Introduction

Students often enter postsecondary education with a sense that Wikipedia is not an eligible source for college-level research. Despite student perceptions that Wikipedia is prohibited, not to mention instructor perceptions that they should redirect students to other sources, student use of Wikipedia is well documented. Some instructors flip the narrative slightly by using Wikipedia in information literacy exercises, asking students to articulate how a Wikipedia article could be improved. However, Wikipedia is also an ideal laboratory for developing writers and researchers. This chapter presents an overview of how a Wikipedia editing assignment may take the place of a traditional research paper. We share a case study of two research assignments that adopted Wikipedia as a writing and research platform, offering students and instructors the opportunity to become “Wikipedians” and disseminate accurate and high-quality information about any topic.

Literature Review

The literature about incorporating Wikipedia into research and writing experience is extensive. As Kuhne and Creel articulate, Wikipedia offers composition students an
opportunity to engage directly in the “social construction of knowledge.”2 In the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) genre, many publications have discussed Wikipedia editing assignments in disciplines ranging from chemistry to English to public policy.3 Pratesi and colleagues characterize Wikipedia as a tool for democratization, arguing that Wikipedia editing assignments promote inclusive teaching and increase diversity in Wikipedia contributors and content.4

Librarians have often grappled with Wikipedia as reference source, not to mention with library patron feelings about Wikipedia.5 As Wikipedia has aged, Wikipedia editing events (edit-a-thons) have been organized by librarians and archivists.6 Librarians have been involved in editing and operating Wikipedia since its early days,7 have engaged with Wikipedia as activists advocating for greater inclusion of marginalized voices,8 and have attempted to remove racist and sexist claims and language from the Wikipedia corpus.9

Librarian use of Wikipedia as a pedagogical tool varies widely; however, the library and information science literature is rich with publications about classroom applications of Wikipedia. As Wikipedia was nearing its second decade, Jacobs wrote,

To forbid Wikipedia without discussing it critically and creatively is, I believe, a missed opportunity within our classrooms to foster precisely the kind of critical thinking we demand of our students and a missed opportunity to engage students’ thinking about information literacy.10

With a focus on the library’s role, Soito offers a thorough accounting of the current options available to anyone wishing to utilize Wikipedia in teaching or research.11 McKenzie and colleagues describe a first-year seminar assignment in which students located, summarized, and cited information to be included in Wikipedia articles, and, like Jacobs, concludes that Wikipedia presents opportunities to develop critical skills and dispositions.12 While librarians are not required participants in a Wikipedia assignment, Proffitt’s edited volume presents a cross section of case studies on how librarians can connect people to Wikipedia, often for teaching and learning purposes.13 Librarians have employed Wikipedia in lessons about topics and keywords and in assignments designed to teach information literacy skills.14 Kingsland and Isuster present a case study of a Wikipedia editing assignment for kinesiology and physical education, showing how librarians can lead discipline-specific Wikipedia editing projects.15

The SoTL literature devotes little time to the nuts and bolts of Wikipedia editing assignments, and Wikipedia’s well-cultivated brand of free information may encourage a presumption that everyone knows how to edit Wikipedia. In this case study, librarians collaborated with instructors who were novice Wikipedia editors. As the research assignments developed, the instructors became familiar with the Wikipedia tools that would allow them to replace a traditional research project with Wikipedia editing; however, neither instructor began with this knowledge. This collaboration of novices benefited heavily from tools developed by Wikipedia that are available through its Wiki Education
Wiki Education Overview

The Wiki Education Foundation provides an infrastructure to guide faculty and students at any higher education institution throughout the process of a Wikipedia assignment. This free support assists librarians, instructors, and students in embarking on the process without extensive technical knowledge or prior Wikipedia editing experience. Instructors manage their Wikipedia assignment through a class dashboard, and Wiki Education provides students and faculty with educational tutorials and professional technical support and troubleshooting services. While there is certainly a learning curve for everyone, this model allows faculty and librarians to focus their teaching efforts on content and information literacy instruction.

