

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW PRO/CON DATABASES CONTENT ANALYSIS December, 2008

In December, 2008 selected members of the Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access to Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a hands-on comparative study of six pro-con themed databases:

- [CQ Researcher](#) (CQ Press/Sage)
- [Issues and Controversies](#) (Facts on File/Infobase Publishing)
- [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#) (Gale)
- [Points-of-View Reference Center](#) (EBSCO)
- [SIRS Researcher](#) (ProQuest)
- [procon.org](#) (a free public WWW site)

[Appendix A: Topic Lists for all Products](#)

[Appendix B-D: Title Lists of Essays, Books, Etc. in Gale Print Pro/Con series that are NOT in Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#)

This review will focus on the depth, quality and quantity of the pro and con essays, while also noting relevant add-on content. Below is a chart comparing the add-on content of each database. Keep in mind that price varies greatly between products with little added content, versus other products that contain a full suite of full-text periodicals articles. (procon.org is not included as it is a different product).

Database	Includes complete full text of the print counterpart?	Added-On Edited Content*?	Additional Reference Books/Materials	Number of Periodicals
CQ Researcher	Y	N	None	None
Issues and Controversies	Y	Y	2, plus selected photos and editorial cartoons	Selections from World News Digest database
Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center	N	Y	15 reference books, 35 pamphlets, Information Plus series, reports	224
Points-of-View Reference Center	Not applicable	Y	Chapters from books (1,348), radio/tv transcripts, primary source documents, photos, videos and editorial cartoons	556
SIRS Researcher	Not applicable	Y	U.S. Government documents	Selective full-text

*Refers to anything in addition to the featured pro/con essays exclusively for the electronic product that is not already a publication found elsewhere.

The review team studied the databases and also sent out questionnaires to the five subscription vendors (they did not send one to procon.org). The review team asked about the expertise of the authors of the featured pro-con essays/content, how often essays are updated, and whether the online product had 100% full-text of the featured essays. The reviewers also include a complete list of topics in each of the products, based on how the vendor lists them.

CQ Researcher

Content Analysis

CCL-EAR Committee Comprehensive CQ Researcher review (April 2005):
<http://www.cclibraries.org/reviews/index.html>.

Figure 1: CQ Researcher Welcome Page

CQ Press is a well-respected publisher in the public affairs and current events arena. Their CQ Researcher database provides efficient electronic access to full-text versions of in-depth reports on a variety of issues and hot topics. Regular subscribers have access to reports published from 1991 to the present, while the archive collection extends coverage back to 1923. This database is essentially an online version of the print periodical. The main advantage to the online version is that it allows for off-campus access, slightly faster updating, and the ability to e-mail reports.

CQ Researcher is a useful resource for multiple disciplines including political science, communications, sociology, criminology, law, and science. According to CQ Press, the editors of the CQ Researcher “identify the topic, and then the writer prepares the report after reading background materials.” The online report appears one day before the print publication. Once these reports are published, they are not updated. Each report focuses on one issue and averages 20-25 pages. Reports typically feature the following sections: Abstract, Overview, Background, Current Situation, Outlook, Special Focus, Chronology, Pro/Con, Bibliography, Next Step, Contacts, and Footnotes. The Special Focus and Pro/Con section can be particularly useful in helping students focus on a subtopic. The Bibliography and Next Step sections give students citations for relevant books, reports and periodical articles. The Next Step section is conveniently divided by subtopic.

The pro/con section of CQ Researcher was only included on a regular basis starting in 1992. In each Pro/Con section two experts are asked a specific question that relates to the report topic. One expert answers the question in the affirmative, the other in the negative. Answers are opinion pieces written in a brief essay format. CQ does an excellent job of clearly identifying the experts by name, title, professional or association affiliations, and even includes, in most cases, a photograph of the expert. (The same – plus a brief biography – is true for the authors of the reports themselves).

CQ Press’ pro/con product essentially isolates the pro/con section of each report and provides a means of accessing them directly and independently of the full report. It should also be noted that

although the “new” Pro/Con browse *feature* is, indeed, new, the content itself is taken entirely from previously published reports.

The Pro/Con browse feature provides users with an unwieldy list of 226 topics arranged in alphabetical order. Selecting a topic displays all of the pro/con questions that relate to the topic. Clicking a specific question takes users to the requested pro/con section, complete with opinion piece answers. At this point the user can go up a level and see the entire report and/or use the “Issue Tracker” feature to browse related reports and the pro/con questions associated with them.

