

Teaching Wikipedia: The Pedagogy and Politics of an Open Access Writing Community

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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Teaching Wikipedia: The Pedagogy and Politics of an Open Access Writing Community

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This dissertation is a study of Wikipedia's collaborative, open access culture and the opportunities for writing pedagogy it provides. Because the encyclopedia showcases productive writing processes in radically transparent ways, Wikipedia enables rich opportunities for students to observe, practice, and learn about writing. Wikipedia can help students gain social and procedural writing knowledge as well as more traditional learning outcomes related to research, writing and rhetoric. Engaging students in Wikipedia's interactive community can also lead to an increase in rhetorical knowledge as students practice negotiation and collaboration with authorities outside the "traditional" classroom. Additionally, the encyclopedia provides opportunities for cultural studies projects that involve students in the recognition of identity politics of representation and cultural marginalization as they work to rectify missing articles and topics that are underrepresented. Discussion of these opportunities provides a range of pedagogical insights into how writing instructors can approach and teach with the encyclopedia, by asking students to join the Wikipedia community and—through their writing—improve existing articles and create new ones. Such insights are supported by three information-rich classroom case studies, made available through a qualitative research design that emphasizes student and instructor experience by re-creating classroom contexts. In addition to asserting and describing the pedagogical benefits of

Wikipedia writing assignments, these classroom studies interrogate the cultural politics of access and representation that emerge when students and others try to join and write in this community. Despite its ambitions for global representation and its open access editorial ethos, Wikipedia's project is hindered by problems of homogenous editorship, troubling issues of editorial access, and gaps in coverage of already marginalized topics. Examination of how these issues manifest in the encyclopedia and speculation on their origin further demonstrate how academics (especially in the humanities) can contribute to Wikipedia. Involving students in projects to remediate problems of representation can improve the encyclopedia while diversifying its editorial demographic. Coming to a deeper understanding of the epistemological limits of the encyclopedic genre, a final goal of this dissertation, provides possible avenues for Wikipedia's future development.

DEDICATION

To my students, for making the research matter.

To all Wikipedians, for imagining a world where knowledge is free.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	3
Dedication.....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables	9
Chapter 1: Introduction: Teaching Wikipedia	10
Chapter 2: From Opportunities to Outcomes: Student Learning in Wikipedia	40
Chapter 3: Beyond the Classroom: A Model for Cross-Disciplinary Pedagogical Applications of Wikipedia	74
Chapter 4: Making the Local Global: Critical-Cultural Student Projects in Wikipedia ..	107
Chapter 5: Conclusion: Expanding the Circle of Knowledge.....	148
Appendix A: Project 1: Composing a Wikipedia Article	178
Appendix B: Project 2: Wikipedia Reflection Essay	186
Appendix C: Study 1 Survey	187
Appendix D: Study 2 Project Assignments	192
Appendix E: Study 2 Survey.....	194
Appendix F: Study 3 Process Logs.....	195
Appendix G: Study 3 Course Syllabus	196
Appendix H: Project 3 Assignment (Wikipedia Edit)	201

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Self-Reported Social Knowledge across Data Sets	58
Table 2: Comparison of Tested Wikipedia Learning Outcomes to WPA Outcomes Categories	69
Table 3: Student Perceptions of Authority Distribution	93
Table 4: Student Identifications of Significant Audiences	96
Table 5: Self-Assessed Student Motivation	98
Table 6: Problems of Representation, Appalachia in Mainstream Media	125
Table 7: Developed Understanding of Wikipedia and Cultural/Information Politics ..	137

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: TEACHING WIKIPEDIA

Until recently, most academics have seen Wikipedia, the “free encyclopedia anyone can edit,” as something to be avoided at all costs. As a crowd-sourced project that relies on volunteers for its content, the encyclopedia is in direct contrast to the kind of credibility building systems we utilize in our own research and teaching and those we have come to expect from valid reference works. In the culture of Wikipedia, the understanding is, *anyone* can contribute to an article, whether they’re qualified or not. It is unvetted and its editors are unqualified, so the argument goes. Furthermore, it is undependable and always changing. An article you cite today may be completely changed tomorrow. For these and other reasons, many researchers and instructors in a variety of fields have not only dismissed Wikipedia, but also vilified it.