The Wikipedia dashboard and tutorial library are useful tools for faculty and librarians in managing the class assignments. The dashboard serves as a hub where instructors view student work, and students collaborate with classmates and stay up-to-date with the Wikipedia assignment. Wiki Edu suggests that instructors start out with a basic template and subsequently use the provided guidelines to customize the specifics for their class. Similarly, the library of training modules allows faculty to customize the training their students receive before they begin editing, providing tutorials ranging from an introduction of Wikipedia’s guiding principles to editing advice for specific fields of study. Instructors could assign these tutorials for class credit and view completion as students progress. These resources serve as a point-of-need reference, which students could continue to refer to as they tackle editing Wikipedia. The dashboard also provides students with a central location to conduct peer reviews of classmates’ additions. Once the edits are completed, the assessment tools on the dashboard give instructors a simple way to view student contributions and compare them to previous versions of an article. Because Wikipedia preserves page histories, students and instructors can be confident that contributions can be viewed and fairly assessed even if other editors change the articles later.

Beyond the educational tutorials and class dashboard, Wiki Education also facilitates the editing process by providing at least one staff member contact for each class. These staff experts serve as a valuable resource in solving technical problems as they arise. Although students are welcome to use these staff members as a resource, it should be noted that few students will do so unless encouraged by the instructor or librarian. Still, for faculty and librarians, it is reassuring to know that if they face an issue they cannot resolve, someone with specialized Wikipedia knowledge is available to help.

While this case study focuses on assignments in which students author or edit articles, Wiki Edu also supports assignments that have students translate existing articles or create media for Wikimedia Commons. These types of assignments are fitting options for language and arts classes.
Chapter 10

Educational Setting

At the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, librarians began working with tools created by Wiki Education in 2016. In an epidemiology course, and later a history course, undergraduate students edited Wikipedia articles for assignments that took the place of the traditional research paper. UW-Eau Claire is a public four-year comprehensive liberal arts institution, with a Carnegie Classification of Master’s Colleges and Universities: Medium Programs.

Epidemiology Assignment

In 2016, an instructor for a 400-level epidemiology course for undergraduates approached librarians about creating a Wikipedia editing assignment for their course. The instructor has continued to teach and refine the Wikipedia assignment in their course each fall semester since 2016. As shown in table 10.1, over the course of four years, students enrolled in this course edited seventy-nine Wikipedia articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Words Added</th>
<th>References Added</th>
<th>Articles Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>9,180</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>18,800</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>20,300</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>26,300</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.1
Epidemiology course contributions to Wikipedia

When the instructor first contacted the library about the assignment, they had never edited a Wikipedia article, though they were familiar with the basic elements of the platform. The instructor proposed that students could select any Wikipedia article about something “with an epidemiology,” for example, chikungunya, placenta previa, or loneliness. Aware that Wikipedia content can be edited by anyone and that students’ contributions might be reversed quickly, the instructor imagined that a complete assignment would include a contribution to Wikipedia and submission of a separate document displaying the student’s complete contribution. Librarians proposed an alternative approach: use tools created by Wiki Education to create the assignment, train students about Wikipedia, and evaluate student contributions. The librarians hoped that, by adopting Wiki Education’s tools, the instructor would opt out of creating their own system and parameters for incorporating Wikipedia into their curriculum. Pleased by the prospect of not having to reinvent the wheel, the instructor and librarians subsequently completed Wiki Education’s tutorials for instructors. The epidemiology instructor drafted the Wikipedia editing assignment according to the course goals and librarian input.

As a result, rather than resorting to the traditional research paper assignment, the instructor assigned the following tasks to be completed over the course of the semester:
1. Complete Wiki Education’s required online training, including a module about editing scientific content.
2. Select a Wikipedia article on a subject with an epidemiology.
3. Update the article with current research, with an emphasis on incorporating systematic reviews into the Wikipedia article’s references.
4. Edit the article for clarity, organization, and conventions, if needed.
5. Write a reflection about the Wikipedia editorial experience.

