

## CHAPTER 14

# Using Wikipedia and the ACRL Framework to Jumpstart Students' Information Literacy Engagement

*Bethany Mickel and Meridith Wolnick*

## Introduction and Background

What does it mean to turn the research paper inside out? How can students engage with the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* and dissect it in order to achieve lasting, impactful research? What role does the academic library play in the general curriculum? With these questions in mind, we embarked on the creation of a semester-long course that sought to not only prepare students to become more than just consumers of information but also to be active participants in the scholarly conversation.

The University Seminar (USEM) program<sup>1</sup> at the University of Virginia offers two-credit courses on interdisciplinary subjects taught by faculty and academic staff throughout the university's twelve schools. Geared toward providing undergraduate students with a discussion-based, hands-on learning experience, the USEM programs aim to ignite interest in divergent fields of study. The guiding principles of interactivity and cross-disciplinary participation on the part of both faculty and students provided an opportunity for us to expand beyond the typical, "one-shot" sessions that librarians often offer and engage



with students for a sustained period to explore the foundational skills associated with information literacy.

During the spring 2019 semester, we offered a USEM titled Truth and Evidence in Research and found that students engaged well with the course material; however, they struggled with the summative research project. A consistent theme was the perceived lack of applicability of their own voices within the scholarly conversation. After a semester of discussing the importance of elevating marginalized voices, projects that lacked staying power outside of the class seemed lackluster and in contradiction to the tenets of the ACRL Framework<sup>2</sup> that we embedded within class discussions.

Aware that we wanted to modify the course for the spring 2020 semester, we spent significant time reframing the learning objectives and course activities. We wanted students to be able to distinguish between fact and opinion and truth and misinformation, use the university's resources to locate and appropriately use peer-reviewed and scholarly sources; understand the impacts of power and privilege on the creation, dissemination, and preservation of information, and situate themselves as active contributors in the scholarly conversation. With an eye toward critical librarianship, we leaned into ways in which our students might thoughtfully examine the systems of power that exist in relation to information creation and provision. Reflecting on a visit from our campus Wikimedian-in-Residence<sup>3</sup> in our spring 2019 course, we wanted to emphasize the critical question of information privilege. In the class, he discussed the ways in which Wikipedia's open, crowd-sourced platform conscientiously strives to provide access to information for *all* without the hindrances of paywalls and pricey database subscriptions. Recalling that class session and the conversations that it generated, we saw a way of merging the concepts of "open" and "accessible" with the foundational basis of Wikipedia's policy of neutrality of information.<sup>4</sup>

As we envisaged how Wikipedia might play a central role in the course, we were influenced by a presentation by librarian Kelsey Molseed of Randolph College.<sup>5</sup> She described a credit-bearing course in which she used Wikipedia Education's (WikiEdu) Student Program<sup>6</sup> as scaffolding for a project that required students to edit articles within Wikipedia as a means to expand and update existing content. Coupled with our own research of WikiEdu's platform for instructor and student support, we saw the potential for a semester-long project that would engage our students in a way that would have a lasting impact once they left the course. While we recognized that much of what WikiEdu has to offer could be replicated without formal participation in the program, we determined that, as this was our first time approaching an assignment of this nature, it would be helpful for us to have the support of pre-populated modules and seasoned experts.

# Wikipedia in the Classroom

From the inception of the project, we were adamant that the course would not center on the intricacies of how to edit Wikipedia. While we knew that students would need to learn Wikipedia's community rules and the basics of editing within the platform, we sought ways in which the necessary scaffolding could be covered as homework, thereby preserving class time for discussions, guest speakers, and other interactivities. WikiEdu offers straightforward modules that provide students with the editing prowess to contribute and participate within the editing platform. Having these modules assigned as homework, we were better able to utilize the class time to forward discussions related to information access, differentiation of sources, as well as power and privilege within the information ecosystem. The structuring of the course is represented in our syllabus.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the semester, students were provided with a list of topics from which to choose that highlighted the tenet of elevating marginalized and under-represented people, events, and places. Examples of articles include the gender pay gap<sup>8</sup> and the gentrified Charlottesville, Virginia, neighborhood of Vinegar Hill.<sup>9</sup> We were advised by our Wikimedian-in-Residence that students would have more success with articles that were categorized as Start or C-class.<sup>10</sup> Start-class articles, as the name implies, have a basic amount of information; however, they need further development. C-class articles are more developed, yet still require further fleshing out and editing.