Figure 2: CQ Researcher Pro/Con Feature

The screenshot shows the CQ Researcher Pro/Con feature interface. On the left is a navigation menu with options like 'FULL REPORT', 'Introduction', 'Overview', 'Background', 'Current Situation', 'Outlook', 'Pro/Con', 'Chronology', 'Short Features', 'Maps/Graphs', 'Bibliography', 'The Next Step', 'Contacts', 'Footnotes', 'About the Author', and 'Comments'. The main content area is titled 'Financial Bailout' with the subtitle 'Will U.S. and overseas action stem the global crisis?' and the author 'By Thomas J. Billitteri'. Below this is the 'Pro/Con' section for the question 'Should Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac be privatized?'. It is divided into two columns: 'PRO' and 'CON'. The 'PRO' column features Lawrence J. White, a professor at Stern School of Business, who argues that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac should remain nationalized. The 'CON' column features Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, who argues that these institutions were set up to create a national mortgage market and that they have failed to recognize the housing bubble. On the right side, there is an 'ISSUE TRACKER for Related Reports' section listing 'Banking' reports from October 2008 and September 2008. Below that is a 'BROWSE RELATED TOPICS' section with links to 'Budget and the Economy', 'Great Depression and other Economic Recessions', and 'Mortgage Loans and Home Finance'. At the bottom right is a 'READER COMMENTS (1)' section with a quote from Tazeen, Illinois, and a 'View All Comments' link.

In addition to the new Pro/Con browse feature, users can use the Advanced Search screen to limit searches by report section (in this case, Pro/Con). This is accomplished by checking the Pro/Con box. Questions, author names and titles, along with their entire answers are all fully indexed and allow searching with Boolean operators.

As the pro/con questions are published only in conjunction with each full report, the breadth and currency of available questions is restricted to the 45+- reports published per year. Once published the reports are not updated. Instead they are complemented or superseded by future reports. Even so, CQ does a good job of balancing the publication of perennial hot topics (gay marriage, affirmative action, and gun rights all saw new reports in the second half of 2008; abortion was last addressed in 2006) with less common but still relevant topics (such as *Regulating Credit Cards* and *Reducing Your Carbon Footprint*, both from fall 2008) and the commanding issues of the day (*Financial Bailout* was published in late Oct. 2008). CQ Press describes their publication schedule by noting they issue “totally updated reports as events warrant; that typically is after two to three years with highly popular subjects but can be even sooner when there are major court decisions or other events.” CQ Researcher does not try to be an up-to-the-minute news source and, when appraised in that context, the reports in this resource offer a wealth of comprehensive, balanced information on a wide variety of issues.

Other Reviews:

“CQ Researcher.” *Library Journal* [Reference Supplement], 133.19 (2008). 26.

Facts on File Issues and Controversies Content Analysis December 2008

General Database Product Overview: <http://tinyurl.com/dmmwkb>

CCL-EAR Comprehensive Review of Facts.com suite (Now Facts on File):
<http://www.cclibraries.org/reviews/Documents/Facts%20com%20review%2010-06.pdf>

Issues and Controversies is Facts on File's answer to providing overviews on controversial topics that permeate our society today. The database now covers over 800 topics and is geared especially for "research papers and debate prep."

Figure 3. Issues and Controversies welcome page

The screenshot shows the 'Issues & Controversies' welcome page. At the top, there's a blue banner with the title and a navigation bar. Below that, a search sidebar on the left offers various search and sorting options. The main content area features a featured article on 'POLITICAL POLLS' with a photo of a ballot box and a list of 'Issues in the Headlines'. At the bottom, there are three columns for 'CURRICULUM TOOLS', 'SPECIAL FEATURES', and 'NEED A RESEARCH TOPIC?'.

The database is based on Facts on File's print documents, *Issues and Controversies On File*. The editors research current newspapers and magazines such as The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and the Los Angeles Times. They also utilize many opinion-oriented magazines such as The Nation, The New Republic, and the National Review. Sources include current web resources such as Politico, altnet.org, and newsmax.com.

Each *Issues and Controversies* article begins with an overview and history, a section on what critics have to say on the topic at hand (the "Con") and what supporters likewise have to say (the "Pro") follows. Other sections provide a good overview of the topic at hand, and a Discussion Questions and Activities section that can either be used by an instructor or to help a student narrow down a topic. All sections include a bibliography of resources with links to the public World Wide Web home page of the source of an article (though the article itself may not be available on the Web or database version), a section titled "Additional Sources" that lists books, "Contact Information" that leads to key non-profit or other organizations and institutions, and "Key Words and Points" to suggest subject terms students should pursue for further searching in the Facts on File database. Each article varies between ten and fifteen pages, and is written in clear, easy to read prose that should be easily read by most community college students.

Figure 4. Issues and Controversies article page

"same sex marriage" GO

Search Story and Title Text
 Search Title Text Only

Sort Option For Results List

By Relevance Rank
 By Story Date

Optional Date Range [\(reset\)](#)

From:

To:

? [Advanced Search](#) GO
(Search all Databases)

Sidebars

[Same-Sex Marriage Follow-up: Gay Marriage Legalized in California, Upheld in Massachusetts; New Hampshire Adopts Same-Sex Civil Unions](#)

[Recent Events in the Debate over Same-Sex Marriage](#)

[Same-Sex Marriage and the 2008 Presidential Election](#)

[Other Views in the Debate over Same-Sex Marriage](#)

[By the Numbers: Update: Same-Sex Marriage](#)

Issue Date: April 13, 2007

Update: Same-Sex Marriage

- [Same-Sex Marriage Enters the National Conversation](#)
- [The Goodridge Decision And Its Political Fallout](#)
- [Opponents Criticize Same-Sex Marriage](#)
- [Supporters Say Gay Couples Deserve Marriage Rights](#)
- [Same-Sex Marriage Debate Looms over 2008 Election](#)
- [Discussion Questions & Activities](#)
- [Bibliography](#)
- [Additional Sources](#)
- [Contact Information](#)
- [Key Words and Points](#)

The issue: Is marriage a basic human right that should be extended to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation? Or should marriage be defined by a federal amendment as a union between a man and a woman?