In addition to consulting with the instructor about the assignment, librarians designed an information literacy lesson (see appendix 10A) to build on Wiki Education’s tool-focused training modules. This lesson was scheduled at the time students were selecting an article for revision. In groups, students examined and discussed a Wikipedia article supplied by the librarian. In an all-class discussion, groups shared their observations about the article, including opportunities for addition or revision. The information literacy lesson primed students to view articles critically and provided an opportunity to demonstrate the variety of articles that would be acceptable for the assignment. Notably, the lesson was scheduled about one-third of the way into the semester. At this point, students had been cultivating foundational knowledge about epidemiology and discussed a variety of epidemics. The students spent approximately ten minutes searching Wikipedia for prospective articles to edit, consulting individually with both the librarian and the epidemiology instructor.

The lesson subsequently shifted away from searching Wikipedia to searching for appropriate sources to cite in updates to a Wikipedia article. The students were aware of Wikipedia’s preference for systematic reviews of evidence rather than primary research, case studies, lab reports, and similar materials. The majority of students were in their third or fourth year in majors like kinesiology, environmental and public health, nursing, biochemistry, and other science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. While many had had the experience of locating scholarly or peer-reviewed literature, the librarians observed that the students had not developed strategies for locating systematic reviews. The lesson plan thus included time for the students to locate databases like Cochrane Library, Medline, and PsycInfo, wherein they experimented with search terms related to the Wikipedia articles they were considering.

The course instructor required students to submit for approval the articles they planned to edit. The majority of submissions were easily approved; however, each year of the collaboration, a few students needed to select an alternative. For example, a student selected the Wikipedia article “Preventive Nutrition,” which at the time of selection was an excellent candidate for improvement; however, it did not meet the instructor’s requirement that the article have an “epidemiology of” component. In another case, a student selected Wikipedia’s article “Salmonella,” which revolves around the bacterium. For the purposes of the epidemiology assignment, the student had more success with the Wikipedia article “Salmonellosis,” which centers on the disease caused by the bacterium Salmonella. Despite having enrolled in an upper-division course, the students were still building a foundation of knowledge about epidemiology, requiring the instructor and librarians to collaborate on identifying alternative Wikipedia articles that related to the students’ initial interest and aligned with the purpose of the assignment.
History Assignment

In 2019, librarians were again approached by a faculty member, this time from history, who had heard about Wikipedia assignments and thought to incorporate one in a 200-level research methods course. Given the librarians’ previous experience with Wikipedia assignments, they encouraged the professor to use the Wiki Education platform and provided support to both the professor and the students throughout the semester. As shown in table 10.2, students enrolled in this course made a substantial contribution to Wikipedia as they completed the assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Words Added</th>
<th>References Added</th>
<th>Articles Edited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.2
History course contributions to Wikipedia

In collaboration with the history professor, librarians mapped out the assignment for the semester. Students would do the following:

1. Complete the required Wiki Edu online training (including optional training specific to certain topics, for example, biographies, women’s studies, LGBT+ studies, etc.).
2. Select a history-related Wikipedia article to edit, on any topic of their choice.
3. Improve the article with information from three quality secondary sources and (if possible) one primary source.
4. Peer-review a classmate’s article.
5. Give an in-class presentation and submit a reflective essay.

Library support for the class over the course of the semester was dynamic in order to fit the changing information needs of the students as they progressed in their research. The student population of the course, in general, largely comprises sophomores and juniors, many of whom are history and education majors. In the past, this course has visited the library for two instruction sessions: an introductory session about secondary sources, and a primary source orientation conducted in the Special Collections and Archives.