Class sessions involved a combination of readings, student-led discussions, collaborative work, and visits from partners throughout the university who couched course material in application. Students thought through systems of power and structure in the United States Census with a data scientist, learned about the ways technology is elevating marginalized voices from a digital humanist, and met with the campus Wikimedian-in-Residence to untangle concepts of bias and privilege in scholarship.

Outside of class, students researched their chosen article using resources found within the university's digital and print collections as well as its Special Collections archives.<sup>11</sup> Students compiled research prior to editing and were required to complete an annotated bibliography of all materials used to inform their Wikipedia edits. Initially working within the Sandbox,<sup>12</sup> a space for practicing drafting and editing within Wikipedia, students were tasked with publishing their contributions to their article and, if applicable, engaging in any discussion on the Talk page<sup>13</sup> related to those edits. The Talk page of a given article is the "behind the scenes" conversation of content related to the article. While most often constructive, comments from other contributors could influence whether an article's edits "stuck," and we were cautioned to view and evaluate students' concerted efforts versus what stayed on the page as a published edit. In addition to the annotated bibliography and substantive contributions to the article, students were required to meet with us one-on-one to discuss their

editing process, present their article to their classmates, and complete a final reflection of the process and how it elevated concepts of power and privilege in relation to access to information.

## Partnerships

The cross-disciplinary University Seminar structure encourages partnerships that leverage expertise from across campus. We were resolute that the social and political climate called for a substantive and thorough examination of information literacy through the lens of power and privilege. Setting the tone that the library has a critical role to play and a deserved seat at the table for these conversations serves to elevate our expertise as uniquely positioned experts on concepts of information literacy. Collaboration and partnership with others throughout the library, as well as the university as a whole, was a means of leaning into areas of study such as data science and digital humanities while highlighting the overarching importance of information, data, and digital literacies. The relationships that we forged with these partners were invaluable both to our students' learning and the course trajectory.

In particular, information as an agent for change was highlighted by the data librarian, who led a group discussion and activity related to Census data. Students became aware of how data literacy is an integral part of social movement in terms of the allocation of funds and distribution of resources. In a session with a digital humanist, students found themselves confronting scholarship in new and innovative ways as they used VR equipment to explore Tibetan temples and buildings that were mapped as a cultural preservation project. A copyright lawyer guided them in a discussion about the legalities of ownership of information and what it means both for creators and end users.

Contextualizing many of these conversations was a return visit from our Wikimedian-in-Residence. At our institution, the Wikimedian-in-Residence is a grant-funded position. This individual is responsible for providing Wikipedia editing events, working with various departments across campus to surface and create content related to the institution, and teaching class sessions. His emphasis on free and open knowledge provided context for our students who, reflectively, viewed information access from a position of privilege through our institution's vast array of databases. He also provided anecdotal uses of Wikipedia on a global scale; notably, the ways in which Wikipedia provides vital medical information in developing countries. His work with the class was invaluable, providing a lens on the privilege of information that resonated with the students and digging into many of the technical questions they had as they embarked upon their final project.

A partnership that proved instrumental in our inception of the Wikipedia editing project was the one forged with WikiEdu. The application process

for WikiEdu is straightforward, and multiple instructors can interact within the same course. Upon acceptance, instructors are assigned a Wikipedia Expert who is versed in the intricacies of WikiEdu's program and has experience and knowledge of working with students. Instructors are provided with training modules in a "train the trainer" fashion and given the tools and know-how to successfully customize a modular training approach for students. While WikiEdu does require certain modules to be completed in a particular order, there is the option to opt in or out of particular ones based on the needs of the course.

While those more familiar with Wikipedia's editing platform might have been able to spearhead a similar project without the assistance of the modules and support staff provided as part of the formalized program, our own emerging understanding of these innerworkings made program participation helpful. With the assignment of a Wikipedia expert for support, we had a go-to person to troubleshoot student questions, tackle our queries, and provide guidance on selecting articles.

## Reflection

Students' interaction with the Wikipedia assignment provided an interesting lens on skepticism turned into enthusiasm. When the assignment was introduced, we talked students through some of the common perceptions of the online encyclopedia. Many students put voice to the commonly held mantra of many faculty: never use Wikipedia. Through careful examination of Wikipedia's policy of source neutrality and citation, we began to see students view Wikipedia with a new sense of its role in information access and dissemination.