- *Opponents of same-sex marriage say:* The foremost purpose of marriage is to promote the creation of families, which consist of a mother, a father and children. Since same-sex couples do not fit that description, governments are justified in withholding marital rights from homosexuals. Additionally, most Americans remain opposed to the idea of letting same-sex couples marry.
- *Supporters of same-sex marriage say:* People should be allowed to marry whomever they chose, regardless of gender. Gay couples should enjoy the same legal rights that heterosexual married couples currently enjoy. Most of the opposition to gay marriage is fueled by hatred of homosexuality; such hatred should not be legitimized by a federal amendment banning same-sex marriage.

The issue of same-sex marriage has sparked one of the most emotional and hotly contested debates in the U.S. today. As of April 2007, only one state--Massachusetts--permits same-sex couples to marry. Three others allow gay couples to form civil unions, which confer many of the same rights as marriages. An additional three states, as well as Washington, D.C., allow homosexuals to form domestic partnerships, which also grant some marriage rights to same-sex partners. But in the remaining states, gay partnerships

Each entry also includes “Sidebars,” a left column listing to other sources which include links to related Issues and Controversies articles, follow-ups to the essay after its publication, and news stories and overviews that are either added to this database or come from its World News Digest (these particular linked articles are available without having to also subscribe to the World News Digest database). Some of the links go to its “By the Numbers” category, which includes key statistics and polls on the hot topics the database covers. A direct list of links to their “By the Numbers” pages is available at: <http://www.2facts.com/RecordUrl.asp?article=/icof/issues-menu-numbers.asp> (link will only work if you have a current subscription)

Theoretically, updates are provided to topics on a regular basis, but perhaps not as often as a student would expect. Still, compared to other products the time difference may not be as bad. Listed below are examples of topics students pursued that they were surprised did not have more up-to-date information:

Same Sex Marriage (April 13, 2007, but until November, students were led to January 30, 2004 on the top of the list results. See below for more discussion)

Parental Notification (November, 2007)

Election Reform (December 29, 2006—no updates to controversies that came up with 2008 election)

Iran (December 3, 2007)

Wildfire Prevention (November 12, 2007)

Subprime Mortgage Crisis (April 25, 2008—with a sidebar update dated October 5, 2008)

Government Bailouts (September 5, 2008 with a sidebar link leading to a follow-up dated October 14, 2008).

This technique makes Issues and Controversies more timely than CQ Researcher, especially for pro/con topics that are always being studied such as Gun Control and Abortion. For example, CQ Researcher has not updated its focused “Hate Crimes” article since January 1, 1993 (It has recent articles on Hate and Racism, but not on Hate Crimes, in particular). By contrast, Facts on File’s most recent update for

their January 5, 2001 article on “Hate Crime Laws” is from August 5, 2005. Likewise, links to key articles on the most recent update should lead to newer articles, though that does not necessarily always happen. First of all, in particular searches, students may go to the earlier article where there is no link to the article’s update. The “Same Sex Marriage” search often leads to the 2004 document which is labeled as updated, when in fact there is also a 2007 update. While more recently the 2007 article has now begun to appear during the writing of this review, other examples show a problem where based on search terms, students could inadvertently be led to an earlier article where there is no link to the most current one. The review team strongly recommends that Facts on File make it so that all earlier articles have links to more current articles *and* any sidebar updates, listed on the left column. For example, only the 2007 version of the same-sex marriage article has a sidebar follow-up on the California Supreme Court ruling.

Patrons would benefit if the editorial team of Facts on File updated articles more frequently. The 2007 “Same Sex Marriage” article has a follow-up to the California Supreme Court ruling, as of December 16, 2008, but there are no follow-ups on either what was on the ballot in the 2008 election or the turnout. Specifically, there is no mention of Proposition 8 in California, or similar propositions in the states of Arkansas, Arizona, or Florida. There is a link to the 2008 elections, but it is dated 2007 and lists all the primary candidates’ positions on this issue. At one institution, students have complained that what they see is dated, as compared to what they find at Wikipedia.

The database contains other sections for assisting the student. There is the *World Almanac and the Book of Facts*, the *Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia*, photographs from many news or Getty sources, and also political cartoons from Uclick.com. For the first two sources, there are tab links on every page for a student to look up information in both the Almanac and the Encyclopedia. A Curriculum Tools tab is also available to give students tips on narrowing down a topic, how to write a research paper, avoid plagiarism and evaluate resources. The Curriculum Tools tab also gives tools and suggested lesson plans to instructors, which are viewable to all users.

