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Wikipedia and academia

Wikipedia classroom assignments on the rise

By Sage Ross

The role of Wikipedia in academia has been expanding rapidly—and to some extent vice-versa. Periodic stories from student newspapers continue to report mixed attitudes to Wikipedia among college and university professors ([1] (http://www.thedartmouth.com/article.php?aid=2006111501050), [2] (http://www.mndaily.com/articles/2006/10/17/69425), [3] (http://www.cavalierdaily.com/CVArticle.asp?ID=28031&pid=1489), [4] (http://www.unogateway.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2006/11/28/456c92e3083a0), [5] (http://www.idsnews.com/news/story.php?id=37478), [6] (http://collegian.csufresno.edu/archive/2006/10/04/news/wiki.shtml)). But in many courses, especially in writing, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary fields, professors are using Wikipedia as the basis for assignments: writing articles or evaluating and discussing them. Jeremy Tirrell, a Purdue English graduate student, recently summed up the advantages and disadvantages of using Wikipedia assignments (http://icap.english.purdue.edu/news_wiki) in writing courses; as he concludes:

> "Although it requires some cognitive stretching on the part of both instructors and students, the Wikipedia project taps into relevant themes and technologies, and offers a unique and rewarding writing experience. As with any project, results are all but guaranteed to be mixed, but real

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audiences and real situations are much prized in composition studies, and online production will only become increasingly important for young authors. As instructors, we would do students a disservice not to engage this burgeoning medium—while keeping, of course, an appropriately critical perspective."

Most Wikipedia writing assignments are relatively small. Typically students are asked to write or revise a few paragraphs to a few pages. For example, in Jonathan Benda's "intercultural communications (http://thuicc.wordpress.com/2006/10/19/this-afternoons-class/)" course at Tunghai University, students looked at the articles and talk pages for a number of topics related to Taiwan, Islam, and Kuwait. Students in Dean Taciuch's (http://mason.gmu.edu/~dtaciuch)"Advanced Composition (http://mason.gmu.edu/~dtaciuch/2006/fall06/302/wiki.html)" course at George Mason University (in a section for IT majors) chose and expanded stub articles; David Perry ran a similar assignment in his section of "Intro to Writing for English Majors" at the University of Albany. Espen Anderson uses Wikipedia assignments (in both English and Norwegian) in several courses at the Norwegian School of Management. Only a small portion of such assignments are self-reported on Wikipedia's school and university projects page.

However, a number of more substantial course projects have been implemented, many of them in technical fields. In journalism and media studies courses at University of Hong Kong, Andrew Lih and his students worked on an array of current events articles, sometimes over several semesters; Lih's project, among the first, was the subject of a CNN article in 2003 (http://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/internet/08/03/wikipedia/). Students in Ellen Cohn's University of Pittsburgh graduate course on cleft palate disorders (assisted by User:Piotrus) created a set of related articles; Kent Norman's students in a "Human/Computer Interaction" graduate course did the same. A Summer "Public

Speaking" course at Indiana University used existing articles as the basis for group presentations, with article corrections as extra credit; similarly, a Fall University of New Brunswick English course required editing and presentations on women playwrights (http://thaliasdaughters.blogspot.com/2006/07/biographical-assignmentpresentation.html). The common denominator of the larger Wikipedia assignments so far has been the involvement of an experienced Wikipedian (usually the professor or teaching assistant).

Only a modest level of attention has been focused on issues related to Wikipedia teaching methods. Earlier this year, Alan Liu of UC Santa Barbara drafted and circulated a statement for students on "Appropriate Use of Wikipedia (http://kairosnews.org/developing-a-wikipedia-research-policy)", which appears to have been well-received among humanities professors. Last fall, Betsy Colwill of San Diego State University implemented a Wikipedia assignment for her "Feminist Thought" course, and presented the results (http://pict.sdsu.edu/Jan06/collwill/wikipedia%20presentation1.ppt) to fellow faculty for the school's People, Information and Communication Technology Project (http://pict.sdsu.edu/fellows.htm). T. Mills Kelly of George Mason University's Center for History and New Media has been using and promoting Wikipedia assignments (http://chnm.gmu.edu/history/faculty/kelly/blogs/edwired/archives/wikis/) for some time, first with graduate students and later with undergraduates as well. Andy Carvin, in his blog and on the educational technology H-Net listserv "edtech (http://www.h-net.org/logsearch/?phrase=Wikipedia&type=keyword&list=edtech&hitlimit=25&field=EDSJ&nojg=on&smonth=00&syear=1989&emonth=11&eyear=2006&order=-%40DPB)", has also initiated discussions about Wikipedia in the classroom.

One interesting development with academia beyond the classroom setting is the new Russian History WikiProject. Created by Marshall Poe, it was organized in response to listserv discussions (http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-russia&month=0612&week=b&msg=jzYSL78KlT/WbWd8c0UUmA&user=&pw=) and consists almost entirely of professional Russian historians and graduate students, many of them new users.

+ Add a comment (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?editintro=Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/Templates/Comment-editnotice&title=Wikipedia_talk:Wikipedia_Signpost/2006-12-26/Wikipedia_and_academia&action=edit&preload=Wikipedia:Signpost/Templates/Signpost-article-comments-end/preload)

I would also note that WP has made it into a recent statewide teacher-certification exam, which asked which of several policies toward students' consulting Wikipedia would be the most appropriate. Lawikitejana 08:16, 27 December 2006 (UTC)

Academic text in teaching congress

Last July I presented a paper (http://gps-tsc.upc.es/imatge/_Xgiro/teaching/publications/2006/cidui.pdf) in a presentation (http://gps-tsc.upc.es/imatge/_Xgiro/research/presentations/2006/cidui.pdf) in a congress (http://cidui.upc.edu/index3.htm) explaining a teaching methodology to use with the Wikipedia. You can consider including it in your text. A deeper text will be published next year in a teaching journal. Xavier Giró 11:56, 28 December 2006

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