marxist to be elected to lead a nation in the Western Hemisphere and also that his was overthrown in 1973. It does not state whom the people or the leader of the people that overthrew Allende's government. The entry also does not state that he died by committing suicide the day that they came to overthrow his government. Perhaps because the World Book is more for children it does not go into details about this piece of his history. It does give a good background on him when he was born, where he studied, groups he was apart of, and his governmental positions. Overall, this entry seems to be toned down for the child researcher that may seek this information. But is not biased towards one side or the other in any obvious way. Lois Hecht Oppenheim wrote this entry of Salvador Allende.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica:

Begins the entry with his birth and death dates and the line "Chile's first Marxist president." From there it continues in a timeline history of his life where he was born, where he studied, similarly to the world book. The largest part of the entry is focused on his presidency and the overthrow of his government this focuses more on the changes that he made while he was in office and at the bottom does end with the details

of the overthrow and does state this “Allende shot himself during a concerted military attack on the presidential palace on that day. His suicide was not publicly acknowledged until 1990, when his body was exhumed from an unmarked grave and given a formal, public burial in Santiago.” This gives the entry the modernization that World Book entry was missing that I was hoping to find. Overall I feel that this entry was very fair and focused the majority of the information about Allende in the right place, on his presidency and not what came after or before.

Online:

States instead of “Chile’s first Marxist president” that he was “Chile’s first socialist president” and also provides a picture of him which the encyclopedia print version did not. Otherwise the entry is the same as the print version with the same passage at the bottom concerning his death.

The Encyclopedia Americana:

For Allende the entry initially gives his dates and then goes into the tag of “president of Chile and first freely elected Marxist chief of state in Latin America.” Which is not a poor description, slightly confusing maybe but not bad. As the entry continues it begins with his political career skipping early biographical information. This does mention his unsuccessful runs for the presidency and even includes one that the *Oxford Encyclopedia* below did not include 1952. This entry focuses actually mostly on the election itself to presidency and how there was no true winner but that the Congress had to decide and chose Allende and he pledge to “respect Chile’s democratic system.” Then the entry goes into the positive changes he implemented in Chile and ends with one sentence about the overthrow: “The government was overthrown by the military on Sept. 11, 1973, and Allende either committed suicide or was murdered during the coup.” This perhaps is the fairest treatment of all of the encyclopedias, mentioning the uncertainty of his death, but focusing on the positive changes that he established during his presidency and life in Chile.

4. Subject Encyclopedia: Oxford Encyclopedia of World History – Salvador Allende

Source:

Oxford Encyclopedia of World History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

This provides a different format for looking at Allende’s life it begins with stating he was a Chilean statesman from (1908 – 1973) and continues as a president of Chile from (1970 – 73). This also limits the Marxist tag a bit further, “he was the first avowed Marxist to win a Latin American presidency in a free election.” Also, the entry mentions he had two failed attempts at presidency in 1958 and 1964, leaving out the attempt to run in 1952. This also directly says the name Pinochet that Britannica and World Book did not enter into their entries under his name. This also states that Allende did not kill himself but rather, “died in the fighting, and was given a state funeral in 1990.” Overall to me this seems to be lacking in the accuracy and the details of the information provided, it does not provide any information on his actual presidency and what he accomplished it focuses mainly on his overthrow. To me this is the most inaccurate entry of all.

Online:

You can access this encyclopedia through their Oxford Reference Online, Pratt does not have access so I was not able to test the authority of this source.