In 2007, for instance, the History department at Middleburg College voted to ban Wikipedia as a source of research for students (Read). That same year, former president of the American Library Association, Michael Gorman, went on record saying “a professor who encourages the use of Wikipedia is the intellectual equivalent of a dietician who recommends a steady diet of Big Macs with everything” (Gorman, para. 11). Examples of the anxieties felt by academics when confronted with Wikipedia abound, especially in those years when it was first gaining such a strong foothold in public culture (2006-2009). Neither are these anxieties completely unfounded. The encyclopedia *does* present a number of challenges to teachers and researchers, especially in terms of how students will understand and utilize the resource in their own writing. All of this is

changing, however, as academics, researchers, and students acknowledge how much Wikipedia, and technologies like it, can contribute to our work.

Whatever challenges Wikipedia poses, outright dismissals are shortsighted, reductive, and serve to limit both research and teaching in a number of fields. By choosing to neglect and ignore a major repository of knowledge as well as the collaborative processes by which that knowledge was constructed, academics perpetuate a self-imposed isolation from digital epistemologies that they, and their students, could benefit from. This dissertation, which focuses on the ways Wikipedia can inform writing pedagogy, asserts that academics in the field of Rhetoric and Composition (as well as English Studies more broadly) need to leave behind such shortsighted dismissals in order to come to a fuller understanding of the opportunities provided by the encyclopedia for student learning. More specifically, I will argue that teaching with Wikipedia can benefit writing pedagogy in a number of ways. Because the encyclopedia itself showcases collaborative writing processes, Wikipedia provides rich opportunities for students to experience and observe writing as a social rather than individual act. It can help students gain social and procedural knowledge that will enrich their understanding of writing. Furthermore, despite its reliance on the genre of the encyclopedic article and neutral point of view (NPOV), Wikipedia can still “teach” traditional first year composition course outcomes related to research, writing and rhetoric. Because of its interactive and collaborative community, furthermore, engaging students in writing projects in Wikipedia can also lead to an increase in rhetorical knowledge as students practice negotiating with authorities outside the “traditional” classroom. Finally, the encyclopedia

provides opportunities for cultural studies projects that can engage students in the recognition of identity politics of representation and cultural marginalization as they work to rectify missing articles and topics that are underrepresented. Ultimately, this dissertation provides a range of pedagogical insights into how writing instructors can approach and teach with the encyclopedia, by asking students to join the Wikipedia community and, through their writing, improve existing articles and create new ones. Such insights are supported by three information-rich classroom case studies, made available through a qualitative research design that emphasizes student and instructor experience by re-creating classroom contexts. In addition to asserting and describing the pedagogical benefits of Wikipedia writing assignments, these classroom studies interrogate the cultural politics of access and representation that emerge when students and others try to join and write in this community. Despite its ambitions for global representation and its open access editorial ethos, Wikipedia's project is hindered by problems of homogenous editorship, troubling issues of editorial access, and gaps in coverage of already marginalized topics. Examination of how these issues manifest in the encyclopedia and speculation on their origin further demonstrate how academics (especially in the humanities) can contribute to Wikipedia. Involving students in projects to remediate problems of representation can improve the encyclopedia while diversifying its editorial demographic. Coming to a deeper understanding of the epistemological limits of the encyclopedic genre, a final goal of this dissertation, provides possible avenues for Wikipedia's future development.

In this introduction, I describe and define the wiki as a computer technology, and review the major scholarly literature in writing studies on both wikis and Wikipedia, in order to demonstrate how this dissertation engages with and contributes to the ongoing conversation on teaching with Wikipedia. Much of this conversation has been characterized by a consistent optimism as researchers share the exciting opportunities wikis and Wikipedia provide for the writing classroom. This dissertation shares in that optimism, but is also careful to be critical of the ways in which wikis and Wikipedia carry with them the ideological traces of democratic, emancipatory, and enlightenment rhetoric that might obscure the ways in which the encyclopedia perpetuates dominant social hierarchies and epistemological hegemonies. Following a brief review of the literature on wikis and Wikipedia, this introduction also introduces and explains my research methodology, a qualitative empirical model that values student voice and experience and contextualizes current scholarly research with descriptive classroom data. Research questions for the dissertation as a whole, as well as for individual chapter studies also make up this section. Finally, I summarize the main contents of this dissertation, providing an overview of each chapter and their contributions to the ongoing research on pedagogical uses of Wikipedia.