Students' course reflections allowed us the opportunity to contemplate the direction of the course and the key takeaways. One student noted the following: "I learned skills about evaluating information that will help me in my other classes." Another commented, "I felt like I was part of something that will still be there when the class has finished." Homing in on the concept of taking part in the scholarly conversation, a student reflected, "I see myself as a *creator* of information—not just a user of it."

Using Wikipedia as the application for concepts and skills that were discussed in class worked exceptionally well and aligned with the tenets of course-based undergraduate research experiences (CURES). Students developed an authentic and rewarding relationship with research that emphasized "learning by doing." The work allowed for failure as edits within Wikipedia are patrolled by fellow editors. While students often reported that their material was removed for lack of substantiation, they experienced a real-time learning experience that encouraged trial, error, and experimentation. We noted the investment that students made in their given topics and the sense of ownership and pride that they took in their work. Students' ability to select topics that increased research sur-

rounding marginalized or underrepresented topics served to increase attention for these articles as well as reinforce the overarching theme of the class—information as a vehicle of power and privilege. As students began to see their work live beyond the confines of the classroom through interactions on the Talk page and increased traffic for the articles themselves, they had an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be part of open and accessible scholarship.

An aspect of the class that resonated well with students was the series of speakers from within the library and across campus who joined the class to provide application and context to topics we were discussing. In addition to reinforcing strong partnerships with our university colleagues, the students engaged with the various forms of scholarship that make up the complex and nuanced web of information literacy. Students benefited from this panel of experts who contextualized the content and provided “real-life” applications of these critical information literacy skills.

While there were challenges incumbent with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced obstacles in terms of article selection as well as determination of what constituted “substantive contributions.” On advice from WikiEdu’s expert, we pre-selected topics from which students might choose. Although a goal of the course was to surface diverse voices, people, and places, we recognized that inherent to articles is a lack of researchable information. Therefore, we worked intentionally with students to surface usable content. For instance, a student selected the gentrified neighborhood of Vinegar Hill, located in Charlottesville, Virginia. While the neighborhood is well known regionally, finding research required directing the student to utilize some specific resources found within our special collections library.

Students had many questions about what we meant by making “substantive contributions” to the articles. Since our WikiEdu expert cautioned us to evaluate students’ work on effort and quality versus what “stuck” in terms of edits or the sheer number of words added, we needed to navigate these conversations carefully. While encouraging students to add as much applicable data to fill content gaps as possible, we also created a rubric that provided structure and a point of self-evaluation. See appendix: Wikipedia Editing Rubric.

In addition to talking more deliberately about what constitutes a substantive contribution, we would like to move outside of WikiEdu’s modular structure. With an eye toward sustainability and reuse in one-shot classroom instruction sessions, we looked to resources such as the Project CORA lesson, *The Gender Gap in Wikipedia*,<sup>14</sup> where customization of how much time is spent on the editing technicalities versus the editing process itself would be placed more squarely in our hands.

Due to the incredible efforts that the students put forth with their articles, it would be ideal to include a showcase opportunity for students to highlight their work outside of the classroom. While students presented their articles to one another, sharing more widely would not only broaden the reach of their work but also inform and engage others within our institution who might be interested

in alternate forms of scholarship. As an emerging model of a CURE, the simulation and replication of presenting research findings and reflection would place students in a unique position to discuss the challenges and rewards of working through a trial-and-error process of learning and discovery.

Finally, we have reconsidered WikiEdu as the foundation for the course modules and scaffolding. The application process has become more stringent and confined to a time-limited period. Depending on when our class will be held in the future, we do not know if WikiEdu's timeframe for application will be feasible. Further, it is not supported outside of the United States and Canada. We know that having done it once, we can now create some of our materials to support our students without using the WikiEdu platform. While those new to this type of undertaking might benefit from formal participation, we are confident that we can customize our training to align with our students' needs and timeline.

## COVID-19

Our university pivoted online in the middle of the students' spring break period. We moved all class sessions and presentations online in just over a week. At the onset of the pandemic, students were moving toward the development phase of in-class presentations that sought to highlight their article edits. As so many students were new to using Zoom, we opted to have them record their presentations online and upload them to our learning management system for their fellow classmates to review and comment on. To facilitate this shift in approach, we created instructional material on how to record and edit.

In addition, we shifted the remaining lectures online and provided brief video recordings for students to view in accompaniment with their readings and WikiEdu module work. Unfortunately, we had to abandon a planned class with our special collections instruction librarian. She provided some readings and an online exercise that worked well to scaffold students' work in relation to primary resources.