5. Wikipedia

Unicorns

Wikipedia is the first to break down the etymology of the word. Also it does cite Ctesias as being the first to describe a unicorn in writing. It breaks down the entire entry for unicorn in a much more approachable manner: history with a subset of unicorns in

antiquity, medieval unicorns, hunt of the unicorn, and heraldry; origins with a subset of alleged evidence, unicorn seals of the Indus Valley Civilization, Elasmotherium or rhinoceros, single-horned goat, the narwhal, the oryx, the eland, and genetic disorders of horned animals; See Also; References; Sources; External links. This also has many more pictures than the encyclopedia, using multiple tapestries to show the original imagery of the unicorn. This entry does go past the Middle Ages which is excellent, it mentions that P.T. Barnum once exhibited what he said to be a “unicorn skeleton, but was exposed as a hoax.” There are a few other examples and a deeper discussion of a one horned animal and how that affects animals and how people are drawn to them. Overall very thorough and accurate. It has a source list of a book entitled, *Unicorn: Myth and Reality* by Rudiger Robert Beer, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *The Unicorn* by Lise Gotfredsen, and *The Lore of the Unicorn* by Odell Shepard. In the history tab for this entry it was edited as early as this morning (November 9, 2008) so it is frequently checked and maintained by the Wikipedia community.

#### Belleville, Illinois

Was very in depth, perhaps more modern than historic though. There is a benefit to the listings of the print encyclopedias in this instance. The Wikipedia listing for my hometown contains many facts and statistics from today, and only a very short three-sentence part about the history. There are no source notes on my page at the bottom of the page so the authorship for this information is a bit unknown, but it appears to be very accurate.

#### Illinois

The Wikipedia entry for the state of Illinois I would compare to the entry in *World Book* both listings are quite comparable with the choice of topics and use of statistics. It is more up to date than the print for obvious reasons Wikipedia can be updated immediately when a new important event occurs, but the print cannot.

#### Salvador Allende

The most comprehensive listing by far of Salvador Allende, covering all possible topics associated with him. When it comes to the overthrow and his death, it does not mention the cover-up of the death that was mentioned in *Britannica*, it does state that many have confirmed that it was a suicide and even goes further to state that his family has accepted that his death was a suicide. This article is followed by a bibliography of 40 sources and also gives a list of other sources and external links. I checked the history tab for this page to see how often it is updated or changed and its frequently updated, as of this writing there are over 500 entries for changes to this entry.

6. *World Book* it seems is the only that provides direct information on who wrote each for every individual entry. For the searched items above I found these people to be the authors listed in *World Book*:

Carl Lindahl the writer of the unicorn listing is a professor at the University of Houston in the Department of English who specializes in folktales, so a good source for the unicorn entry.

Theodore J. Karamanski and William D. Walters, Jr collectively wrote the article for Illinois

Theodore J. Karamanski is a writer who focuses on writing historical fiction and non-fiction based in the Midwest, an interesting choice for an author but qualified.

William D. Walters, Jr is a professor of geography at Illinois State University, also an interesting choice but definitely qualified to write an entry for Illinois.

Lois Hecht Oppenheim wrote the entry for Salvador Allende she is a professor of Political Science at the American Jewish University and she is a scholar of Latin American politics with a focus on Chile, a perfect match for this entry in the encyclopedia.

For the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* I found in their *Wikipedia* entry: that “the articles in the *Britannica* are aimed at educated adult readers, and written by a staff of about 100 full-time editors and over 4000 expert contributors.” The specific entries in the *Micropaedia* that I checked for this assignment did not list the names of the contributors although in the *Macropaedia* some of the entries gave writer information.

The *Encyclopedia Americana* selectively mentions writers of the longer entries and also includes their titles. The only listing that listed authorship was the Illinois entry. The authors listed were:

Samuel K. Gove, of the University of Illinois and James D. Nowlan a Representative from the Illinois General Assembly.

Samuel K. Gove was a professor at the University of Illinois from (1954- 1989) which lends itself to the understanding of why this entry felt so outdated. He was a very standup gentleman for the state and his authorship is qualified but not up-to-date.

James D. Nowlan is a senior fellow at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs and an adjunct professor of public policy at Knox College.

Sources for above biographical information:

“Department of English: Carl Lindahl” University of Houston. 9 November 2008.  
< [http://www.class.uh.edu/English/faculty/lindahl\\_c.asp](http://www.class.uh.edu/English/faculty/lindahl_c.asp)>.