To support the new Wikipedia assignment, an information literacy session was added to help students evaluate, select, and start editing a Wikipedia article. During this session, the librarian first facilitated discussions about the students’ previous knowledge of Wikipedia, followed by students working in groups to evaluate and suggest improvements to existing Wikipedia articles. This session was scheduled in the early weeks of the semester, at a time when students were first beginning their research. The intent was to give students an early start with their projects; however, due to the fact that many students did not begin their secondary sources research until later in the semester, the session likely was scheduled too early to have had the desired relevance and significant impact to the students. Still, this information literacy session presented an important starting point to familiarize students with Wikipedia and to explore larger concepts about historical narratives. The
history professor prepared students well for this group discussion by assigning a reading that helped them consider historical authority and the role of Wikipedia in reflecting popular memory.\textsuperscript{25} When students submitted their proposed article selections, the librarians and instructor consulted among themselves and then approved or suggested alternate articles for students.

Further into the semester, when students began to express anxiety about the Wikipedia project, librarians coordinated with the instructor to schedule an additional instruction lab session where a librarian and the instructor consulted one-on-one with students, working on identifying and evaluating weaknesses in their existing Wikipedia pages. Through consultation with librarians, students located high-quality sources to contribute additional valuable information to the article. These one-on-one discussions gave students the opportunity to describe the research they had conducted thus far and discuss their planned Wikipedia contributions. The additional session for guidance and structured work time appeared to reduce student concerns and allowed librarians to provide constructive feedback to each student at the midway point of their project.

Librarians also collaborated with the history professor at the end of the semester to discuss final article quality assessment and evaluation. A librarian attended the students’ final in-class presentations to recognize their accomplishments and hear their reflective assessments of the Wikipedia project. Students reported that editing Wikipedia was useful and rewarding; however, there was one point during the semester where students experienced particular confusion and concern. The process of choosing a topic and selecting an article proved difficult for many students. This may have been due to the fact that many students planned to use the same topic for their Wikipedia project and for their history thesis prospectus. Because those two assignments were the only major graded assignments of the class, the topic selection process for the Wikipedia project likely seemed more high-stakes to the students than the librarians and instructor had initially anticipated. The lack of any constraints on the topics (besides a focus on history) may have been daunting to students at the start of the project; however, many students commented at the end of the semester that they appreciated the freedom to pick any topic they felt passionate about. Although this class required additional instructional support in the middle of the semester, ultimately timing and reassurance, rather than difficulty with research and writing, proved to be the greater issues. Since Wikipedia’s online tutorials are always available for students to use, the students were instead looking more for content-specific guidance from the instructor and librarians. Despite students’ anxiety in anticipation of this project, the majority of the class demonstrated successful historical research techniques and improved Wikipedia through their contributions.

**Wikipedia versus the Research Paper**

In an essay for student writers, James Purdy writes, “You may not realize it, but creating knowledge is one reason you are asked to do research-based writing in college.” Purdy suggests that Wikipedia articles are a live demonstration of revision, active conversation,
and explanation using factual information.\textsuperscript{26} Wikipedia editing assignments allow student researchers to practice revision and conversation, justify their use of facts, and even discuss the meaning and significance of information. Research papers also afford student writers the opportunity to gather, evaluate, and synthesize information. While every assignment differs, research papers typically require that students draw on primary and secondary sources collected during the research phase.

