

Report from the Field

Working Wikipedia: A Year of Meaningful Collaboration

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Introduction

Collaboration, creative connections, crowdsourcing, teamwork—all conjure visions of people working productively together to innovate and improve output, disrupting stagnant practices while preserving quality. But collaboration can be difficult. Though essential in the workplace, it is often one of the least satisfying aspects of one’s job, not least because the burden of collaborative work is often unequally distributed across team members. Such lack of alignment within a team can hinder the outcome of a project. Essential for a stronger collaborative culture are quality in-person interactions, individual and collective accountability, goal-checking, and debriefing. But establishing such ground rules and handling miscommunication while maintaining a team that wants to keep working together require a great deal of emotional labor and test a team’s resilience. Throughout our experiences teaching students from a range of disciplines how to write for Wikipedia—perhaps the largest collaborative writing project ever—our working group has observed enhanced collaboration and critical thinking both in our students and ourselves. And through our own interdisciplinary collaboration, sharing our knowledge and experience teaching with Wikipedia at various conferences and workshops, we have come to realize that our students’ and our own enhanced collaborations were influenced by the values, principles, and policies of Wikipedia’s collaborative culture.

In March 2015, our group, “The Working Wikipedia Collaborative,” formed. We are an interdisciplinary, self-organized group with no established hierarchy, not unlike Wikipedia itself. Because we are an interdisciplinary team made up of a collections archivist (Greta Kuriger Suiter), a digital humanities librarian (Amanda Rust), and three instructors who teach writing for a variety of disciplines (Amy Carleton, Cecelia A. Musselman, and Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze), together we have a nuanced view of how Wikipedia can be improved by student contributors’ diverse interests and topics of study, and the sources they can access through their institutions’ libraries, archives, and special collections.

Our work is informed by the scholarly literature on Wikipedia and institutional archives (Combs, 2011; Snyder, 2013), on assignments that encourage critical thinking about Wikipedia as a source and site of knowledge creation (Barnhisel 2014; Calhoun, 2014; Sormunen, 2011), and on the alignment of Wikipedia's composition model with a range of multidisciplinary learning goals, including collaboration skills (e.g., Cummings, 2009; Hood, 2009; Jones, 2008; Purdy, 2009; Vetter, 2014). We all share Wikipedia's goal of freely sharing the sum of all human knowledge with everyone in the world, and we all believe that contributions from diverse perspectives are vital to reach that goal. Our discussion here, and the scholarly literature we will most deeply explore, focuses on collaboration and diversity.

Our first project was to write a proposal for an all-day workshop on how to participate in Wikipedia for the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication; once our workshop was accepted, our collaboration flourished, resulting in eighteen workshops and presentations in 2016 alone. Through monthly organizational meetings, we developed material and exercises for these additional events, including in-person Wikipedia training and editing sessions (i.e., edit-a-thons) and teaching workshops. And although we did not establish rules, policies, and guidelines that would dictate how we interacted, as we became more familiar with Wikipedia's underlying guidelines and principles we incorporated many of them into our work. As we worked together to teach students and share our work with colleagues, we came to understand a very important mode of critical thinking: collaborative critical thinking.

Looking back at the last two years, we see a clear alignment of our critical thinking with Joseph Reagle's definition of collaboration in Wikipedia, which he takes from business and technology theorist Michael Schrage: collaboration on Wikipedia is defined by the serendipitous insight that emerges when people "with complementary skills" come together "to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own" (as cited in Reagle, 2010, p. 47). Our interdisciplinary group not only brought a range of perspectives and ideas to the table, but also frequently injected projects with energy that none of us could have sustained individually. We have learned that such collaborative critical thinking, influenced as it is by Wikipedia's culture, generates impressive results. In working with Wikipedia and the Wikipedia community, our group has found the tools for productive, even happy, collaboration in scholarship, teaching, and community outreach.

This report from the field presents an overview of Wikipedia's collaborative culture and how our group drew upon its principles to teach students and present work to colleagues. It also presents the collaborative critical thinking strategies and tools we used to bring these projects to fruition. The report concludes with an exercise that we often share with workshop participants, which we hope will aid readers in reflecting upon their own collaborative goals and strategies.

Wikipedia: The Biggest Collaborative Writing Project in History

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia celebrated its 16th birthday in January 2017. By that time, the English edition of Wikipedia had over 5.3 million articles ("Wikipedia: Size comparisons," 2017); in the same month on English Wikipedia, there were about 30,000 "active" editors (those with more than 5 edits per month) and 3,500 "very active" editors, with more than one hundred edits per month ("Wikipedia: Wikipedians," 2017). To date, there is an average

of 800 new articles added to the English version of the encyclopedia daily (“Wikipedia: Modelling Wikipedia Extended Growth,” 2017).

That is an enormous amount of information generated by a very small group of people, who, it turns out, are very similar demographically. While there is some variance in survey data, a conservative estimate suggests that 80% of editors are white, college-educated men between the ages of 18 and 29. Some surveys report that demographic to be as high as 85 or 90% (“Wikipedia: Systemic Bias,” 2017). Such demographic similarity means that the content of Wikipedia is skewed, not necessarily on purpose, but through contributors’ human blind spots and the mechanisms of systemic bias (Wadewitz, 2013; Wagner, Garcia, Jadidi, & Strohmaier, 2015; Wagner, Graells-Garrido, Garcia, & Menczer, 2016). Wikipedia is an economy of attention, and when editors are all from a similar demographic, their attention tends to line up along certain axes. For example, Figure 1 shows the number of “Featured Articles” (i.e., articles voted by the Wikipedia community to be exemplary; these are featured daily on the site’s front page). This is not a full list of featured article topics on Wikipedia, but it does demonstrate the pull toward war, sports, and video games.