Other Reviews:

Markgren, S. “Issues and Controversies.” Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries 46.4 (2008): 668.

Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center Content Analysis December 2008

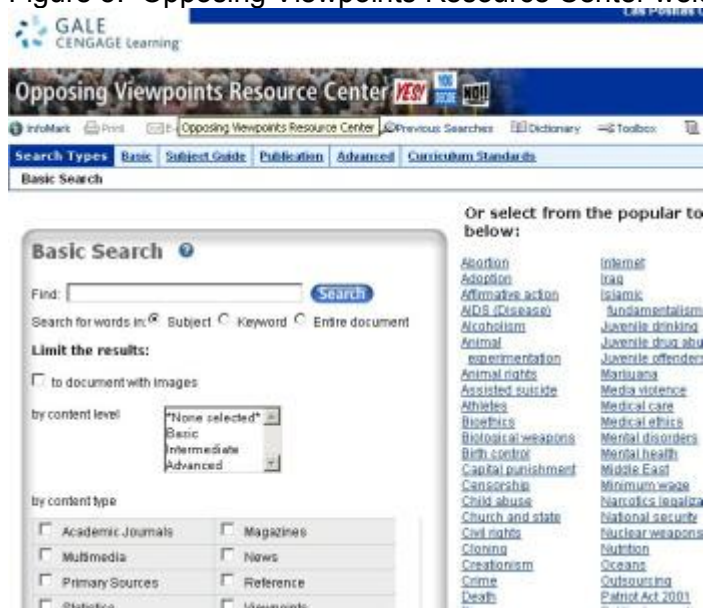
General database product overview can be found at: <http://www.gale.cengage.com/pdf/facts/ovrc.pdf>

Complete title lists for journal and reference sources can be found at:
http://www.gale.cengage.com/title_lists/

CCL-EAR Committee, Preview, Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center (July 2005):
<http://www.cclibraries.org/reviews/Documents/Opposing%20Viewpoints%20Issues.pdf>

Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center (OVRC) is a subscription repository of information geared to middle school students and up who are researching controversial social issues of the day. Though a broad range of resources from periodicals to Podcasts is offered, the appeal for librarians is the inclusion of print content from selected pro-con series titles. Since many community college students struggle with critical thinking and basic skills issues, *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center* allows libraries a good option for supporting this segment of their clientele.

Figure 5. Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center welcome page



Print Reference Books:

OVRC provides content from 15 reference works, which in essence constitutes a small social sciences library:

- 9-11 Commission Report from the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States
- Activists, Rebels, and Reformers (2001)
- Bioethics for Students (selections) (1999)
- Civil Rights in the United States (2000)
- Drugs and Controlled Substances: Information for Students (2003)
- Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy (2002)
- Encyclopedia of Sociology (2000)
- Environmental Encyclopedia (2003)
- Federal Agency Profiles for Students (1999)

- Great American Court Cases (1999)
- Great Disasters: Tsunamis (2003)
- Encyclopedia of Sociology (2000)
- Macmillian Compendium: Social Issues (1998)
- Macmillan Profiles: Humanitarians and Reformers (1999)
- Special Interest Group Profiles for Students (1991)
- Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations, Vol. 1: United Nations (2007)

In addition, there are over 450 popular pro-con series titles from Gale, Greenhaven Press, Macmillan, Scribner and U*X*L are available in *Opposing Viewpoints Reference Center*. Included are: *At Issue*, *Contemporary Issues Companion*, *Current Controversies*, forty-two titles from *Information Plus*, *Opposing Viewpoints*, *Opposing Viewpoints Digests*, and *Teen Decisions*.

According to Gale's response to the consortium's vendor-completed survey, articles for these series are selected by the individual volume editors in concert with [Gale] staff senior acquisitions editors who look for articles that:

- introduce some of the main debates surrounding the issue that is the subject of the volume,
- foster the development of students' critical thinking skills,
- represent opinions across the political spectrum,
- represent an unbiased and inclusive approach,
- strive to provide an engaging "panoramic view" of the subject of the volume,
- express a clear point of view on the subject of the volume,
- originate from a variety of sources, including magazines, newspapers, speeches, reports, congressional testimony, book excerpts, Internet articles, etc., and
- have largely been published within the past 3 years.

No particular updating schedule for the series titles is given; however a Gale representative reports that the reference content is updated on a regular basis, with Greenhaven titles receiving revision every two to five years depending on the topic. This is a fair statement as the reviewers determined that 151 of the 410 Greenhaven titles listed on the *Database Title Lists* had been updated at least once and 18 titles twice.

According to the product manager for *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center*, the time lag between publication of *Information Plus* and *Opposing Viewpoints* titles and their appearance online is usually two to three months. During this period the content is converted to electronic format, indexed by humans, and then loaded onto the database. A company goal for 2009 is to shorten the delay to just one month.

