Wikipedia: Need for Librarians as Contributors

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia built collaboratively using wiki software, is the most visited reference site on the web.¹ Only 270 librarians identify as Wikipedians² of 21,431,799 Wikipedians with named accounts.³ This needs to change. Understanding Wikipedia is essential to teaching information literacy and editing Wikipedia is essential to foster successful information-seeking behavior. Librarians who become skilled Wikipedians will maintain the centrality of librarianship to knowledge management in the 21st century—especially through active participation in crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing is the online participation model that makes use of the collective intelligence of online communities for specific purposes⁴ in this case creating and editing articles for Wikipedia.

I began my career as a librarian in pre-digital times when the Guide to Reference Books was called Winchell.⁶ As a young librarian I conscientiously reviewed new editions of reference resources and annotated my copy of Winchell until the next edition was released—a rather big event in the librarian calendars of the last century. Since 2000 the Guide has only been published online.⁷ Yet the special expertise of librarians honed by our deep understanding

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KEYWORDS: Crowdsourcing; Digital natives; Florida libraries; Gender gap; Human rights; Information-seeking behavior; Information literacy; Knowledge management; Librarian biography; Librarians as Wikipedians; Library education; Library history; University of South Florida, School of Information; Wikipedia.
of the reference books annotated in Winchell (later Sheehy, then Balay, now Kieft) and honored in yearly reviews may give us false confidence that our expertise is widely understood and appreciated. In the 21st century these skills make little difference unless we connect them to the world’s largest and most used reference tool—Wikipedia.

Academic bias against Wikipedia was discussed in 2007 at Inside Higher Education as Middlebury college history professors banned its use, although the columnist points out that an analysis of the accuracy of Wikipedia for The Journal of American History found that in many entries, Wikipedia was as accurate or more accurate than more traditional encyclopedias. Now seven years old, the 161 comments attached to the column illuminate librarian and faculty opinions heavily critical of Wikipedia as a source.

In a 2010 study of Wikipedia use in higher education Head and Eisenberg point out: “Far more students, than not, used Wikipedia….Reasons for using Wikipedia were diverse: Wikipedia provided students with a summary about a topic, the meaning of related terms, and also got students started on their research and offered a usable interface.” As our students are increasingly digital natives, we can expect them to be more open to crowdsourced technologies like Wikipedia.

The Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries is in the revision process at the time of this writing (May 2014). It defines information literacy:
Information literacy combines a repertoire of abilities, practices, and dispositions focused on expanding one’s understanding of the information ecosystem, with the proficiencies of finding, using and analyzing information, scholarship, and data to answer questions, develop new ones, and create new knowledge, through ethical participation in communities of learning and scholarship.\textsuperscript{12}

This definition of information literacy certainly provides a rationale for using Wikipedia, but \textit{The Framework} indicates no strong recognition of the growing importance of Wikipedia as a source. This is a missed opportunity. Again, Wikipedia is the most used reference resource in the world.

\textbf{“Wikipedia and Knowledge Management:” the Courses}

During 2013-2014 I developed a new course, “Wikipedia and Knowledge Management,” and reorganized two other courses, “History of Books and Libraries,” and “Librarians and Human Rights” with large portions of assignments to be done in Wikipedia. I decided that students could apply critical thinking skills to enhance articles in Wikipedia and at the same time work to increase the amount of information about libraries and librarianship at the site. Since my classes are 60 percent women it also seemed to me that teaching more women to edit in Wikipedia would be a way I could help in a small way to address the gender gap among Wikipedia editors.\textsuperscript{13} I live by the question asked by Eleanor Roosevelt, ‘Where do human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination.’\textsuperscript{14} A class is a good small place.

In this article I provide a summary of the work done by students enrolled in these classes at the University of South Florida, School of Information, a program accredited by the American Library Association.\textsuperscript{15} Students were extraordinarily creative and without limits as they went through tutorials and became proficient at editing.\textsuperscript{16} The outcome of the classes was that enrolled students are now creative contributors, skilled editors, and managers of content in Wikipedia. They are both librarians AND Wikipedians.

To demonstrate the scope of work I provide examples from the three classes. These examples are intended to demonstrate the range of scholarship and creativity that graduate students accomplished as editors. Clearly, these are examples of solid work on which others can build and expand. Crowdsourcing by librarians is a strategy for extending our contributions to knowledge and especially to topics relating to books and libraries.
LIS Course: “Wikipedia and Knowledge Management.”