Students who have completed Wikipedia assignments at UW-Eau Claire have described the experience of writing for Wikipedia as unique or rewarding because they had not previously had the opportunity to contribute to a conversation beyond the classroom. Because novice researchers, and especially undergraduate writers, lack experience with publication, the conversational aspect of research and citation may not be obvious. In contrast to the research paper format, Wikipedia foregrounds the conversational element of disseminating information with its Talk pages and the sandbox where editors discuss and critique articles. Nonetheless, Wikipedia also prioritizes citation, just like traditional research papers. Advanced researchers and scholars understand that citations are more than documentation—citations are also a critical element of the scholarly conversation. In addition to acknowledging previously published work and facts established by others, citations allow authors to discuss the work of others. This discussion may validate a cited author’s work or raise questions and criticism. As more authors cite and discuss another’s work, the scholarly conversation evolves. While a research paper is unlikely to change after the student has submitted it and received instructor feedback, Wikipedia editors can see that articles continue to change as other contributors flag statements and citations and use the Talk pages to hash out prospective changes. In this sense, the Wikipedia assignment is a low-stakes way for students to experience the dynamic research, writing, and publication process.

As an encyclopedia intended for a broad audience, Wikipedia emphasizes writing for a general audience. Explaining complex ideas or problems for the basic reader is never easy; however, this skill is also not a priority in most research paper assignments. As a result, Wikipedia’s structure offers student writers the unique opportunity to gather and synthesize information for readers with no background knowledge. Condensing complex information and articulating it in a way that most people can understand adds a layer of cognitive challenge to the research process when students are editing Wikipedia articles. Because encyclopedia articles are a unique genre of writing, engaging with this kind of content may challenge the student’s understanding of writing. Editing a Wikipedia article offers students the opportunity to evaluate the structuring of information organization. In this context, the students not only critically evaluate the purpose of the information, but also investigate how the structure of the article supports a general reader’s learning.

Writing for Wikipedia also introduces the idea of sharing knowledge as a service for the greater good. One instructor engaged in this case study described the Wikipedia editing assignment as a “small opportunity to make the world a better place” by sharing accurate scientific information. While any research assignment can be designed with a component of public service or volunteerism, Wikipedia is explicitly structured to allow writers to contribute to public knowledge. Students engaged in editing Wikipedia using
course or disciplinary knowledge and research are participating in a global community of writers and researchers with a shared mission of expanding freely available knowledge.

In contrast to assigning a research paper, editing Wikipedia is not guaranteed to be an easier research assignment for students, and the assignment is not necessarily easier for instructors to evaluate. However, Wikipedia assignments may offer some efficiencies, especially if assigned to groups. In the history assignment described here, students were offered the chance to edit an article in a group or to work individually. Most chose individual work. In the epidemiology courses, more students elected to complete the assignment in groups. The choice to work alone may be influenced by an individual student’s interests, logistical convenience, or preferred working styles. Librarians involved in these assignments observe that completing the project independently supported each student’s agency as a researcher. However, individual projects in Wikipedia increase the workloads of instructors and librarians and may require more work from the individual Wikipedia editor. In this case study, much more coaching and troubleshooting fell to the professors and librarians outside of class time when students chose to work on their Wikipedia assignments alone instead of in groups. Professors should be mindful of this factor and encourage group work when possible for Wikipedia assignments. To be sure, group projects often require instructors to develop strict guidelines to ensure equitable contribution from all members. However, students who research collaboratively, like those in the epidemiology classes, often consult each other about content, solve technical issues together, and delegate to make the editing process more manageable. Weighing the benefits of individual projects for smaller classes of self-directed researchers, instructors might actively encourage students to use the tutorials and staff support from Wiki Edu to address technical issues so that instructors can focus on content-related questions.

**Assessment of Student Work**

Assessment of student research often poses a challenge for librarians, whose teaching role does not always afford access to the artifacts of student work. This status can leave librarians without a view of the student’s writing process or research outcomes. The collaborations featured in this case study allowed librarians to participate with no expectation that they would grade the student’s contribution. However, participating librarians were able to view and provide feedback on student progress from article selection through drafting, peer review, revision, and final submission. History and epidemiology instructors collaborating on Wikipedia assignments developed discipline- and curriculum-specific rubrics to evaluate student work for the purposes of grading. Wiki Edu provides a sample grading rubric for instructors, and librarians helped refine these criteria to the specific needs of instructors. Some instructors incorporated librarian feedback into the final grade, but librarians were also able to evaluate student work to understand the efficacy of library instruction.