A primary motivation for each member of our group has been to help diversify Wikipedia’s content, to increase articles on academic topics, and to diversify editorship. We work toward these goals by organizing and hosting Wikipedia edit-a-thons with themes and curated sources that enhance and improve articles on underrepresented groups, such as “Writing Black History into Wikipedia” (Wikipedia: Meetup/Boston/WritingBlackHistory, 2017), and “Women in Politics” (Wikipedia: Meetup/Boston/Women In Politics IAP, 2017). And our classroom assignments tend to focus on academic content that typically does not receive sustained attention on Wikipedia, like environmental science, biochemistry, or the history of social justice activism in Boston.

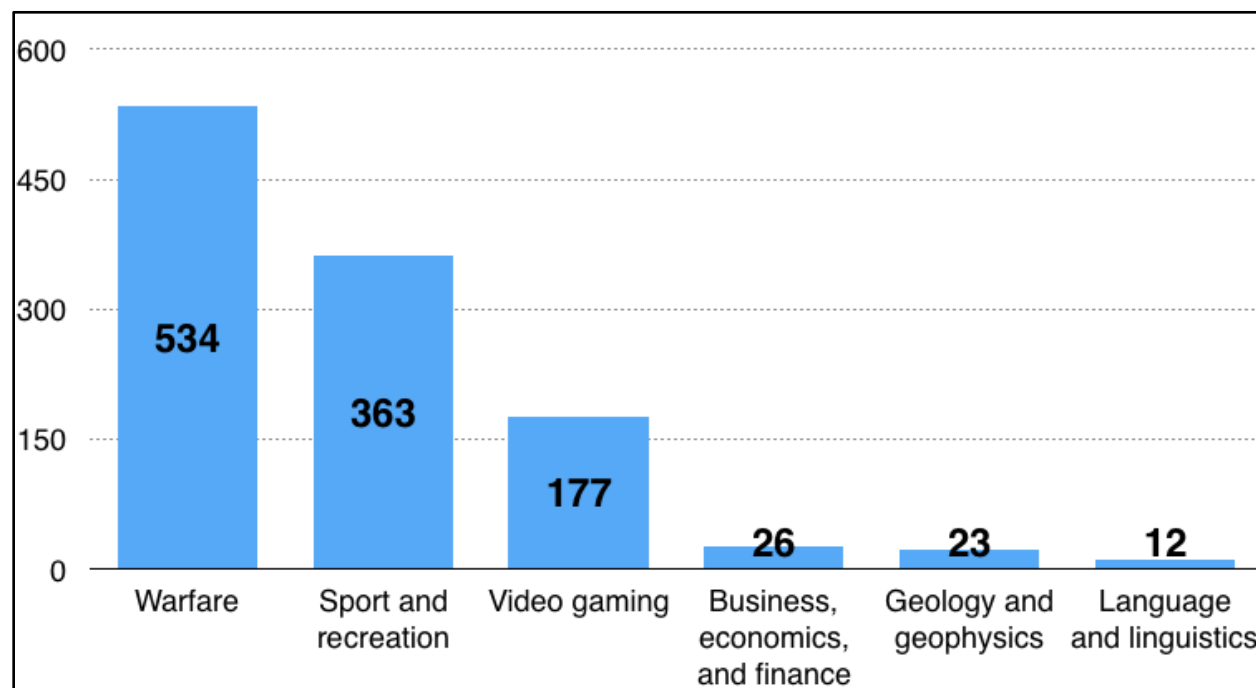


Figure 1. Distribution of “Featured Article” topics on Wikipedia, as of March 2016. Cf. Jami Mathewson, Wiki Education Foundation.

Beyond the numerous gaps in its content, Wikipedia's pedagogical richness also motivated our group. Wikipedia is so fruitful for writing studies and higher education because it is a place where student contributors practice substantive research, cultivate an awareness of audience, and produce genre-specific writing. In the last ten years, Wikipedia has attracted the attention of forward-looking academics, universities, librarians, and archivists as an opportunity to share information from valuable library and archival resources with anyone who can access the encyclopedia. And in 2010, the Wikimedia Foundation formed The Wiki Education Foundation (Wiki Ed), an active education program committed to establishing connections with universities and supporting instructors and students working on Wikipedia projects.

In college classrooms, instructors increasingly find that writing for Wikipedia teaches critical thinking through collaboration, as students must make community-sensitive decisions even before beginning to write (Bilansky, 2016; Cummings, 2009; Hood, 2009; Purdy, 2010; Vetter, 2014). Students must think about a number of issues: where the content gaps in the encyclopedia can be found; whether they can access appropriate sources of information to fill those gaps; whether the community considers this gap to be notable enough to warrant an article; and perhaps most importantly, whether they, as writers, can effectively learn the community's needs and customs and participate in a constructive way. Our own experiences teaching, and others described in writing studies, show that these Wikipedia writing assignments foster more nuanced thinking about scholarly research (including appropriate source use) and disciplinary knowledge, and the exercise of crucial collaborative critical thinking skills.

