What’s Up With Wikipedia?
A Pro and Con Discussion

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Abstract
This session will take a look "behind the scenes" at one of the most popular web sites. Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia written and maintained by its users. Many high school and college students use it as their main destination when doing research. This program will reveal some of the problems and issues of using Wikipedia as a research tool.
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A Stand Against Wikipedia

As Wikipedia has become more and more popular with students, some professors have become increasingly concerned about the online, reader-produced encyclopedia.

While plenty of professors have complained about the lack of accuracy or completeness of entries, and some have discouraged or tried to bar students from using it, the history department at Middlebury College is trying to take a stronger, collective stand. It voted this month to bar students from citing the Web site as a source in papers or other academic work. All faculty members will be telling students about the policy and explaining why material on Wikipedia — while convenient — may not be trustworthy.

“As educators, we are in the business of reducing the dissemination of misinformation,” said Don Wyatt, chair of the department. “Even though Wikipedia may have some value, particularly from the value of leading students to credible sources, it is not itself an appropriate source for citation,” he said.

The department made what Wyatt termed a consensus decision on the issue after discussing problems professors were seeing as students cited incorrect information from Wikipedia in papers and on tests. In one instance, Wyatt said, a professor noticed several students offering the same incorrect information, from Wikipedia.
Wikipedia in the News

Professors Should Embrace Wikipedia

By Mark A. Wilson

When the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, appeared in 2001, educators, especially college professors, were appalled. The Internet was already an apparently limitless source of nonsense for their students to eagerly consume — now there was a website with the appearance of legitimacy and a dead-easy interface that would complete the seduction until all sense of fact, fiction, myth and propaganda blended into a popular culture of pseudointelligence masking the barest ignorance. An Inside Higher Ed article just last year on Wikipedia use in the academy drew a huge and passionate response; much of it negative.

Now the English version of Wikipedia has over 2 million articles, and it has been translated into over 250 languages. It has become so massive that you can type virtually any noun into a search engine and the first link will be to a Wikipedia page. After seven years and this exponential growth, Wikipedia can still be edited by anyone at any time. A generation of students was warned away from this information siren, but we know as professors that it is the first place they go to when doing research. Look up an unfamiliar term from lecture, or find something disturbing to ask about during the next lecture. In fact, we learned too that Wikipedia is indeed the most

Wikipedia in the News

What to Do With Wikipedia

By William Badke, Trinity Western University

If you want to get five opinions from four information professionals, just mention Wikipedia. Often banned by professors, panned by traditional reference book publishers, and embraced by just about everyone else, Wikipedia marches on like a great beast, growing larger and more commanding every day. With no paid editors and written by almost anyone, it shouldn’t have succeeded, but it has. In fact, it’s now emerged as the No. 1 go-to information source in the world. It’s used not only by the great unwashed but also by many educated people as well. "ONLINE" reported on the Pew Internet & American Life Project’s findings that 10% of the American population regularly consult Wikipedia (July/August 2007, pp. 6).

Admit it—you use Wikipedia too. Someone comes to you wanting to know how to find some good stuff on quantum physics, so you sneak a peak at the relevant Wikipedia article just so you won’t sound stupid to your patron. Or someone queries, “What year did George Washington die?” and you could look it up in Oxford Reference, but you don’t. I mean, even Wikipedia couldn’t get the date of George Washington’s death date wrong, could it?

Maybe the newer, supposedly more reliable Citizendum (http://en.citizendum.org) will provide a better alternative, but the standards for Citizendum article production are not much higher than those for Wikipedia. Moreover, Wikipedia remains the online encyclopedia of choice for users.

Some Just Don’t Like It

There are detractors. I know of any number of professors who will not allow a Wikipedia article to appear in a student’s research paper. Wikipedia is labeled as shallow, unreliable, sometimes slanderous, and too often dead wrong. On a more philosophical note, Wikipedia is viewed as the child of our postmodern age in which “truth” is measured by how many people believe something.