In the case of the epidemiology and history assignments, the first opportunity for librarians to assess student work came early, when instructors and librarians reviewed the Wikipedia articles the students proposed to edit. Just as topic selection can be a challenge
for any student, Wikipedia employs a letter scheme for rating articles based on factual accuracy and, to a lesser extent, style and structure.\textsuperscript{28} In this case study, most students had no difficulty avoiding A-class articles, or those identified as Good Articles (GA) or Featured Articles (FA). As Wikipedia users know, articles in need of revision are often tagged with comments about unsubstantiated claims, needs for updated sources, brevity, or other signs of underdevelopment. Articles in need of significant expansion are typically categorized as a “start” or a “stub,” giving students even more opportunities to identify candidates for expansion or revision.

At this preliminary stage, instructors and librarians evaluated each student’s understanding of the assignment and their use of Wikipedia’s article-rating tools to select an appropriate artifact for revision. About 75 percent of students in the epidemiology classes were able to select an appropriate article for the assignment, typically following advice to focus on content that could be transformed into a Good Article, rather than something that had already achieved that status. The remaining students were stymied by misunderstandings about the subject matter. For example, some students selected health science topics that were indirectly related to epidemics, such as medical treatments. As previously discussed, history students struggled more with article selection in the first year of the assignment. Completing the assignment independently, rather than in a group, and the relative latitude to choose virtually any historical topic likely contributed to indecision.

In the early development of the Wikipedia assignments, the authors worked with the collaborating instructors to identify qualities of student work that would signify improvement to a Wikipedia article. These qualities included

- clear communication
- use of evidence
- organizational improvements

Wikipedia articles are significantly shorter than the standard research paper, reducing the quantity of material to be evaluated. In addition, peer review allowed students to make editorial suggestions and to catch each other’s spelling and grammatical errors before the final article submission. Librarian instruction emphasized that Wikipedia editors must comply with the genre of the encyclopedia article; assessment of student contributions thus included key questions:

- Did the author write in plain language understandable to a general audience?
- Did the author interpret the basic meaning or main idea of evidence?

While the majority of students completing these assignments struggled to write about complex subjects for a general audience, more than 80 percent of all participants succeeded in locating and incorporating current, scholarly material into the Wikipedia articles they selected. In feedback solicited from students, many commented that writing for Wikipedia was their “first publication” opportunity or a chance to “contribute to public understanding.” In that sense, the librarian’s feedback to the students was only a single data point about the ultimate outcome of their Wikipedia edits. Students reported that seeing how their edits and additions were received by other Wikipedians was a humbling experience, especially if contributions were quickly reversed or altered. Many students further noted the positive aspects of contributing to the Wikipedia community. Students
who completed the assignments expressed surprise that the Wikipedia editing community is large and engaged and described their appreciation for the prior efforts of other Wikipedians that gave them a foundation to build upon. Some teaching majors from the history class even commented on the potential of editing Wikipedia with their future students. Generally speaking, student evaluations have featured positive reflections on the real-world impact and public nature of their Wikipedia contributions.

Librarians also examined Wikipedia contributions for use of high-quality evidence and organization. Assessment of the students’ use of evidence and improvements to article organization are aided by Wikipedia’s Objective Revision Evaluation Service (ORES), which utilizes machine learning to produce a “structural completeness score” for articles edited by classes using the Wiki Edu platform. The structural completeness score is based on citations, elements of article organization, and quantity of text. On a scale of zero to 100, the structural completeness scores allow librarians to view a single article’s score prior to editing and the score after final edits are complete. In addition, ORES calculates a mean score for the entire class. In the history and epidemiology courses with assignments that have received a structural completeness score, student contributions have increased each article’s structural completeness score, as shown in table 10.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Epidemiology</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Epidemiology</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Epidemiology</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Epidemiology</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.3
Changes in structural completeness scores for UW-Eau Claire courses