Wikipedia is a place where students must learn how to contribute in a public, collaborative space, leading to new skills in online work and communication that will make students better digital citizens. Because Wikipedia contributors form a global network, with monthly page views in the billions, as students add to its public knowledge project they connect with an audience outside the classroom. In end-of-semester reflections and course evaluations, our students report that they feel their writing for Wikipedia has more impact on their growth and development as writers, researchers, and collaborators than their traditional classroom-based assignments do. They explain that their work is less transactional (i.e., submitting an assignment in exchange for a grade) and more purposeful as they contribute to a dynamic, ongoing project with real-world function and value.

It is perhaps Wikipedia's process of writing—collaborative, continually parsed, revised—that is most relevant to writing studies. Carra Leah Hood (2007) noted that work in Wikipedia “render[s] process visible”—a point that would seem to answer John Trimbur's lament (2000) that “it is hard to think of many visual representations of the act of writing” (p. 188). By viewing an article's history, students can readily see the labor inherent in the production of knowledge. First drafts are not final drafts—and it takes time (and many hands) to bolster the quality of a contribution. In one of the earliest critical texts on Wikipedia and writing studies, *Lazy Virtues: Teaching Writing in the Age of Wikipedia*, Robert Cummings (2009) introduced six core concepts that may be reinforced through Wikipedia writing: Commons-based peer production models (introducing students to collaborative writing and revision practices); Authenticity (writing for a real and responsive audience); Professional Standards (producing work that is well-situated within a knowledge community); Epistemology (understanding the discourse community for which one is writing and how knowledge is constituted); Transition (preparing students to move from

knowledge consumers to knowledge producers); and Laziness (encouraging students to work on autonomous writing projects, grounded in their individual interests). Cummings emphasized the benefit of commons-based peer production in the writing classroom, which is defined by its collaboration model with low barriers to entry, allows for freely accessible communication, and includes work that is well suited for multiple authors. His contention, that Wikipedia represents an ideal model of collaborative content production—and as such, presents a unique opportunity for students to actively participate in a large-scale writing project where the emphasis is very much on writing process and collaborative practice—underscores the very things that we wish to teach our students.

One of the book's most revealing anecdotes—describing an interaction the author had with a skeptical colleague—also connects with our working group's own collaborative model as we work on slides, presentation notes, and even this article. In the brief reflection, Cummings described how he attempted to persuade this Wikipedia skeptic of the quality control aspects of the encyclopedia. The colleague made some purposefully inaccurate edits on a page as “proof” of the site's unreliability (after all, *anyone* can edit Wikipedia.) When Cummings went back to his office to restore the page moments later, he saw that someone had already made the corrections. Not only is this kind of paratextual—and inter-network—editorial cooperation par for the course in Wikipedia, so too is it a hallmark of our collaboration and, we argue, successful collaborative relationships in general, where participants are well-intentioned and well-equipped to provide textual intervention and feedback.

Learning to Collaborate on Wikipedia

By working together on Wikipedia we have learned much about how we work—both individually and as part of a team, both with each other and with other Wikipedians online. Working with Wikipedia has affected how we organize our individual and group efforts, how we give credit, and how we navigate different yet related concerns and values from various professional fields. Furthermore, we recognize the generativity of collaborative critical thinking—how the combination of various complementary perspectives and skills, according to Schrage, “create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on our own” (as cited in Reagle, 2011, p.47).

In the process of teaching others to contribute to Wikipedia, each of us has also learned how to think like a Wikipedian. Anyone can participate and contribute to Wikipedia, but, as is the case when entering any new community, it is important to understand the culture before enacting change. There is a wealth of information on Wikipedia about its goals and policies, where Wikipedia will tell you about itself. Familiarizing oneself with the rules of Wikipedia before editing is a prudent first step. As Dariusz Jemielniak pointed out in *Common Knowledge: An Ethnography of Wikipedia* (2014), “Conflicts take place on Wikipedia every day. Many of them are resolved by the rules” (p. 60). But it is also worth noting that “policies are not drafted like legal documents, so don't push their meaning beyond the basic point or intention” (Ayers, Matthews, & Yates, 2008, p. 371). Thus understanding and accepting not only the rules of Wikipedia but also its general hacker ethos—including sentiments such as “be bold” and “leave things better than you found them”—will aid new editors in meaningfully participating in this massive collaborative effort.

The rules of Wikipedia support what Joseph Reagle called Wikipedia's “participatory culture” (a concept originated by media theorist Henry Jenkins). Participatory cultures like

Wikipedia and our working group have “low barriers of engagement, support for creation and sharing, and some form of mentorship or socialization, and members believe that their contributions matter as they feel some degree of social connection with one another” (Reagle, 2011, p. 47). In particular, Wikipedia’s core principles of “Civility,” “Consensus,” “Be Bold,” “Assume Good Faith,” “Don’t Bite the Newbies,” and “Perfection is Not Required” support such a participatory culture, and as our group worked, they became baked into our collaboration, too (“Wikipedia: Policies and Guidelines,” 2017).

The rules of Wikipedia are deceptively simple: five pillars to rule them all, and one of those five pillars states, “Wikipedia has no firm rules” (“Wikipedia: Five pillars,” 2017; See also Figure 2). But if one digs deeper one will uncover numerous guidelines and policies that further dictate acceptable behavior and editing norms.