As a collaborative writing platform, the wiki (the writing technology on which Wikipedia was built) has been viewed by many in writing studies and digital rhetoric as rich with democratic opportunity, a technology that allows for a multitude of voices and displaces traditional authority structures (Barton; Garza and Hern). Others, more doubtful of this technological optimism have been cautious in presenting the ways collaborative

writing spaces construct authority (Fernheimer et al.; Lundin Wilson). Like any communicative technology, the wiki brings specific affordances and constraints to its users, ways in which it promotes certain ways of thinking and writing and prohibits others. For instance, the wiki makes it easy for non-specialist users to edit and create web content. Its “History” function, which displays any changes and revisions made to that content, allows users to view previous versions of content or even compare versions. Most wikis also typically offer a discussion or “Talk” function, where users can discuss content, suggest revisions, or explain their edits to other users.

Researchers in writing studies did not completely imagine the democratic nature of wikis. From the time of its invention by Ward Cunningham, the wiki was seen as inherently ideological. As “server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser,” the wiki is described by its creator as “encourag[ing] democratic use of the web and promot[ing] content composition by nontechnical users” (Leuf and Cunningham, 5). It comes as no surprise, then, that researchers exploring the wiki in the field of computers and writing have sought to apply such democratic potential to the writing classroom. Matthew Barton, who, with Robert Cummings, represents an early proponent for the rich potential of wikis for composition pedagogy, has argued that wikis (as well as other Web 2.0 writing technologies) are essential for the maintenance of an online critical public sphere. Wikis, for Barton, emphasize a “progressive democratic aspect of writing that is mostly ignored by the commercial press, where only the finished product is emphasized” (187).

The notion of the wiki as democratic writing technology is furthered by Susan Loudermilk Garza and Tommy Hern, who insist on its capability not only for collaboration but also for conflict negotiation: “Wikis provide a means to negotiate conflict and to build upon the positive aspects of conflict. In writing and working collaboratively with wikis, users must create and agree on the structures, forms, and methods that are necessary to accomplish their collaborative task” (“Wiki as a Collaborative Writing Tool”). Garza and Hern go beyond explorations of the collaborative affordances of the technology, to theorize how the wiki, because it allows for a social-collaborative process of writing, can actually teach and encourage a writing process in line with recent theoretical positions in composition:

The dynamic nature of wikis encourages writers to become more involved in the messiness of writing, to better understand the social nature of writing, to more easily and comfortably engage in the act of collaboration, and to produce better documents as a result. This dynamic nature also encourages writers to find stability in an end product that has been well developed. The open-system nature of wikis more aptly mirrors the dynamic nature of writing. (“Wiki and Composition Theory”)

The optimism at work in much of this literature is tempered, somewhat, by later studies which, while recognizing the capability of the wiki to encourage a recursive and extensive writing process, were more cautious in claims about the technology’s capabilities for classroom collaboration. Fernheimer et al., for instance, in a study that assessed the cross-disciplinary use of wikis for writing projects, found the automatic

praise of the technology misguided. According to their research, the wiki failed to encourage substantial collaboration among students. The wiki, they conclude, “was neither panacea nor short-cut to achieving deep collaboration [which]...is realized only over time and through continual or repeated cognitive engagement by participants” (“Conclusions”).

Rebecca Lundin Wilson also offers a more practical assessment of the classroom collaboration afforded by the technology. Wilson’s descriptions of her own experience teaching with wikis present some complications to the theoretical potentials of wikis, especially in terms of student participation. Wilson describes her first attempt to incorporate wikis into the classroom as one in which students were reading others’ work but failed to comment on those texts: “This breakdown of interaction on a wiki indicated to me that even as wikis can facilitate free conversation between students and classes, they also make visible how difficult that interaction is to foster. Wikis do not solve students’ reluctance to engage in texts” (441). Focusing particularly on the potential of the wiki to foster true collaborative authorship, Wilson was disappointed, claiming “teachers will not necessarily be able to depart completely from students’ [individualistic] expectations for a course” (442). Furthermore, Wilson finds that too much student agency and authority can present complications for classroom use of the technology. Like on other online platforms, “flaming”—inappropriate or insulting speech acts—can also become a problem (448).