While the vendor claims that all of the print material is loaded onto the online product, the reviewer found a number of omissions. Using 31 tables of contents from the *Opposing Viewpoints Series* from 2007 to 2008, which were downloaded from the Gale CENGAGE Learning online product catalog, and then typing the individual document titles into the Basic Search box with keywords, and a second time using the Advanced search document title box, 114 articles were identified as missing from the online product (see [Appendix B](#) for list of articles). A smaller sample of table of contents from the *At Issue Series* was examined identifying 50 missing articles from 13 series titles (see [Appendix C](#) for list of articles).

Some of the omissions are due to indexing/technical errors, for example Linda Hirschman's piece, "Mothers Should Work," can only be retrieved by searching under keyword and placing the complete title in quotation marks. The essay titled "Iraqi Nation-Building Can Reconstruct Iraq" can be found by typing in the complete essay title with a period (.), or by conducting an author search. "Intervention in God's Plan for Natural Reproduction is Wrong," is retrieved by typing in the complete title or by placing the first four words in quotation marks. With peculiarities such as these, retrieval of some articles is left to serendipity.

Allowing for the possible three month time lag, it appears that an entire book from a particular series TITLE can be absent from the online product; for example the following titles are missing: *At Issue: Cancer* (January 2007), *At Issue: Charter Schools* (December 2007), *Opposing Viewpoints: Eating Disorders* (July 2007), plus eight issues of *Opposing Viewpoints* released between May and August of 2008 (see [Appendix D](#) for these titles).

This selective investigation of the printed content vs. online content begs the question: just how many pro-con print articles are missing from *Opposing Viewpoints Reference Center*? Perhaps a major review of the aggregator's downloading and/or indexing procedures is in order.

The reviewers would be remiss if they did not mention that another type of omission favors the researcher in that more content is available than advertised. A comparison of the Excel files from the tool bar's *Title List* link with the titles actually found under *Publication Search* reveals additional titles from the following series: *At Issue Series* has 48 additional titles; *Contemporary Issues Companion Series*, 9 additional titles; *Current Controversies Series*, 9 additional titles, and *Opposing Viewpoints Series*, 28 additional titles. The Excel files, however, have other errors, for example, some words within the titles are misspelled, for example America, America's, and American's, depending on the context. Use of the word "the" in some of the titles is problematic, causing some titles to be filed alphabetically starting with the word, "The," while other titles were given an extra "the" within the body of the title. In the grand scheme of things these errors may not affect the students' ability to access information, but it does again point to the overall need for better database maintenance and quality control.

Periodicals:

In an effort to provide currency to topical issues, *Opposing Viewpoints Reference Center* is updated daily with periodical content from 224 full-text magazine, newspaper and journal titles; however, only 122 of these titles are current, with *Commonweal* and *Journal of East Asian Studies* limited by a 180-day embargo. Eight titles shown on the *Database Title Lists* as active are in fact closed or perhaps have changed status to embargoed: *Arrows for Change* (full text ends December 2006), *Daily Item* (full text ends 4/13/08), *Eden Daily News* (full text ends 3/27/08), *Endangered Species Update* (full text ends April/June 2007), *Frontier Perspectives* (full text ends Spring/Summer 2007), *Telegram-Tribune* (full text ends 7/25/08), *Underwater Naturalist* (full text ends October 2007), and *Western Standard* (full text 7/30/07), bringing the list of full-text titles down to 114. Of these titles, 14 are peer-reviewed and are current. Cash-strapped libraries should note that included in the list of current full-text titles is the *New York Times* from 1985 to the present with only a one-day embargo.

Other content includes thousands of Podcasts, many from NPR programs, and 42 titles from the *Information Plus Series*. The titles range in publication date from 2004 to 2007, with over 60% from 2006-2007. Understandably downplayed is a small pamphlet collection which contains 27 titles from the Guttmacher Institute and three from the Center for Women Policy Studies; since the majority of these are eight or more years old, a student would be better served by going directly to the publisher's website where similar and more recent information can be found.

Web Pages:

Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center also includes links to more than 2,300 juried and subject-indexed websites. Because each link comes with a disclaimer from the aggregator, it takes three clicks to actually open the recommended website, a bit annoying, but hopefully, it serves to develop for the student, an appreciation for the quality of the content.

Accessibility:

Gale can honestly and happily boast that the home page for the *Opposing Viewpoints Research Center* is accessible. The site is relatively easy to navigate for an experienced screenreader user. Proper markup for form fields is present. Information is retrievable from both the Basic Search box and the list of popular topics. There are many redundant links (i.e., 'Full Text' is repeated for every search result that is

returned. This is not a problem for an experienced screenreader user, but is not what could be considered a best practice. The colored tabs work just like any other hyperlink on the page.

The accessibility policy is very forthcoming about what parts are accessible and what are not, and the difficulties the aggregator encounters in striving to achieve compliance. Overall, Gale appears to take accessibility seriously and plans to address current problems as updates are applied.

Summary evaluation

Few can dispute the attractiveness of the *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center* search interface, and the convenience of having such a variety of resources pulled together in one source that is ADA compliant. However, it is disturbing that Gale has not addressed the concerns detailed in the League's July 2005 preview article. To date, many articles from the print series are not found in the database, and it is often difficult to identify paired content, making it a stretch sometimes, to appreciate the word "opposing" in the product's name. A decent database, but librarians are not necessarily getting everything they paid for.