Students reacted well to the online shift, and the new format gave them experience working in a virtual setting. While the nature of our institution is very much in-person, we did glean helpful takeaways from the experience that will guide our instruction as we move forward. We plan to continue to increase online learning resources, consider new and innovative technologies for engaging students, and experiment with alternate methods of scholarship demonstration.

We also plan to offer the course again now that the university has transitioned back to a traditional academic schedule and in-class structure. While it is possible to conduct the course online, the nature of USEM courses is such that students benefit from the small class size as an opportunity to develop more deliberate connections with other students and the instructors themselves. The "hands-on," discussion-based elements of the class suffered in the online shift and we hope to see the entire course come to fruition in a traditional in-person model.

## Assessment

Student assessment was summative in nature, and both instructors spent time throughout the course personally and collaboratively reflecting on what went well. We made note of concepts and readings that proved problematic or that did not quite strike the tone we had hoped. We also examined the WikiEdu structure for modules and pieces of content—particularly related to information bias—that were already scaffolded within the course.

The relatively small class size meant that we were informally able to gauge student interaction with the content. Formally, students completed a reflection paper in which they were asked to provide “lessons learned” on what went well, where they struggled, and their overall experience in the class both during the instruction sessions as well as engaging with Wikipedia editing. In addition, students completed the university-distributed class survey.

Collectively, we learned that the students enjoyed the class and felt that it provided them a window into what alternative scholarship and divergent methods of information gathering look like. They overwhelmingly reflected that the experience had been a positive one; for many, it was the first time they saw their work live beyond the confines of a research paper. At the time of this chapter’s writing, our seventeen student editors contributed to a total of twenty-one articles with 421 edits, just shy of 17,000 words added in addition to 190 new references. There have been 627,000—and counting—views of their articles.

Challenges that students encountered and voiced in their feedback related to the difficulty of finding relevant research material for narrow-focus articles. We also determined that more clearly outlined parameters for evaluation were needed to better clarify substantive contributions.

As we look ahead, we plan to integrate the feedback we received and do some preliminary research to determine the contribution potential for vetted articles. In addition, we will refine the rubric for more clarification. While we benefited from the WikiEdu module structure, we may opt to create our own customized versions of the modules to increase replicability and widen our opportunities for use in other classes. With WikiEdu moving toward a more time-sensitive application process, we will need to consider its feasibility in accommodating our schedule.

## Recommendations and Best Practices

We recommend the following best practices for others wishing to include a Wikipedia editing project in their course or curriculum:

- Apply early to the WikiEdu program. While it is not essential to go

through the WikiEdu program, for first timers, the guides that are provided help give both a background of the tenets of Wikipedia as well as its editing community's practices.

- Use Start or C-class articles to set up students for success so that they have plenty of room for improvement and contribution without the heavy traffic hassles of more developed articles.
- Avoid articles that relate to people. This is helpful for new editors as there are additional standards and policies that surround content in these articles.
- Allow plenty of preparation time to acclimate both you and your students.
- Spend time editing Wikipedia beforehand to be able to troubleshoot problems that students might encounter.
- Familiarize yourself with the backend of Wikipedia—its community of editors, concepts of neutrality, and monitoring processes for malicious, biased, and inaccurate information.

Our work with this project has provided us with a new context through which to talk about and present access to scholarship and information. For many of our students, education comes with the privilege of access to materials and content housed in databases. Due to our university's research focus, students often undervalue the abundance of information that is available to them through these resources. As part of the course, students were confronted with the reality that, for many, Wikipedia is a primary provider of information. This was eye-opening for the students and led to thoughtful discussions about power structures. While this initiative has not yet informed other facets of work within the library, our intention is to bring Wikipedia into our one-shot class sessions as a jumping-off point for further explorations.

Reflecting on the impact of the course, we have highlighted numerous positives; however, among the most notable is the impact of power and privilege on the creation, dissemination, and preservation of information. In addition, we learned that Wikipedia has a place in the classroom, and we are eager to weave it into single-class sessions. Finally, the engagement of our students skyrocketed with the Wikipedia assignment as they realized that their work had staying power and that it contributed to a community and body of knowledge. Embracing the CURE approach of authentic learning through doing, we noted that, as students saw themselves as part of real, actualized research and contribution, they were far more invested in the quality and outcome.