The satirist Stephen Colbert introduced the term "Wikiality" (truth by consensus) to poke fun at the concept that if enough people support a Wikipedia statement it becomes true (The Colbert Report, July 30, 2006; www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.html?ml_video=72347). This is closely related to another term Colbert created: "truthiness" (The Colbert Report, Oct. 17, 2005; www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.html?ml_video=24039). Researchers at the University of California at Santa Cruz have created software that uses the measures of age of an entry and number of edits to gauge reliability of articles (the code was released on Dec. 14, 2007). But this, of course, only determines level of consensus (http://trust.csc.ucsc.edu).

Which begs the question: If Wikipedia is so bad that we caution our students not to use it for academic work, how can it be so good that much of what you need to know is found there?
How an article is published on Wikipedia

Create Account

Create Account

Login Successful!

Welcome to Wikipedia, **Klaconference2008**!
Your user account has been created.
Anyone Can Edit

Welcome to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit. 1,784,886 articles in English.

Today's featured article

Japan is an island nation in East Asia. Located in the Pacific Ocean, it lies to the east of China, Korea, and Russia, stretching from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north to the East China Sea in the south. Japan's capital and largest city is Tokyo. Japan comprises over three thousand islands, the largest of which are Honshū, Hokkaidō, Kyūshū and Shikoku. Most of the islands are mountainous, many volcanic; for example, Japan's highest peak, Mount Fuji, is a volcano. Japan is the world's third largest economy.

In the news

- The death toll from violence associated with the general election in the Philippines reaches 126.
- At least one million people gather in Izmir for the fifth mass rally (pictured) to demand that Turkey remain a secular state.
- Afghan officials report the death of Mullah Dadullah, a
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Comparison of Free Encyclopedias

- A look at an article in Wikipedia
- Encarta
- Columbia Encyclopedia
- Britannica Concise
Behind the Scenes!

- Louisville article
- Louisville article editing screen
- Louisville page edit history
- Louisville page discussion
As a result of this universal access, what are some of the Issues?

- Disagreement over content (edit wars)
- Hoaxes
- Vandalism
Some Known Hoaxes

- Upper Peninsula War
- Brahmanical See
- Brahmanical See lives on…
Examples of Vandalism

- Kentucky
- Easter Island Entry
- Seigenthaler Controversy
- Seigenthaler Controversy Cont.
Attempts to Check Authority

- [Wikilab](#) Example
- [Wikiscanner](#)
- [List of salacious edits](#) Example
- [Whois IP Address Finder](#) Result

Live in an ocean of readily available information.

Students have grown up in a digital world

- Never relied on print sources as authoritative

Wikipedia is a product of a digital world
Information Seeking Behavior

Krikkelas (1983) Information Seeking Behavior model

- “information seeking begins when someone perceives that the current state of knowledge is less than that needed to deal with some issue (or problem). The process ends when that perception no longer exists (p. 7).”

Path of least resistance
Information Literacy

Use it as an instructional tool
- Evaluating criteria for information resources
  - Accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, coverage
- Discussion tab
  - Different points of view
  - Settling scores

Appropriate starting point
- Like other encyclopedias
Evaluating Criteria

- **Accuracy** – ??
- **Authority** – none / Wisdom of Crowds
- **Objectivity** – uses “Neutral Point of View”
- **Currency** – extremely current
  - e.g. financial bailout bill
- **Coverage** – extensive
  - Over 2.5 million articles in English
  - Fort Dix attack plot
Good Enough Information

- Not GOOD Information
- FDA and Drug Approval
  - Aspirin would not be approved today
Things to Watch...

- Google Knol
- Citizendium
- New Britannica
Additional Humorous Stuff
Time Permitting

- Deletionpedia
- Wiki Dumper
- Asylum Seeker
Link To Presentation Info

www.bellarmine.edu/faculty/kpeers/wikikla/wikikla.htm

www.bellarmine.edu/faculty/kpeers/wikikla/klabib.htm

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