The fundamental principles of Wikipedia may be summarized in five “pillars”:






 <p>Wikipedia is an encyclopedia It combines many features of general and specialized encyclopedias, almanacs, and gazetteers. Wikipedia is not a soapbox, an advertising platform, a vanity press, an experiment in anarchy or democracy, an indiscriminate collection of information, or a web directory. It is not a dictionary, a newspaper, or a collection of source documents, although some of its fellow Wikimedia projects are.</p>	<p>Shortcuts: WP:SP1 WP:SP WP:PILLARS</p>
 <p>Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view We strive for articles that document and explain major points of view, giving due weight with respect to their prominence in an impartial tone. We avoid advocacy and we characterize information and issues rather than debate them. In some areas there may be just one well-recognized point of view; in others, we describe multiple points of view, presenting each accurately and in context rather than as “the truth” or “the best view”. All articles must strive for verifiable accuracy, citing reliable, authoritative sources, especially when the topic is controversial or is on living persons. Editors' personal experiences, interpretations, or opinions do not belong.</p>	<p>Shortcut: WP:SP2</p>
 <p>Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute Since all editors freely license their work to the public, no editor owns an article and any contributions can and will be mercilessly edited and redistributed. Respect copyright laws, and never plagiarize from sources. Borrowing non-free media is sometimes allowed as fair use, but strive to find free alternatives first.</p>	<p>Shortcut: WP:SP3</p>
 <p>Editors should treat each other with respect and civility Respect your fellow Wikipedians, even when you disagree. Apply Wikipedia etiquette, and don't engage in personal attacks. Seek consensus, avoid edit wars, and never disrupt Wikipedia to illustrate a point. Act in good faith, and assume good faith on the part of others. Be open and welcoming to newcomers. Should conflicts arise, discuss them calmly on the appropriate talk pages, follow dispute resolution procedures, and consider that there are 5,334,566 other articles on the English Wikipedia to improve and discuss.</p>	<p>Shortcut: WP:SP4</p>
 <p>Wikipedia has no firm rules Wikipedia has policies and guidelines, but they are not carved in stone; their content and interpretation can evolve over time. The principles and spirit matter more than literal wording, and sometimes improving Wikipedia requires making exceptions. Be bold but not reckless in updating articles. And do not agonize over making mistakes: every past version of a page is saved, so mistakes can be easily corrected.</p>	<p>Shortcut: WP:SP5</p>

Figure 2. The Five Pillars of Wikipedia comprise the framework for the Wikipedia community’s numerous policies, guidelines, principles, and philosophies (“Wikipedia:Five pillars,” 2017).

Behind the fourth pillar, “Editors should treat each other with respect and civility,” several fundamental principles can be found. “Civility” refers to a social policy that encourages respectful and civil participation, and this is the base upon which Wikipedia’s sense of social connection is built. Contributors should consciously try to avoid offending people unintentionally, and when negotiating edits with others they should try to understand their position and conclusions. Even if an editor’s actions are difficult to understand, Wikipedia’s policies encourage writers to “Strive to become the editor who can’t be baited” (“Wikipedia: Civility,” 2017).

“Take a Real-life check” is also found within the Civility policy. It encourages editors to think about how their words will affect others by taking *two* steps to assess what one is about to write (or has just written). “Take a Real-life check” encourages empathetic thinking by asking editors to consider the questions, “How would I feel if someone said that to me?” and “How would I feel if someone said that to someone I love who *cannot* just ‘brush it off?’” (“Wikipedia: Civility,” 2017). This part of the policy suggests that if you have already written something potentially insensitive then you should apologize and strike it immediately.

Civility helps to promote Wikipedia’s main model for decision-making, “Consensus,” which strives to address editor concerns through compromise and covers both content and social situations (“Wikipedia: Consensus,” 2017). Our group, also, makes its decisions by consensus. Civility is key to our consensus, but our group was fortunate to begin with a built-in foundation of social connection: Amy, Cecelia, and Rebecca worked in the same writing program for over a decade, sharing offices and supporting each other through dissertations and job transitions; Amanda and Cecelia have been collaborating on instruction with Wikipedia since 2012; and Greta, Rebecca, and Amy worked together on Wikipedia edit-a-thons, beginning in January 2015. Due to these existing social connections, it may be easier to “Assume Good Faith,” even when our communications are not carefully vetted for civility. In the digital space, however—Wikipedia included—coming to explicit consensus about this key assumption may be necessary to ease collaboration.

Wikipedia’s behavioral guideline “Assume Good Faith” helps facilitate all of the other policies; it states: “Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, assume that people who work on the project are trying to help it, not hurt it. And, if criticism is needed, discuss editors’ actions, but avoid accusing others of harmful motives without clear evidence” (“Wikipedia: Assume Good Faith,” 2017). The mental action of assuming good faith eases the emotional labor of Wikipedia, and we have found that it does the same for our group. Further, Wikipedia’s directive to “Be Bold” was instrumental for us, both within Wikipedia and in our group. This editing guideline states that one does not have to ask permission to fix something that could be improved (“Wikipedia: Be Bold,” 2017). If you believe your contribution upholds community principles and values, be bold and make it.