“Amazon.com: Theodore J. Karamanski Books.” Amazon.com. 9 November 2008.  
< <http://www.amazon.com/s?ie=UTF8&search-type=ss&index=books&field-author=Theodore%20J.%20Karamanski&page=1>>.

“Contentdm Collection: William D. Walters Jr.” University Library at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. 9 November 2008.  
<[http://www.library.uiuc.edu/contentdm/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/tdc&CISOPTR=926&CISOBX=1&REC=1](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/contentdm/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/tdc&CISOPTR=926&CISOBX=1&REC=1)>.

“Lois Hecht Oppenheim, PhD” American Jewish University Academics. 9 November 2008.  
< <http://academics.ajula.edu/Content/ContentUnit.asp?CID=1735&u=1206&t=0>>.

“Encyclopaedia Britannica.” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 9 November 2008.  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopædia\\_Britannica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopædia_Britannica)>.

“Samuel K. Gove Papers, 1948 – 89 – UIUC Archives.” University of Illinois Archives. 9 November 2008.  
<<http://www.library.uiuc.edu/archives/archon/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=4030>>.

“James D. Nowlan” Institute of Government and Public Affairs. 9 November 2008.  
<<http://www.igpa.uillinois.edu/person/james-d-nowlan>>.

Wikipedia is an open community that does list who has edited the pages and created them initially, it is hard to find exactly who these people are because of the nature of Wikipedia. Generally it has been tested to be extremely accurate and unbiased.

7. Of the three encyclopedias for this assignment, *The World Book Encyclopedia*, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Encyclopedia Americana*. I would not choose any of these encyclopedias to be in my library. I do not feel as if the content is updated frequently enough in any of them and also that often times the information is very inaccurate. However, these are generally recognized as the best encyclopedias and if I was in a public library I would place the *World Book* in the children’s section of the library and have the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the reference section. Overall, I was very displeased with the currency of the information, graphics, and pictures in the *Encyclopedia Americana*.

#### 8. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* structure:

The print *Britannica* includes an index of two volumes that cover A-K and L-Z, these point you to volumes and whether or not the query is in the Propaedia, Macropaedia, or the Micropaedia. Overall the index is very helpful although could be hard to navigate because many of the listings point you to other listings and those point you further and it could be hard to track exactly what you are looking for.

The print *Britannica* also contains a “Book of the Year” a yearbook in this case for the year 2005. This book contains the current events sort of information from all over the world with a really great span of coverage. Begins with new biographies, goes into obituaries, and then goes into general topics of interest for the year. Finally the book breaks down into specific country current event information and ends with a comparative statistical chart on just about any topic you could want to find information about. For example the Solomon Islands it gives its official name the form of government and the capital and many more categories of information such as in 2003 Imports were in SI\$639,500,000 and then it breaks that number into further sections of percentages of where the money was spent.

The Propaedia is an “Outline of Knowledge” which gives really brief subject lists and part breakdowns for everything from the human body to the “European Colonies in the Americas from c.1492 to c.1790.” This book would be of interest in finding very quick ready reference information. Or if someone was doing research on one topic and wanted to find more places to find more information about that topic.

The Macropaedia is “Knowledge in Depth” and unlike my above complaint for the short length of entry for the state of Illinois in the Micropaedia that I was looking in at that point the Macropaedia gives very detailed information about the entries that you would find in the smaller detailed Micropaedia. It is good for being the sole source of what you are seeking information for, unlike the Micropaedia which is more for getting the research started and a providing a jumping off point of where to find more information for.

The Micropaedia is “Ready Reference” and is what I used in the above analysis. The Micropaedia is very good for providing the general information that you would want to know about a certain subject, but is quite brief. It is good for those who want information quickly or as it states “ready reference.”

Overall I think this breakdown is very useful for the *Britannica Encyclopaedia*, because it gives a greater understanding of an encyclopedia and provides a place to find everything you are seeking or just a place to start from. I am unsure if most people who go to the library will understand this breakdown in the print form and may get lost in all of the volumes, but it is a good attempt and making the encyclopedia more useful in my opinion.