While Wikipedia’s ORES tools do not evaluate most elements of writing style, the structural completeness score is nonetheless an objective measure of change to both individual articles and the collection of articles revised by a group of students. Structural completeness scores offer instructors an objective view of students’ research and writing output on Wikipedia. More broadly, librarians and instructors engaged in this project have reviewed the structural completeness scores to understand how this project improves access to freely available information. The observation that student researchers make a net positive impact on structural completeness scores aligns with reports from instructors at the University of Hawaii and the University of California, San Francisco.

**Conclusion**

The students who completed the Wikipedia assignments described here were primarily readers of Wikipedia prior to selecting the articles they would go on to edit. Becoming a Wikipedian presents an opportunity for students writing for a general audience to
conduct secondary research, as well as interpret complex ideas and discoveries. Rather than condemning Wikipedia as a nonacademic source, having students become Wikipedia editors has the potential to apply information literacy skills and disciplinary knowledge in the service of expanding access to freely available knowledge. While research assignments vary across disciplines and courses, the critical challenges posed by selecting and editing Wikipedia articles allow students to apply their knowledge in a novel real-world setting.

As described in this case study, collaborating to develop a Wikipedia assignment and learning to use infrastructure like the Wiki Education platform require a significant time commitment for instructors and librarians. For the librarian, this commitment may be counterbalanced by the opportunity to review and evaluate student writing and research. In comparison to the research paper, the relatively small quantity of writing contributed by each student may also reduce the instructor’s grading time. The training opportunities and editorial platform developed by Wiki Education are flexible for class and assignment formats and allow instructors and librarians to deploy Wikipedia assignments without reinventing the wheel. For many instructors who wish to experiment with nontraditional research assignments, Wikipedia offers plentiful opportunities for engagement with any course’s subject matter.
APPENDIX 10A
Wikipedia Instruction Session
Lesson Plan

This lesson is best done in a computer lab or active learning classroom where students have access to computers. It is also ideal if students have begun some research with secondary sources on their topic and created Wikipedia accounts, but this is not required. The lesson can be done at any early stage of the Wikipedia assignment.

Objective: Students will identify strengths and weaknesses of Wikipedia as a whole and evaluate individual articles. They will begin the process of choosing an article to edit.

Class discussion (5 minutes)
Discuss the negative and positive impressions of Wikipedia in general. Possible discussion questions include
- What have you heard about Wikipedia in the past? From whom?
- What are problems with Wikipedia? What are its strengths?

Activity: Evaluating Wikipedia articles (15–20 minutes)
1. As a class, identify the signs of a strong article in Wikipedia. (5 minutes)
   a. Show a high-quality Wikipedia article on the main screen. A featured article is a good starting place.
   b. Ask students to point out characteristics that demonstrate credibility and clarity.

2. In pairs, ask students to look at an example Wikipedia article that needs improvement. If time is short, have all pairs look at the same article. If you have time for more practice and discussion, allow students to choose from two to three article options. (10–15 minutes)
   a. Tell the pairs to make a list of the article’s strengths and weaknesses, specifically looking for ways that the article could be improved.
   b. Discuss the articles as a class, having the pairs share out their observations and suggestions. Have your own list of strengths and weaknesses of the articles to point out anything students may have missed during the larger class discussion.
Search, evaluate, and select articles (20 minutes)

Now that students have practiced evaluating and identifying areas for improvement in Wikipedia articles, they will begin searching for articles on their topic in order to choose an article to edit. Things to mention:

- information source types to use (secondary sources, no original research)
- article Talk pages and Wikipedia’s quality scale
- controversial/protected pages and respect for fellow Wikipedia contributors
- (Optional) Show the user sandbox and demonstrate editing, adding sources/citations.

Open the class to individual/group search time. Circulate to answer questions.

Notes


Bibliography