But being bold and learning in such a public way can be intimidating for students and instructors (us included). Wikipedia has guidelines that ease that process, as well: “Don’t Bite the Newbies” encourages more experienced editors to treat new editors with respect rather than hostility (“Wikipedia: Don’t Bite the Newbies,” 2017). And the principle “Perfection is Not Required” asks contributors to “improve pages wherever you can, and do not worry about leaving them imperfect. Preserve the value that others add, even if they ‘did it wrong’ (try to fix it rather than delete it)” (“Wikipedia: Editing Policy,” 2017). Learning about these guidelines and policies not only increased our understanding of Wikipedia but also helped facilitate our group work and our individual actions.

“Being bold” is also a balancing act, with pitfalls even for experienced users. The Wikipedia user community is a self-conscious anarchy, without official, centralized review of contributor actions, and at the same time it has developed a byzantine bureaucracy of policies and procedures to guide those actions. (While it is worth noting that there is a structure for Wikipedians to bring other Wikipedians to an official arbitration board, there is no central body responsible for monitoring all Wikipedia behavior; rather, individual Wikipedians monitor each other.) Tensions pervade this freedom to be bold, with its ethic of unfettered individuality, and the insider reliance on policies, guidelines, and procedures,

where adherence to “the rules” is used as a rhetorical weapon to win arguments. These tensions can be particularly difficult for new users to navigate.

This is particularly relevant to those working on topics involving historically underrepresented groups, where the surface discourse of “freedom of choice” obscures issues of systemic bias that arise when rules (such as notability) are seen as objective but are actually applied in inconsistent ways. The application of rules depends on individual interpretation by Wikipedia’s contributors, who can bring deep-seated assumptions about what is inherently “notable,” and who are empowered both to be bold and to use Wikipedia’s rules to immediately affect content on the encyclopedia. Contributors working on issues related to underrepresented groups can expect to be accused of activism, bias, or an agenda, as if those things do not already exist on Wikipedia. In these cases, it is doubly important that one communicate effectively, using community standards, to show the Wikipedian community, first, that changes in the status quo do not automatically equal violating policy, and second, that you are still partners in the same goal of improving the encyclopedia.

It is worth noting here that we do not suggest that the freedom of participation on Wikipedia is a net negative; rather, that it is essential for those operating in such environments to reflect on the mechanisms of systemic bias that may be operating underneath the discourse of freedom and individuality. Informed by the work of Jo Freeman on “egalitarianism in feminist collectives” (as cited in Reagle, 2012, para. 4), Joseph Reagle (2012) elegantly described this mechanism as it operates on gender bias in free culture movements: “the ideology and rhetoric of freedom and openness can . . . be used to (a) suppress concerns by labeling them as ‘censorship’ and, to (b) rationalize low female participation as simply a matter of women’s choice” (as cited in Reagle, 2012, para. 3).

How has this affected our own work? We have found the encouragement to be bold inspiring, and are able to envision ourselves more clearly as active participants, not just in collaboration but in determining *how* one should collaborate on Wikipedia. At the same time, we have directly faced situations where the discourse of “No Firm Rules” has obscured behavior that, by focusing on enforcement of strict notability guidelines, reinforces the (biased) status quo without reflection on the consequences. This has helped us, in our own work within our group, to think more about how the rules and guidelines, stated and unstated, of being “academic” might reinforce aspects of the status quo that we do not actually support.

Talk Pages: How Wikipedians Communicate

Given the complex tensions that cross-cut contribution to Wikipedia, how do editors create consensus about content and ensure that new contributions accord with rules, policies, and guidelines? Wikipedia is a transparent operation. Behind every article lies a history of negotiation (or lack thereof) that goes on between editors. These interactions are documented in multiple places, but most notably on article “talk pages.” This is where one sees discussions and debates between editors about the content of the article.

The following quotations from the Willa Cather talk page (Figure 3) provide examples of written exchanges among editors, most of whom have never met in real life, that demonstrate the tenets of “Assume Good Faith,” “Civility,” and “Be Bold.” Here we find much discussion about the content of the article, how well it is written, and what sources should be included. Because everything written on Wikipedia needs to have a source, this is an essential component to all articles, and often a popular topic of discussion. Talk-page sub-

sections on “Sexuality” and “Birthplace contradiction” demonstrate how questions about sources affect broader issues. Comments under “Sexuality” debate whether Cather’s sexuality should be discussed in the biography section or in a separate section on critical discourse among scholars. Editor Cbc_writer talks about the number of sources that agree on Cather’s sexuality and seeks consensus among other editors:

Frankly I only know of one significant Cather scholar who's really defensive about people considering Cather gay, John J. Murphy at BYU; everyone else seems pretty comfortable with the assumption that she probably or almost certainly was homosexual. But I gather people have widely varying standards about what goes into this article. Cbc_writer 03:41, 22 March 2007 (UTC) (“Talk: Willa Cather,” 2017)

Although Cbc_writer doesn’t explicitly ask for consensus, her comment “. . . I gather people have widely varying standards about what goes into this article” is a passive suggestion that consensus should decide how this issue will be resolved.



Figure 3. Screenshot from the Talk page for Wikipedia’s article on Willa Cather.