As becomes obvious from the experiences of Wilson and Fernheimer et al., using the wiki in the classroom does not always result in a collaborative or democratic writing

experience for students. Their research also demonstrates how misleading the previous scholarship could be as it praised the wiki's emancipatory and democratic potential without considering how local context might limit this potential. Such context includes not only the particular wiki users and the practices they bring to the technology, but also the task these users are working on, how it is framed and staged, and what each student is responsible for. The basic characteristics of the wiki *can* support collaborative creation of web content, but making claims about its "democratic" potential must come through investigations of both the technology and the particular local cultures that grow up around that technology, especially in the classroom.

Steven Thorne's term "culture-of-use" is particularly helpful here. In order to understand a computer mediated communication (CMC) tool like the wiki, we need to understand the social community that has gathered around the tool and their particular ways of using it: the "historically sedimented characteristics that accrue to [the tool] from its everyday use" (Thorne, 40). What makes a wiki capable of fostering substantial collaboration, it would seem, has just as much to do with the culture of the social group that adopts it, as with the technology itself. This is precisely what makes Wikipedia so useful for writing pedagogy.

With over 90,000 active editors, Wikipedia has already established a particularly rich culture of collaboration, a fact that makes it even more suitable for observation and participation by student-writers. Unlike a new wiki set up for a writing course or writing project, the Wikipedia community already places significant emphasis on the values often attributed to wikis: revision, collaboration, a knowledge base that is free and accessible,

open negotiation, and a transparent process of production,. For these reasons, and simply because Wikipedia is the most successful wiki to date, the encyclopedia has become another major topic in the conversation on wiki technology and writing pedagogy.

Once considered grossly inaccurate and undependable, the encyclopedia began to gain credibility in 2005, when a study conducted by scientific journal *Nature* found Wikipedia to be only slightly less accurate than the print *Encyclopedia Britannica*. According to this research, “the average science entry in Wikipedia contained four inaccuracies; Britannica, about three” (Giles, para. 4). In 2015, in its fourteenth year, it is becoming clearer to many that, as a cultural touchstone and public source of information, Wikipedia can no longer be ignored. Today, the English edition contains nearly four and a half million articles (“Wikipedia: Size”). The entire encyclopedia, which includes editions in 287 languages (“List of Wikipedias”), includes over 30 million articles (“History of Wikipedia”). Wikipedia is the seventh most popular website on the Internet and receives “over 85 million monthly unique visitors from the US alone” (“History of Wikipedia”). The “free encyclopedia that anyone can edit,” Wikipedia is one of the most successful collaborative writing projects to date. In a little over 10 years, it appears that the encyclopedia has already come to occupy a permanent place in the public knowledge culture of the United States. It has also, in some ways, surpassed print encyclopedias, especially in terms of coverage. The 2013 edition of Wikipedia’s English competitor, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* contained approximately forty thousand articles (“Wikipedia: Encyclopedia Britannica”); Wikipedia’s English edition, as of early 2015, contains roughly 4.5 million (“Wikipedia: Size”). Beyond size comparisons, Wikipedia is also

known for its extensive coverage of pop culture and internet culture, among other topics, as well as its hypertextual, associative organization, whereby it organizes content through “wikilinks” within its own articles. Wikipedia’s use of the wiki technology further differentiates it from traditional encyclopedias.

As a successful instantiation of Web 2.0, and the power of crowd-sourced, collaborative writing, Wikipedia pushes against traditional academic practices, both pedagogical and epistemological, and urges us to rethink the hierarchical structures that govern our teaching and research. This is because the collaborative culture of Wikipedia revolves around a system of economic production known as Commons-Based Peer Production (CBPP). First coined by Yochai Benkler (375), CBPP refers to the distributed economies made available by networked systems in which participants within the system work collaboratively to achieve a goal. What distinguishes CBPP from other economic systems is its structural “heterarchy.” In the case of Wikipedia, the system is decentralized in that it “depends on very large aggregations of individuals independently scouring their information environment in search of opportunities to be creative in small or large increments” (Benkler, 375-376). Allowing participants to organize and volunteer according to their own interests further maximizes productivity and motivation. The opportunities for task organization and individual motivation offered by CBPP, as Robert Cummings has found, can be translated into the writing classroom as well.