From what started as an idea to try something new came the seeds for exciting opportunities for our students to see themselves as scholars and members of important conversations that have been taking place over time. Armed with a firmer understanding of their incumbent duty to share and disseminate knowledge, we hope that this group of students will use this experience as a catalyst to continue the hard work of research and publication.

# Appendix

## Wikipedia Editing Rubric

<b>Final Project/ Presentation</b> (30% of course grade)			
Research & Preparation	<b>Incomplete</b> (0 points each)	<b>Marginal</b> (1 points each)	<b>Exceptional</b> (2 points each)
<b>Project/presentation was discussed with Bethany or Meridith at one-to-one meeting (March 18).</b>	Did not meet.	Met; however, progress on project and ideas for presentation were not fleshed out.	Met with project nearing completion and idea for presentation clearly outlined.
<b>New Article Content (in Sandbox or published)</b>	Scattered content that doesn't add much value to the overall article. No evidence of citations. (0–2 edits)	Basic content gaps filled with new content fully referenced. (3–4 edits)	Excels at addressing missing content with added content fully referenced. (5 or more edits)
Removal or Enhancement of Existing Content (in Sandbox or published)	Removals harm existing content or new sources added are inappropriate. OR Zero removals or sources added to existing content.	Appropriate small removals and/or one new reference added to support existing content.	Evidence of article improvement through judicious removal and/or two or more references added to support existing content.
References: Citations	Citations missing or inadequate to lead readers to sources.	Most citations are complete; however, a few citations may be missing elements.	Citation elements complete.
References: Sources	Few or no sources. (0–2 sources)	Moderate selection of sources; however, some may be inappropriate for Wikipedia. (3–4 sources)	Excellent selection of varied sources. (5 or more sources)

<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Incomplete (0 points each)</b>	<b>Marginal (1 point each)</b>	<b>Exceptional (2 points each)</b>
<b>Style</b> (e.g., speaks in sentences, clear and fluent delivery, well-paced, maintains eye contact, fits time requirement (8–10 minutes), clearly practiced).	Unrehearsed, unclear, or does not meet specified time requirement.	Evidence of presentation being rehearsed; however, disorganization may be present.	Presentation is polished, enunciates well, is fluent in the delivery, maintains an effective pace and eye contact, doesn't run under/ over allotted time.
<b>Clarity</b> (e.g., explains ideas well, integrates with visuals, clear introduction and conclusion, obvious transitions, demonstrates knowledge of material).	Presentation is not coherent.	Presentation is coherent for the most part; portions are unclear or do not transition well.	Presentation is coherent, with introduction, transitions, and conclusion; speaker demonstrates knowledge of subject.
<b>Medium Integration</b> Visual element to enhance presentation.	Medium is not present.	Medium is used; however, it does not clearly enhance the presentation or directly relate to the presentation.	Medium is integrated into the presentation to add to the audience's understanding of the topic presented.
<b>Question &amp; Answer</b> Responses to questions posed by class are addressed and substantiated by knowledge of topic.	Unprepared or non-responsive to questions.	Questions are answered; however, responses are unclear or uninformed.	Questions are addressed and answered with a demonstrated command of the topic.
			<b>Total for Final Project/ Presentation</b> _____/18 points  _____%

<b>Written Presentation Summary</b> (10% of course grade)			
	<b>Incomplete</b> <b>(0 points each)</b>	<b>Marginal</b> <b>(1 point each)</b>	<b>Exceptional</b> <b>(2 points each)</b>
<b>Reflection Paper</b> 1-page reflection describing what you learned during the research process and how your perception of scholarly conversation has changed.	Reflection not submitted.	Reflection submitted but with incomplete or inadequate exploration of what was learned and how perceptions were/were not changed.	Complete and thoughtful exploration of what was learned and how perceptions were/were not changed.
<b>Annotated Bibliography</b> At least 5 sources you evaluated and/or used in your Wikipedia article using MLA citation format.	Annotated bibliography not submitted.	Annotated bibliography submitted but incomplete: fewer than 5 sources weak annotations inconsistent/incorrect citation style	Complete and consistent citations with thoughtful annotations.
			Total for Written Presentation Summary _____/4 points _____%

## Notes

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  12. “Wikipedia:About the sandbox,” Wikipedia, last modified May 11, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About\\_the\\_sandbox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About_the_sandbox).
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  14. Elisa Acosta, “The Gender Gap in Wikipedia,” Project CORA: Community of Online Research Assignments, last modified March 20, 2017, <https://www.projectcora.org/assignment/gender-gap-wikipedia>.

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