The “Birthplace contradiction” section of the talk page discusses a contradiction found within the article that has no sources. One editor points out this inaccuracy and another editor finds a source that could solve the issue. The editor then volunteers to fix the issue and provides words of encouragement by saying, “Good catch”:

In the infobox, it states she was born ‘near Winchester, Virginia, United States’, but in the Biography section, it states she was born "on a small farm in the Back Creek valley near Stephen, Minnesota." Which is it? There are no sources for either one. ...[日本穰?](#) · [投稿](#) · [Talk to Nihonjoe](#) 01:38, 7 April 2010 (UTC)

Let me see what I can find. — e. ripley\^{talk} 01:28, 8 April 2010 (UTC)

Here is a link to a description of the home she was born in, which apparently is up for sale [1]. I'll fix the text. GOod catch. — e. ripley\^{talk} 01:30, 8 April 2010 (UTC)

(“Talk: Willa Cather,” 2017)

This exchange among editors about Cather’s birthplace exemplifies a constructive way to communicate productively, with civility, and follow the policies and guidelines of Wikipedia. Here we see one editor point to a fault in the article and then suggest a way to fix it by adding a source. Another editor assists and offers one up. It demonstrates a truly collaborative moment between editors and models for us, both teachers and students, how editors can follow community values to create a collaborative environment.

In contrast, in the “Writing Career Section” of the talk page, there is an outright dismissal of the article with criticisms instead of edit proposals. An editor comments that the article is not well written, it doesn’t mention some of Cather’s most well-known works, and there are missing citations and dates. This editor calls the fourth paragraph “gibberish” and calls for its deletion. The editor then offers the damning final assessment that “this is one of the most disappointing bios in Wikipedia” (“Talk: Willa Cather,” 2017). This indictment of the article provides some constructive criticism of problems that can be solved or built upon by others, but it is couched in non-constructive and judgmental language that complains without offering fixes. The fact that it was unsigned (“—Preceding unsigned comment added by [143.165.201.47](#) [[talk](#)] 17:30, 22 February 2010 [UTC]”) indicates that the editor was not entirely willing to take responsibility for the comment. And the total lack of engagement from other editors indicates a collective dismissal of the comment.

Looking so closely at this article’s talk page allows us to understand better how editors communicate on Wikipedia, and how the policies and guidelines of “Assume Good Faith,” “Civility,” and “Be Bold” manifest within editor interactions. Close reading of talk pages in the context of the policies and guidelines also makes us more aware of how we adapt these rules to our collaborative discussions in The Working Wikipedia Collaborative, which entails communicating across several different platforms and tools.

“The Working Wikipedia Collaborative” Model: Strategies and Tools

For all of us, our shared interest in Wikipedia became woven into our established social connections, and in turn we were linked to the wider network of New England Wikipedians, the Wiki Education Foundation, and the Wikimedia Foundation. Our group network fostered

connections with these other Wikipedians, which in turn supported our group as we learned, in public, to edit Wikipedia, train others to do the same, and share our insights and experiences with a range of audiences. This outreach contributes to our goal of incrementally diversifying editorship and content of Wikipedia, and this work has helped us pay more attention to how we organize our own group work, how we give credit to the ideas of others in our group, and how we address differing but related values and concerns of our different fields.

In practice, to facilitate collaboration our group uses a combination of analog, digital, synchronous, and asynchronous methods and tools. Instrumental to our work have been the Google Suite of tools and Slack, a team communication app that allows us to embed documents from a variety of programs, including the Google Suite. We create papers and proposals both synchronously and asynchronously on Google Docs, and collaboratively create our presentations on Google Slides. We hold regular face-to-face meetings, which have been occasionally augmented by Google Hangouts, if a teammate cannot physically attend. Our early meetings often incorporated Hangouts, and we planned one ninety-minute conference panel this way, with one of our collaborators from the Wiki Education Foundation joining us remotely.

Working with the Wiki Education Foundation first exposed our group to the affordances of Slack (Figure 4); the app's chat channels often came up in conversation. And, as we experienced first-hand at WikiConference North America in October 2016, Wikipedians also use the team messaging app to augment their collaborative processes outside of Wikipedia itself. During the conference, organizers posted various notices to Slack, and the mobile app notified volunteers where various services were needed.