A geographical, sociological and chronological overview of knowledge management beginning with the printed encyclopedia. How Wikipedia came about and how a virtual army of volunteers crowd-sourced a user-built encyclopedia of over 4 million articles. Class activities will include editing, writing and organizing knowledge to be included in Wikipedia.¹⁷

**Biographical contributions**

Out of the gate one student added a new entry on *The Librarian* (Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s painting).

The Librarian (Giuseppe Arcimboldo)

Another student observed: “Wikipedia’s list of librarians was looking male dominated and Eurocentric so I added some notable female and international librarians. While I was glad to see that so many had Wikipedia pages, I thought it was important they be included in an overall view.” By including a few examples of this student’s work taken from the “history” tab of each page we can see how this was accomplished (see endnote 17).¹⁸

For the human rights class a new entry was written for Clara Breed a librarian in San Diego, California, remembered chiefly for her support for Japanese American children during World War II. This entry was featured in...
the 2/28/14 DYK section\(^{19}\) and had over 8,137 visits in between time of creation and March, 2014. It was one of the top visited pages in March 2014. The user page of petercannon\(^{20}\) is a resource to review this process. Additionally, here is a screenshot:

Below is a list of over 40 biographies added during the three classes. Those with a + symbol were new entries. Others were extant entries that were expanded and edited. Because Wikipedia is not in alphabetical order but is an openly searchable database I have listed biographies the way they appear on their Wikipedia pages. Some students included new images with their reports and a few examples are provided. Some wrote biographies of librarians whose careers had a focus on human rights. Some looked to the history of the discipline to add notable librarians and book people.

Ainsworth Rand Spofford
Alice S. Tyler
Alois Senefelder
Ana Rosa Núñez
Anne Jarvis
+Beatrice Winser
Charles Ammi Cutter
+Clara Breed
Clara Whitehill Hunt
Caroline Hewins
Eliza Atkins Gleason
Eliza Farnham
+Emily Wheelock Reed
+Francis R. St. John
+Fred C. Cole
Garth Williams

Hâfiz Osman
Hedwig Anuar
+Helen Marot
Henrietta M. Smith
James Logan
+Jane Walker Burleson
José Toribio Medina
+Joseph Henry Reason
+Josephus Nelson Larned
Justin Winsor
+Juliette Hampton Morgan
Li Dazhao
Louise Noëlle Malclès
+Maria Chavez-Hernandez
+Maria Luisa Monteiro da Cunha
Marianne Scott
Helen Marot was a Progressive librarian and Labor Movement activist

Melvil Dewey
+Patricia Swift Blalock
+Olinta Ariosa Morales
+Randolph Greenfield Adams
S. R. Ranganathan
Sadie Peterson Delaney

Samuel Gompers
+Shen Zhurong
+Tony Pizzo
Thomas Bray
William Frederick Poole
+Winarti Partaningrat

Winarti Partaningrat. Indonesian leader in the creation of a special library networking system