Other reviews:

Fagin, Jody Condit and Emily Conroy. "Points of View Reference Center and Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center." Charleston Advisor 9.3 (2008): 5-9.

Young, Terrence E., Jr. "Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center." School Library Journal 51.8 (2005): 80-81.

EBSCO Points of View Reference Center Content Analysis December 2008

General Database Product Overview:

<http://www.ebscohost.com/thisTopic.php?marketID=1&topicID=770>

Complete Title List can be found at: <http://www.ebscohost.com/titleLists/pwh-coverage.pdf>

EBSCO's Points of View Reference Center (POV) is a fairly new player in the online market catering to the pro/con and controversial issues research assignments so prevalent in high schools and colleges today. Launched in 2007, the database combines essays written in-house by EBSCO-affiliated researchers with journal and newspaper content, book chapters, radio and TV transcripts, and primary source documents (e.g. Congressional testimony, historic documents, speeches, etc.). Also included are photos from sources such as AP, UPI, and Getty as well as streamed clips from the Video Encyclopedia of the 20th Century.

The "Points of View" portion of the database comprises 4 essays on each of the over 250 topics; an overview, a "point" representing one side of the issue, a "counterpoint" taking a contrary view, and a "guide to critical analysis". In some cases, a topic may have additional essays with significantly updated information. The topics covered can be browsed either by category or by using the "View All Topics" list (see below).

Figure 6. Points of View Reference Center welcome page

In addition to the standard POV topics, the database is supplemented with entries covering prominent people in the news, most recently, presidential candidates from the 2008 election. Entries with a geographical slant also include almanac-like entries from a series called "Our States".

Each POV essay is approximately 3-4 pages long and follows a standardized template. The citation is clearly labeled and includes subject headings, lexile reading level (mostly at the high school/undergraduate level), a brief abstract, and a persistent link. Each of the essays on a particular topic is linked to the others through the template arrangement. The template also includes a tab labeled

“What experts say” which links to one or more articles from mostly popular magazines or occasional congressional testimony. It’s not always clear what qualifies the author as an “expert”. Another tab labeled “Research guides” lists links to generic advice on doing research such as “choosing a topic, write a thesis statement, write a persuasive essay, give an oral presentation”, etc. The remaining tabs on the template provide links to curriculum standards in the U.S and Canada.

Overview essays include definitions of key terms, a history and current state of the issue, and a bibliography. The “point” and “counterpoint” essays have clearly stated abstracts and thesis statements. The body of the essay lays out several points in support of the position and is followed by a brief list of questions for students to consider. Finally, a bibliography is included which covers books, articles, and often web sites for further study. The “Guide to Critical Analysis” for each topic is itself a template adapted to the particular topic. Generic strategies like “before you read...” or “as you read...” are followed by examples of factual statements vs. opinion. Students are then encouraged to look deeper into the topic and write their own essays using the “Research Guides”.

The representation of currency (dates) and authority (author affiliation) is a bit misleading and could conceivably cause problems for student researchers. Admittedly, these issues are not unique to EBSCO.

On the questions of currency and the representation of dates, there are no essays with dates prior to 2007. However, a representative from EBSCO indicates that some of the original articles were created “several years ago”. If this is the case, the 2007 dates are misleading. Many of the “primary source documents” that are historical in nature have recent dates assigned to them in the results list (the “Battle of Lexington, American and British Accounts” is dated 1997, perhaps taken from a printed version). On the other hand, some essays dated 2007 have updated information from 2008. An article on John Edwards with a 2007 date includes information about his 2008 presidential campaign and marital infidelity. A student researching the 2008 campaign might bypass this entry upon seeing the 2007 date.

The question of authority is constantly stressed when working with students on research strategies. No information on an author’s qualifications or credentials is given in POV but several searches for essays by the same author within the database seem to indicate staff writer credentials and not necessarily expertise in a particular area. For example, one author has contributed essays on topics as varied as honeybee colony collapse, legalized gambling, autism, and diamond mining. EBSCO does plan an “Expert Review phase” which they predict will take 3-6 months. Experts, defined as those with a PhD or Masters and work experience in the field, will review and update entries, and brief biographical information highlighting their credentials will be included. For now, embedded in the database is the following description of the “**Editorial Process**”:

“Points of View Reference Center (POV) leverages the skills and knowledge of many people. Professional writers, in-house writing and research teams, and database editors work together to assure a high quality level for the product.

Writers and Editors

Professional writers are selected by EBSCO’s internal Publishing Team based upon the skill and quality of their writing style, as well as their affinity to the subjects that they will cover. Writers are required to provide qualifications and background to the EBSCO internal Publishing Team. As part of the selection process, the Publishing Team will assess all background information and have informal interviews with the writers. Before being accepted as a writer for EBSCO, each writer must present sample work and create an essay based on a topic in POV. Only after careful review are writers then hired to work on the POV essays.

After being selected to write for EBSCO, all writers are required to follow detailed content-creation guidelines that are established by the internal Publishing Team. These guidelines provide information on how to research, issues on plagiarism, citing and more.