Research focusing on what Wikipedia can offer in terms of pedagogy generally falls into two categories. First, students of writing can gain metacognitive and procedural knowledge about writing through observation of the community’s successful writing

practices (Hood; Purdy). James Purdy, in an article published in *College Composition and Communication*, argues that Wikipedia demonstrates and “supports notions of revision, collaboration, and authority valued by the field [of rhetoric and composition],” that the community “exemplifies many of the tenets of composition that the field purports to value and can, therefore, be a valuable resource for teacher-scholars” (352). Carra Leah Hood, focusing more on Wikipedia’s extensive use of article histories, furthers the notion that observation of the encyclopedia’s writing production can be useful for students, especially in terms of the rich and sustained writing processes it demonstrates. “Wikipedia delivers pedagogy,” Hood argues, “a pedagogy familiar to writers and to teachers of writing. The online encyclopedia values writing process, not to the exclusion of product, but as a respectable, long period of negotiation with words”—a negotiation that (theoretically) never stops at a fixed point (“Wikipedia in Composition,” para. 2).

The second strand in this conversation on Wikipedia and composition pedagogy revolves around a somewhat more experimental approach: asking students to join the Wikipedia community, and write for that community in order to practice and observe writing in a highly contextualized rhetorical situation. In *Lazy Virtues: Teaching Writing in the Age of Wikipedia*, Robert E. Cummings employs economic theory and analysis¹ to understand knowledge production systems of Wikipedia and apply the benefits of those systems to the composition classroom. Cummings' work theorizes six “key concepts” exemplified by Wikipedia that can be effectively applied to the composition classroom:

¹ Cummings’ economic analysis is based on Yochai Benkler’s *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*.

Commons Based Peer Production (CBPP), Authenticity, Professional Standards, Epistemology, Transition, and Laziness.

CBPP, according to Cummings, “occurs when the costs of collaboration are extremely low and the nature of the work at hand is amendable to distribution over a network” (5). The application of CBPP to the composition classroom “means maximizing the value added to collaborative projects and maximizing student autonomy...by allowing writers to select projects or topics based on their interests” (5). The value of such collaborative projects is further maximized, especially in pedagogical terms, because of the “authenticity” of the writing situations Wikipedia affords. Cummings' use of this second concept describes the genuine rhetorical situations students encounter when writing for immediate audiences in Wikipedia, audiences that “often write back” (5). These authentic writing situations also mean that students must conform to certain professional standards, Cummings' third key concept, and must follow community conventions in order to develop a credible ethos and have their work accepted. Asking students to be cognizant of these community conventions also leads to another type of awareness. The transparent and open nature of Wikipedia, which offers a unique glimpse into collaborative writing processes through its comprehensive documentation of article histories, provides students a unique opportunity to witness knowledge production. “CBPP writing assignments,” Cummings asserts, “develop epistemological awareness by asking students to participate in CBPP projects, to understand the accepted knowledge-making procedures for their project's community, and, when challenged, to reevaluate and defend their contributions according to the stated acceptable practices of that

knowledge community” (6). The pedagogy proposed by Cummings also lends itself to the type of learning college students should encounter as they attempt to transition, the fifth key concept, from “general knowledge to specific authoritative knowledge” and become authoritative contributors of specific knowledge “rather than only consuming it” (6). Finally, Cummings asserts that CBPP promotes “laziness.” A guiding metaphor for the entire work, Cummings' theoretical employment of the notion of laziness is built on the “computer coding belief that it is preferable to reuse code by copying it, rather than rewriting or authoring it anew.” Cummings is careful to move away from this strict conceptualization of laziness as “reuse” to a broader definition that “emphasizes instead that each writer should examine the project's overall needs and create his or her contributions based on an awareness of the project's needs and one's own creative desires” (6). Cummings’ use of the term laziness, in contrast to its negative connotations, describes a self-motivated writer working in concert with others to achieve a specific goal. As a reviewer writing for Wikipedia’s newsletter *The Signpost* explains, “in the hacker idiom, ‘laziness’ can be a virtue when students edit Wikipedia articles of their own choosing: it takes less work, yet produces better results, to write about topics one already knows about and cares about” (Ragesoss, para. 2).²

² While Cummings use of the term “laziness” might be an apt way to describe hacker culture (and this reviewer seems to understand that usage), it could also be misleading for students. To limit confusion, I have attempted to avoid using this term to describe student motivation in my own teaching and research.