100 of the Most Important 20th Century Leaders in the United States

And, as a tour de force, one student (already a well-established Wikipedian—the legendary Gamaliel) decided to edit and update entries for librarians listed in American Libraries as “100 of the Most Important Leaders We Had in the 20th Century.” He went through the list and looked for basic things to improve: categories, citations, redirects, dates of birth/death, etc. For most leaders listed below additions and edits were made to improve and enhance their entry.
Mary Eileen Ahern
Alexander Allain
(intellectual freedom advocate)
May Hill Arbuthnot
Lester E. Asheim
Hugh Atkinson
Augusta Baker
William J. Barrow
Mildred Leona Batchelder
John Shaw Billings
William Warner Bishop
Henry Bliss
Sarah Bogle
Richard Rogers Bowker
William Howard Brett
Pierce Butler
Andrew Carnegie (not a librarian)
Leon Carnovsky
Verner Warren Clapp
David Horace Clift
Fred C. Cole
George Watson Cole
Robert B. Craneberger
Arthur Curley
John Cotton Dana
Sadie Peterson Delaney
Melvil Dewey
William S. Dix
Robert B. Downs
Paul Dunkin
Linda Eastman
Margaret A. Edwards
Charles Evans
Luther Evans
Virginia Proctor Powell Florence
Henry Clay Folger (book collector)
Herman H. Fussler
Loleta Fyan
Mary Gaver
Rudolph H. Gjelsness
Fred Glazer
Margaret Hayes Grazier
Emerson Greenaway
James Christian Meinich Hanson
Adelaide R. Hasse
Frances E. Henne
Caroline M. Hewins
Carleton B. Joeckel
Virginia Lacy Jones
Frederick Paul Keppel
(Carnegie Foundation)
Harry Miller Lydenberg
Stephen McCarthy
Archibald MacLeish
Margaret Mann
Charles Martel
Allie Beth Martin
Frederic G. Melcher (bookman)
Keyes D. Metcalf
Carl H. Milam
Sydney B. Mitchell
William Andrew Moffett
Foster E. Mohrhardt
Anne Carroll Moore
Bessie Boehm Moore
(trustee leader)
Everett T. Moore
Isabel Gilbert Mudge
L. Ouincy Mumford
Ralph Munn
Margaret Norton
Paul Peter Evans
Effie Louise Power
Herbert Putnam
Joseph Henry Reason
Ernest C. Richardson
Arthur Fremont Rider
Frank Bradway Rogers
Charlemae Rollins
Francis R. St. John
Frances Clarke Sayers
Marvin Scilken
Margaret C. Scoggin
Minnie Earl Sears
To get an idea of the kinds of changes made to these entries by Gamaliel a few examples are provided in the endnotes.24

**Library Associations**

Library associations are not well represented in Wikipedia and adding and editing them could be a major focus for librarians who become Wikipedians.25 So much work to support intellectual freedom and outreach takes place in librarian associations that is documented haphazardly on websites of various degrees of currency. There is much support for students by hundreds of librarians in their associations raising funds for scholarships or awards that encourage research: The Progressive Librarian Guild’s Braverman Award, for example.26 Having Wikipedia entries for library associations enhances the visibility of library and information work. Students added new entries and expanded extant ones. The list of library associations on which class members worked to update links is a starting point for additional article creation and editing.27

American Association of Law Libraries
+Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries
Association of Research Libraries
Bibliographical Society of America
+Florida Library Association
+Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (American Library Association)
Library Association of Ireland
Southeastern Library Association
+Tampa Bay Library Consortium
+Virginia Library Association
Young Adult Library Services Association
Library Updates or New Entries (+) United States

Another group of entries on which students worked were devoted to a variety of U.S. libraries and related topics. Once again those proceeded by a + were new to Wikipedia. Other topics were expanded.

The classes felt that general library information was lacking for many locations and students were especially conscientious adding photographs, location data and history for many libraries. Wikipedia entries on Florida counties were inconsistent in the inclusion of library system information. Student Dgiguere89 did as stunning amount of work adding library information to county entries. A few examples indicate the scope of her work. Though Florida libraries were the majority of the entries, some in other states were included.

African-American Research Library and Cultural Center, Broward County, Florida

Anton Brees Carillon Library (FL)  
+Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History (GA)  
Boca Raton Public Library (FL)  
Bradenton Carnegie Library (FL)  
Carnegie Library  
Broward County. African-American Research Library and Cultural Center (FL)
A great deal of work was done adding information to national library entries. However, one class member, Brooksky, who tried to add information about the National Library of Pakistan was unable to do so. The individual watching the site—“Smsarmad” used the ruse of copyright violation to delete information that was added. Having reviewed the work I know it was not copied and was information that had been documented with notes from secondary sources. When Brooksky met Smsarmad’s demands the changes were still deleted.
Inexplicably the higher authority agreed that the sources should be deleted. I could only surmise that individuals who become conversant in the Wikipedia community on certain topic have created levels of authority that can overturn well intentioned and accurate information on rare occasions. To overturn this would take much more editing focus than was available to this class. We did not have difficulties with any other national library. It is likely best to be aware that this sort of activity can go on, can be discouraging, but is not typical. It would be a leap to suggest that there is a cultural bias against women editing the National Library of Pakistan site, but it could be an aspect of the “Malala effect.” Interested readers may want to review the “Talk” pages for this library to see how issues might be contested.

Listed below are national library entries that were edited by students in the classes.