The Overview, Point, and Counterpoint essays in Points of View are created by our professional writers who are skilled in persuasive and research writing, language arts, and curriculum. Carefully constructed and extensively researched, these essays

provide students with solid examples for writing their own persuasive essays and arguments. The Point and Counterpoint essays are opinion pieces; the goal is to present an idea only as it pertains to the viewpoint being expressed, much like a newspaper editorial.

All essays are carefully reviewed by the internal Publishing Team. This group will copyedit and fact check the content to assure that the information presented is correct. During the review, plagiarism rules are considered to assure that the work does not infringe on other's intellectual property.

The essays are reviewed a minimum of each year by the internal Publishing Team. During the review, the Publishing Team will research the topic area. If more current information is available on the topic, the original content is edited to reflect the changes. If fundamental information on the topic has changed drastically, a new essay will be created. The older essay will be archived, yet will remain on the product for historical purposes.

Product Managers and Database Editors

Product Managers and Database Editors for Points of View have a thorough understanding of the product. This team interacts with customers and the market in order to build a solid understanding of researchers' needs.

The Database Editor identifies the best titles (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers) that are suited for the product. This includes "Core" titles (those titles in which all articles are included in the product) as well as "Selective" titles (those titles in which selective articles are included in the product). Further, the Database Editor chooses articles from the Selective titles so that the most appropriate content is available for researchers. New titles are continuously added to POV.

In an ongoing effort to uncover new content for inclusion in POV, the Database Editor researches emerging issues to ensure that the most current information is available. Once new topics are chosen, the Database Editor works closely with the Publishing Team to get the proprietary content created and develops the list of topics that comprise the browse navigation.

Product Managers and the Database Editors also interact with EBSCO's technology groups to identify feature and functionality needs of the product."

Other Reviews:

Fagin, Jody Condit and Emily Conroy. "Points of View Reference Center and Opposing Viewpoints

Resource Center." Charleston Advisor 9.3 (2008): 5-9.

Potter, J.D. "Points of View Reference Center." Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries 45.7

(2008): 1143.

SIRS Researcher Content Analysis December 2008

General database product overview can be found at:

<http://sks.sirs.com/cgi-bin/hst-table-display?file=libcorner.html&id=SCA6428-0-5498>

Complete title list can be found at: SIRS Researcher Source List:

http://www.proquestk12.com/pic/pdfs/SIRSResearcher_Sources.xls (November 2008)

CCL-EAR Committee, Comprehensive Review, SIRS Knowledge Source (January 2007):

<http://www.cclibraries.org/reviews/Documents/SIRS%20comprehensive%20review.pdf>

Print Reference Books: None

Periodicals:

SIRS Researcher is the pro-con component of ProQuest's *SIRS (Social Issues Resource Series) Knowledge Source* database. While SIRS Knowledge Source is traditionally considered a K-12 educational product, the content and presentation hold great appeal for community college students. Content is drawn selectively from nearly 1600 diverse periodicals from 1988 to the present. These periodicals are comprised of magazines, newspapers, trade publications, and U.S. Government publications. While the articles chosen from the individual periodicals are selective, the titles themselves represent a variety of publication types from consumer health journals (such as *Harvard Mental Health Letter* and *Prevention*) to regional newspapers (such as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) to national newspapers (such as *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*) to professional and industry newsletters (such as *Fire Management Today* and *Psychotherapy Networker*). *SIRS Researcher* also selects from politically charged newsweeklies such as the left-leaning *New Republic* and *Nation* and the self-described conservative *American Spectator* and *National Review*. *SIRS Researcher* draws content from only a handful of peer reviewed journals; however, these are not distinguished as such nor can a search be limited solely to peer reviewed titles. *SIRS Researcher* is not an aggregated database. The editors routinely scan the 1,600 periodicals and hand select articles for inclusion.

Webpages:

SIRS Researcher also includes links to carefully selected websites.

Original Content:

For each of the *Leading Issues: Pro-Con Topics*, the editors also include an increasing body of original content to organize and complement the previously published articles and weblinks. This content includes: un-credited introductory essays; brief, uncredited Pro-Con paragraphs with significant points hyperlinked to full-text articles; and the newly added "Leading Issues Timeline" articles, credited to "Proquest staff."

Selection

According to SIRS documentation, the editorial staff of 40 is comprised of professionals with advanced degrees in varied social science disciplines or education. Subject coverage is similarly varied and user driven. The editorial staff meets weekly and reviews keyword and subject searches to determine which topics will be included among the approximately 100 *Leading Issues* topics and the "Top 10 Pro vs. Con: Leading Issues." While new articles are added to the database on a daily basis, the Top10 list is revised at most on a monthly basis. The *Leading Issues* list is revised infrequently. A comparison of the Pro-Con Topic Coverage lists from Spring 2007 and Winter 2008 shows the addition of three topics ("Economic Policy,U.S.", "Election 2008", and "Taxation") and the deletion of only one topic ("Work and Family").