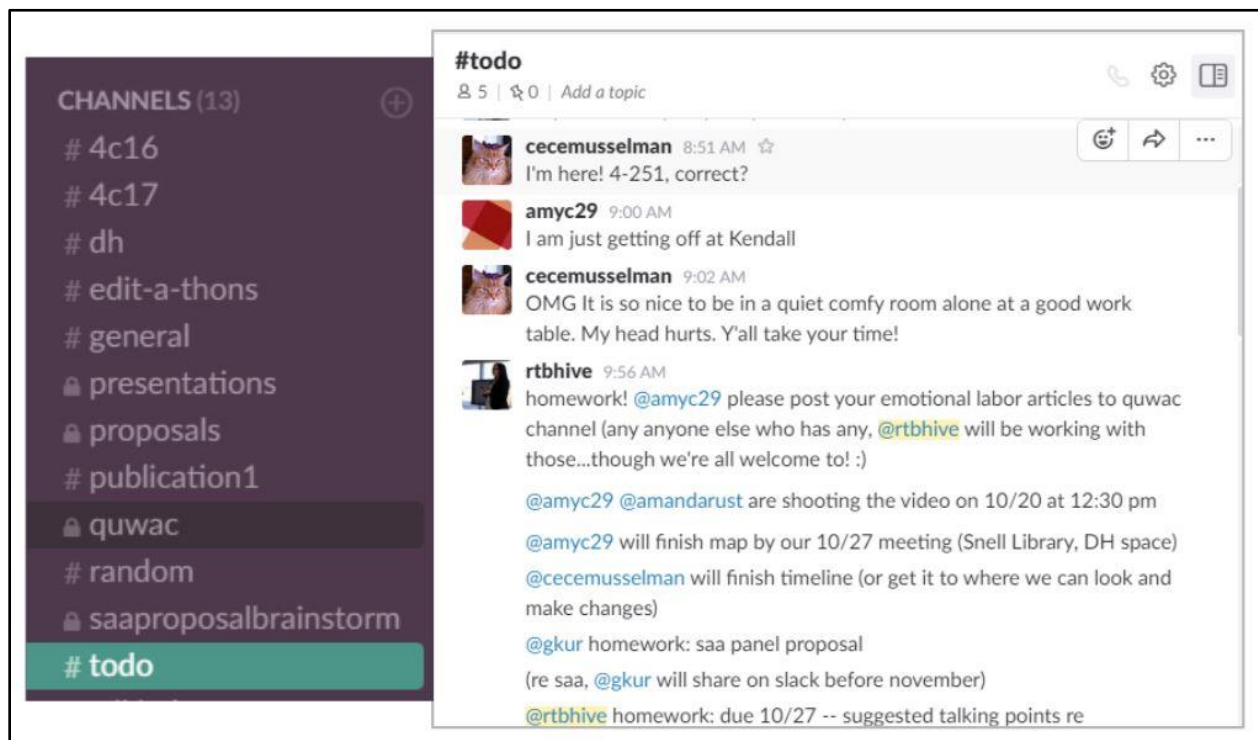


Figure 4. A screenshot of “The Working Wikipedia Collaborative” Slack discussion.

Such immediacy and ease of use supports more effective collaboration. Beyond embedding various documents and websites, Slack's multi-channel functionality allows our group to save and search all of our communications on each of our many projects, as well as our numerous proposals and presentations. Not only is it easier to gather all group communications in this one location (rather than letting them accumulate in our inboxes), but the communication interface has more in common with text messaging than email (emojis included), and thus it allows for more spontaneous sharing of ideas. We have found that stripping away the genre conventions of professional email promotes more valuable insights that develop into more dynamic results.

Potential Avenues for Readers to Enhance Collaboration

Outside of the classroom, academic librarians and teaching faculty are expected to collaborate as they stay current in their respective fields, participating in their larger disciplinary cultures. But in the process, they face several challenges. First, the labor required for individual participation in this culture can be both isolating and logistically challenging. Second, for those that wish to collaborate in a more traditional sense—that is, working in tandem with other colleagues on a shared project—finding interdisciplinary opportunities for this can be rare. Finally, for those on the tenure track, collaborative projects may be considered less valuable than individual scholarly contributions. Add to that the perceived (and very real) emotional labor of collaborative effort, and the obstacles to initiate such an endeavor can seem insurmountable.

Going forward, we will continue to explore how we productively think about Wikipedia's collaborative, participatory culture in relation to processes of academic scholarship and research. How might we bring Wikipedia's tenet of "Assume Good Faith" into explicit focus with our colleagues? How can we balance rigorous disciplinary standards and academic hierarchies with the creation of collaborative spaces where members feel free to dive in, make mistakes, and learn in front of an audience?

So far, we have constructed one tool for both the classroom and professional development situations—an exercise that asks audiences to consider collaboration a little more broadly. We initially demonstrate the tool with an example from our classroom experiences. When we create a write-for-Wikipedia assignment for a writing classroom, we collaborate on more than one level: students in the class work with each other and (we hope) with Wikipedians in interactions that are usually individual-to-individual. But we also have three groups working together: the writing instructor (and thus, the writing program's values), the students, and the Wikipedia community. These interactions are individual-to-many, and at times many-to-many. Each group has its own set of values, some explicit (e.g., a set of Writing Program Learning Goals) and some unvoiced, like the constellation of student concerns that can arise when faced with an unfamiliar assignment.

For a workshop discussion with students, writing instructors, and Wikipedians at the 2016 Wikimedia Diversity Conference, we designed the Venn diagram in Figure 5. We found it to be helpful in eliciting which values all three groups share, which values only two share, and which values may be unique to one group and, thus, represent potential tension points in the collaborative effort. The large central area of the Venn diagram is a deliberate move to encourage collaborators to focus on shared values. All three groups present at our talk reported that they were most productive and had the most fun working in the center space

of the diagram. In other words, they naturally gravitated toward what other collaborating scholars recommend: “Forge a shared mission,” (Brown, Deletic, & Wong, 2015).