Albania  
Algeria  
Angola  
Azerbaijan  
Belarus  
Botswana  
Brazil  
Burkina Faso  
Burundi  
Cambodia  
Cape Verde

Costa Rica  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Ethiopia  
Germany  
Iran  
Norway  
Portugal  
South Africa  
Turkey  
Ukraine  
Uruguay

And a few additional non-U.S. entries demonstrate the range of library and manuscript entries that can be expanded.

List of libraries in the ancient world
Cotton library  
Dresden Codex  
+Gazi Husrev-beg Library  
Herzog August Library  
Library of Ashurbanipal  
Library of Celsus  
Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine

**Human Rights and Librarianship**

Human rights topics or libraries with a focus on human rights such as the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History were added. Librarians with a notable commitment to human rights are listed
Dresden Codes. A pre-Columbian Maya book of the eleventh or twelfth century of the Yucatecan Maya in Chichén Itzá. This Maya codex is believed to be a copy of an original text of some three or four hundred years earlier. It is the oldest book written in the Americas known to historians in the biographical section intermingled with all biographical contributions, for who can not say that all library work contributes to human development?

The strongest work done in the class on behalf of human rights was a three person collaboration that extensively revised the Wikipedia entry, “Librarianship and human rights in the United States.” The article now opens with this powerful statement:

Librarians, both individually and collectively, have a long history of engagement with human rights issues as they pertain to libraries and the communities they serve: against censorship and discrimination; and in support of the rights of immigrants, cultural minorities, poor people, the homeless and unemployed, people with disabilities, children and young adults, the LGBT community, older adults, those who are illiterate, and the imprisoned. Librarians also protect human rights by developing
diverse collections, programs and services; promoting literacy; and preserving cultural and historical records.\textsuperscript{32}

Listed below are human rights Wikipedia entries created or edited addressed by students in the class.

![Book burning in Chile following the 1973 coup that installed the Pinochet regime in Chile](image)

Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse
+Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History (GA)
Bookburning
Broward County. African-American Research Library and Cultural Center (FL)
Effect of Hurricane Katrina on Tulane University (added information on damage to library)
Equality Florida
Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.
Freedom Summer
Human Rights Watch
Individuals and groups assisting Jews during the Holocaust
Intellectual freedom
Lesbian and Gay Equality Project
Librarians Without Borders
Librarianship and human rights in the United States
+Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition Against Censorship
Prison Library
Progressive Librarians Guild
Tampa International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
UN Women
Universal Declaration of Human Rights
World Health Organization
Women’s suffrage in the United States
Victory for the Slain (anti-war poem)

Other Editing Examples

The classes were expansive and a number of interesting edits on library or book-related topics were also submitted as weekly assignments. Some of these are listed below.

Oscar Hijuelos, appears at Miami Book Fair International, 1993

As We May Think
Ask a Librarian
Bibliomania
Blanket order
Bok Tower Gardens
Book curse
Bookmobile

Bookselling
Bookworm
Carilda Oliver Labra
Chapbook
Digital rights management
Education for librarianship
Faceted classification
A few examples of student comments at the end of the course indicate the kind of reception this class received:

- I plan to continue editing and creating articles for Wikipedia and part of that plan will carry over to whatever place of employment I have after graduation. I’ve put my wiki editing skills on my CV and it’s in my portfolio of things I’ve worked on or created during my time in grad school. I think that integrating special collections holdings into Wikipedia is something that we, as archivists, should consider.

- As I began to learn about Wikipedia, I realized its importance, not only from a conceptual standpoint but also as a source of knowledge. Whether or not academia frowns on it, people use Wikipedia. For most of the population, who cannot afford subscription databases nor have the necessary research skills, it is a primary access point. This resulted in me questioning my role as a librarian. After all, isn’t it my responsibility to ensure that all people have access to the same quality of information? Beginning the editing process was not easy, the syntax was confusing, there was little instructional material and it was difficult to find a community. Without this class, I’m not sure that I would have stayed with it. However, as I kept working on Wikipedia, I began to respect it in a way that I didn’t expect. The internal process of quality control, the sheer amount of time and energy spent by volunteers and the quality of research were actually quite amazing.

- I see Wikipedia as integral part of the web, people trust Wikipedia, they use Wikipedia and no matter what problems it may run into I do not think that it is going to change. I know that I will continue to edit Wikipedia.