Figure 7: *SIRS Researcher* Top 10, December 4, 2008.



The article selection process bears the imprint of the editorial staff. Once selected, each article is then classed by editorial staff into SIRS topics and assigned Library of Congress and Reader's Guide Subject Headings.

The editors at SIRS are to be commended on the inclusiveness and general timeliness of their article selections. An examination of the Leading Issue: Gay Rights, for example, contains articles from the conservative *American Enterprise* magazine as well as from the left-leaning periodical, *In These Times*.

Figure 8: *SIRS Researcher*, Magazine articles on gay rights.

[A Gay Man Decries "Gay Rights"](#)

American Enterprise March 2000; Lexile Score: 1370; 11K, SIRS Researcher

Summary: This article criticizes the politicization of the gay rights movement. The author, a gay man, calls for "a return to the joys of private life, the rediscovery of discretion and even anonymity" (THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE).

Descriptors: [Gay liberation movement](#), [Gay rights](#), [Gays](#), [Legal status](#), [laws](#), [etc.](#), [Liberty](#), [2001: A Space Odyssey \(Film\)](#)

[Fear of a Queer Planet](#)

In These Times June 27, 1999; Lexile Score: 1300; 5K, SIRS Researcher

Summary: "Homophobia is an affliction that deeply permeates this culture and, because of their peculiar history, African-Americans are particularly vulnerable. Americans, more than anyone, should understand the perils of prejudice, but many remain loathe to compare the black freedom struggle to the gay rights movement." (IN THESE TIMES) This article discusses the reasons behind rampant homophobia in the black community in the U.S. and lists some steps to combat such sentiment.

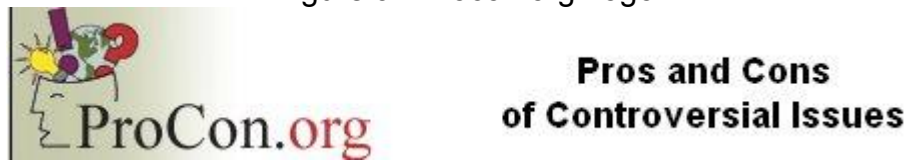
Descriptors: [African American churches](#), [Gay rights](#), [Homophobia](#), [2001: A Space Odyssey \(Film\)](#)

SIRS Researcher is also timely for most topics. The Gay Rights topic includes the November 2008 ballot initiative in both its timeline and selected articles.

For those students fortunate enough to find their subject of interest covered in the Leading Issues list, *SIRS Researcher* is an excellent first resource for research on controversial social issues. The database also affords keyword and subject access to the articles in its collection, but the results are less manageable than the retrieval from articles collated by Leading Issue topic and less comprehensive than the results one would find in an aggregated database.

**ProCon.org
Content Analysis
December 2008**

Figure 9. Procon.org Logo



ProCon.org, initiated in 2002, is a non-partisan Internet site that solicits and collects articles on controversial social issues. ProCon's mission statement is posted prominently on the site:

"Promoting education, critical thinking, and informed citizenship by presenting controversial issues in a straightforward, nonpartisan primarily pro-con format."

ProCon.org provides content on 18 controversial topics. The topics covered are much the same as those one would find in the other current controversy databases compared in this review. Coverage of each topic is comprehensive, balanced, well organized, and thoughtful. ProCon.org has added at most five new topics a year since its inception. Two years, 2004-2005, witnessed no additions. Two of the topics have been "archived;" that is, they are still accessible online but new content is not being added to these topics sites. The comparatively limited selection of topics, however, prevents ProCon.org from becoming more than a complement to the fee based pro-con databases.

The format of the freely available ProCon.org reflects its origins as an Internet based site. ProCon.org posts a web site to support each controversial topic. Each topic site is assigned a researcher who compiles and organizes the content based on a common template. Individual researchers, mostly political science graduates from colleges and universities in California, are each responsible for multiple sites. Their interests and credentials are well documented and they are accessible to the readership by phone, fax, and email. The creation and revision of each topic site is also well documented as is the authorship of each individual article, editorial comment, and reader comment posted to the site. Statistics on site traffic are maintained and visible as well.

Researchers contribute background editorial content to the site. This content includes: an introduction to the topic ("1-Minute Overview"); a chronology with some hyperlinks to bibliographic references, court cases, and primary source materials; a glossary; a "10-Minute Summary" of approximately five to ten points of controversy, displayed in a pro/con array. The points of controversy pieces are extracts from previously published resources, all of which are well documented. The ProCon.org researcher assigns a credibility ranking of one to five stars to each ProCon contributing author.

ProCon.org maintains currency on all but the two archived sites, which are both clearly labeled as such. New content, distinguished as a "Notice," is featured by scrolling down to the bottom of a topic site's welcome page. Each of the 16 current topic sites contained multiple notices from within the past 30 days. Notices more than a month old are archived.

The thorough documentation, comprehensive and balanced coverage, and logical organization and navigation of each ProCon.org topic site make it an excellent resource for the student undertaking research on one of its 16 selected topics. However, the limited size of the database limits its value as a resource for community college students.