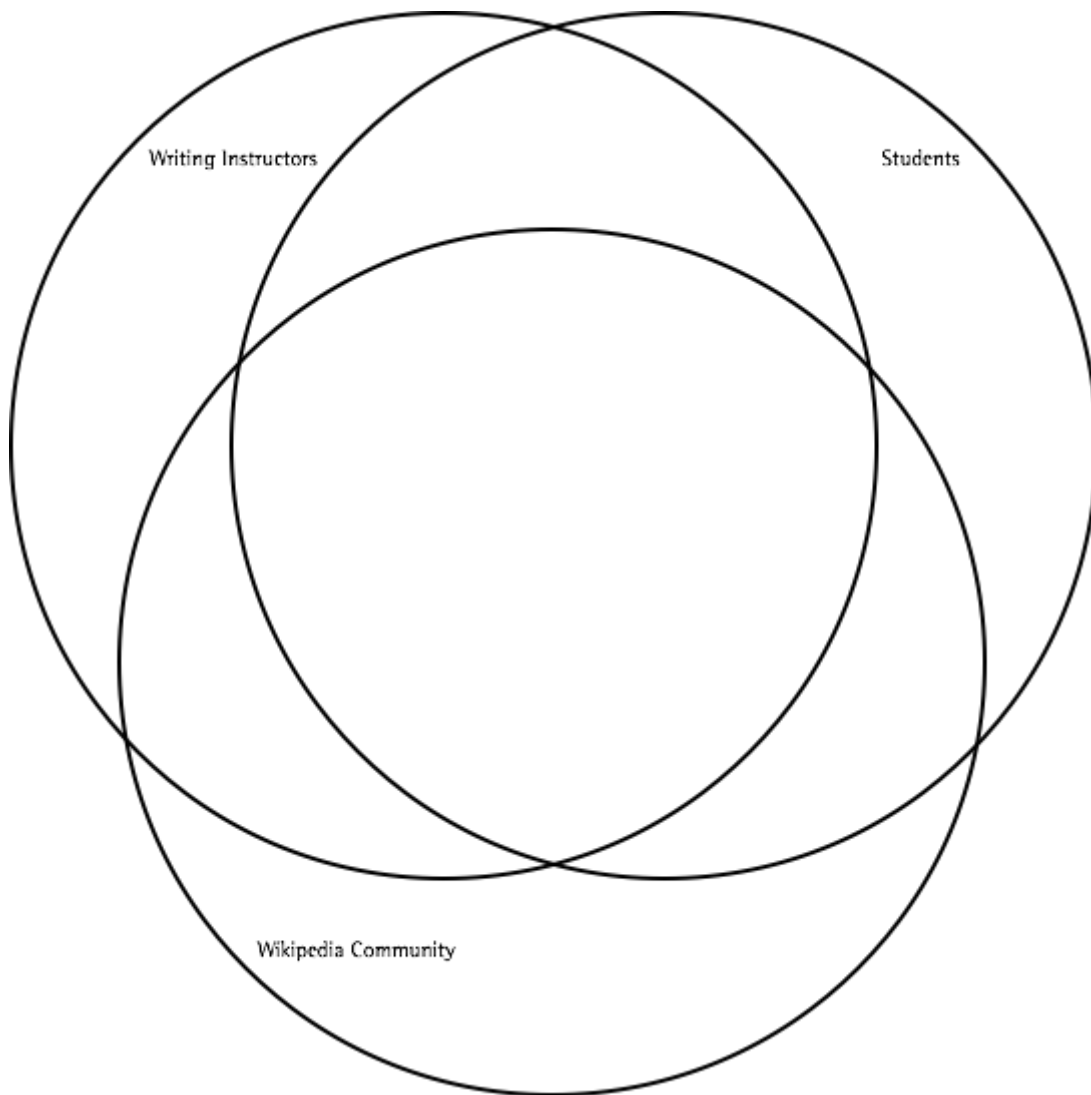


Figure 5. Rethinking Collaboration. Think about a collaboration you are involved in, and identify three main groups. These could include students, faculty, university administration, the learning goals of your courses, Wikipedia or some other academic community. Label the three circles with the three collaborators in your model, in place of the sample labels provided here. Then, with your collaborators or on your own, fill in the Venn diagram with points of intersection between these three communities, points where perhaps only two groups coincide, and places where the three communities may not be able to reconcile their values. How can working collaboratively help to work around those possible tensions?

Identifying shared values at the outset of a project gives collaborators concrete places to begin work, and identifying points of tension can help in developing strategies for working with and around those flashpoints. For example, at a recent presentation and discussion facilitated by our group, a colleague in attendance repurposed the Venn diagram to think

about shared values among three faculty governance groups: faculty senators, the faculty they represent, and deans from across the university. When we suggested he approach the Venn diagram exercise from the point of view of the Wikipedia call to assume good faith—an assumption that can be conspicuously absent among these three groups—he reported that the exercise helped him rethink his own approach to the collaboration and more constructively redirect elements of his multifaceted committee’s work. In two professional presentations, in three advanced writing-in-the-disciplines courses, and even in a project-based mechanical engineering course, the Venn diagram exercise has been a simple, easily reproducible, concrete, and flexible tool for beginning discussions among many types of collaborators.

Over the year since our first conference presentation together, the Wikipedia-informed habits of collaboration described in this report from the field have brought us dramatically increased productivity in our individual and group writing, conference presentations, on-campus events, and classroom innovations. The flexibility inherent in Wikipedia’s collaborative model and community values has allowed our own collaboration to effectively leverage experience and skills—including course and assignment design, interpersonal communication, public speaking, research, digital citizenship, community outreach, and project management—to produce, as a group, in ways that would be much more difficult as individuals. We look forward to continuing to work together developing more collaboration tools and further enhancing collaborative critical thinking habits that strengthen both teaching and research.

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