- This class was simply amazing. Through intense discussion of the social history of knowledge management, the class learned a great deal about how history, politics, culture and other external factors directly impact the methods of knowledge production and maintenance. The sections we covered on Wikipedia were informative and helpful. Conducting weekly edits helped us as students to get in and really see what Wikipedia does, how it is done, and how it can impact those who frequently use this internet website. The information that I have learned from this class will be of great use to me in the future, and I have every plan to continue on as an editor for Wikipedia in the years to come. The importance of accurate information from an encyclopedia cannot be stressed enough, and with a resource like Wikipedia, librarians should be helping to create better information.
source through our knowledge of research, proper citation and neutrality of topics.

The point of this rather extensive review of work done in the three classes I taught in 2013-2014 is to offer a challenge to teachers of librarians and to librarians as information literacy instructors. The challenge is that they engage in editing in Wikipedia—the world’s most used reference source.

If not us, who?

The Future of Librarianship and Wikipedia

Cultural organizations have begun to hire Wikipedians. The National Library of Scotland hired a full-time Wikipedian in 2013 whose duties involve using the library’s collections to update the online user-led encyclopaedia and teaching staff and the public how to add to the site. The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, was the first presidential library in the United States to have a “Wikipedian in residence” on its staff. Michael Barera, a master’s student at Michigan’s School of Information, was charged with increasing and enhancing the library’s presence on Wikipedia in 2013. The University of California Berkeley American Cultures program has hired Kevin Gorman as the first Wikipedian-in-Residence at a U.S. university. Houghton Library at Harvard is seeking a Wikipedian to help make its collections as accessible as possible.

Wikipedia is increasingly a topic of academic study. For example Fullerton and Ettema’s analysis of “talk pages” in which discussions of article creation are recorded or Joorabchi and Mahdi’s study of automatic subject indexing of library records with Wikipedia concepts. For me a very true, smart and pragmatic approach to using Wikipedia in teaching information literacy was detailed by Cate Calhoun in College and Research Library News:

Wikipedia can act as a bridge to help them [undergraduates] become familiar with library resources and a new way to research they may have never learned in high school. Wikipedia continues to increase in popularity, and it is likely that students will continue to use it. Scholars, educators, and librarians should not shun it, but rather embrace it and make it work within a structure of information literacy while furthering students’ education.

There are indicators that the convergence of the work of Librarian and Wikipedian is gaining more traction. Brian Kelly, Innovation Advocate at Cetis, the Centre for Educational Technology, Interoperability and Standards based at the University of Bolton, has given a number of talks on Wikipedia
and summarized developments in use of Wikipedia in higher education at the EduWiki Serbia conference held in Belgrade in March 2014. He has supported Wikipedia training events and edit-a-thons including session at the LILAC 2014 information literacy conference.

There are initiatives in the Wikipedia community to expand librarian involvement. “Wikipedia Loves Libraries” is a general initiative for improved Wikimedia engagement with libraries (and archives), and more concretely an annual campaign of wiki-workshops and edit-a-thons at libraries around Open Access Week in October/November. Events for each year can be viewed at the Wikipedia Loves Libraries Portal.

Wikipedia is a democratic crowdsourced reference tool that needs a more inclusive cadre of editors—more women (only about 12% of contributors are women) and more people from diverse backgrounds. Managing knowledge, preserving knowledge, and sharing knowledge is central to the work of a librarian. Wikipedia as a resource is covered by the first point in the Library Bill of Rights: “Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.” And use of Wikipedia is also covered by the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association: “We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.”

Given that mastery of Wikipedia is simply an extension of the librarian’s skill set from scrolls, to codices, to digital collection, isn’t it time that the page “Wikipedian Librarians” adds thousands?

NOTES


18. The history tab allows readers to view the editors of the article and the changes that have been made. Listed here are a few of the changes made to include women and librarians from a more diverse set of backgrounds to the “list of librarians.” User:Mcgowanlianna https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Mcgowanlianna Accessed May 26, 2014.

18:04, 6 November 2013 (diff | hist) List of librarians [(Margaret Scoggin) (current) 18:01, 6 November 2013 (diff | hist) . . (+27) . . . List of librarians [(Frances Clarke Sayers)

17:54, 6 November 2013 (diff | hist) . . (+24) . . . List of librarians [(Effie Louise Power)
The history tab allows readers to view the editors of the article and the changes that have been made. Listed here are a few of the changes made from the list of 100 library leaders of the 20th century.