Overall, Cummings' book-length study of applications of Wikipedia to the composition classroom represents an argument for the broader influence and pervasiveness of CBPP. Exposing students to these modes of production now will more fully prepare them for a future in which networked economies are more pervasive. Yet, because he is so attuned to economic analysis, on how economic structures can lead to writing motivation and student learning, Cummings neglects to interrogate the ways in which Commons-based Peer Production, despite its productive capability, can work against the encyclopedia's goal to collect *all* human knowledge. As a distributed economic model, CBPP de-emphasizes and de-values the place of local knowledge production and curation precisely because it depends on sharing production across chronological and geographical space. Wikipedia is, in part, so productive because its editors can share mass-produced, published secondary sources to add to the encyclopedia's coverage. However, such reliance also serves to marginalize those cultures in which print resources are less available, just as it marginalizes knowledge or subjects only available or meaningful to a limited amount of people (and, by extension, editors). This realization—that the emancipatory and “open access” rhetoric of Wikipedia might obscure some of the ways in which it actually marginalizes and omits particular knowledge sets and identities—came to me as a result of working with students in the encyclopedia, from their own experiences and struggles as they attempted to contribute to the “free encyclopedia anyone can edit.” Such research, in which students and their experience of particular pedagogies play a significant role, also characterizes the central methodological approach of this dissertation.

This methodology is best explained through an explanation of my research term “classroom study” – used to define a qualitative model of inquiry that seeks to re-create and explain classroom contexts in order to fully present a picture of both student and instructor’s experiences within specific pedagogies. Classroom studies make up the body of this dissertation, comprising chapters 1-3. Accordingly, while my research is always contextualized with relevant scholarly literature, a majority of the research for this dissertation is empirical by design, as it seeks to observe the outcomes of specific pedagogical practices. This research, which is most evident in the three classroom studies described in the next section, is typically descriptive and qualitative in nature. Descriptive research, as defined by Janice M. Lauer and J. William Asher, includes case studies, surveys, and ethnography, all methods of observation that inform the work in these chapters. Descriptive research is also characterized by the role of the researcher as an observer and interpreter of data. As Lauer and Asher explain, “researchers do not deliberately structure or control the environment from which the data are gathered” (15); rather they aim to describe the subject and draw conclusions from those descriptions.

While I define the research of this dissertation as primarily descriptive, I acknowledge that classroom research in which the instructor is also the primary investigator will always be subject to some influence on the part of the researcher. Because of this, my design strategy for classroom research does not reflect a completely naturalistic inquiry that is nonmanipulative and noncontrolling, but rather a model that is guided by emergent design flexibility and purposeful sampling. Emergent design flexibility, as defined by Michael Quinn Patton, allows for an “openness to adapting

inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change”— the very process my own research took as I gained more insight and knowledge about best pedagogical practices for Wikipedia writing projects. Furthermore, my methodological design, also employs a type of “purposeful sampling” in which I select specific cases for study that are “‘information rich’ and illuminative ‘of a particular subject.’” Such sampling, which allows me to focus on my own students and their experiences with Wikipedia writing projects, gathers “insight about the phenomenon” as it is experienced in a particular sample, rather than “empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (Patton, 40).

Chapters 1-3, because they focus on pedagogical practices, are informed by the descriptive methods of case studies and surveys that emphasize the collection of qualitative data within the context of classroom practice and student experience. A significant aim of these studies is to observe and learn from students’ perceptions and responses to the types of pedagogies afforded by Wikipedia. The emphasis of student experience, in this dissertation, is also an effort to give voice to those most affected by teaching strategies and assignments. Data collection in these chapters attempts, as much as possible, to follow the course of various writing assignments, and, furthermore, to enrich students’ writing processes. For instance, while student-participants in the first two classroom studies both completed qualitative surveys, I also collected data more strictly tied to the actual assignments they were completing: reflective essays, letters, process logs, article drafts (See Appendices A-H), many at different points in the assignment process. This kind of multi-source, multi-layered collection of data allows for rich descriptive study of the classroom experiences created by these pedagogies. Yet it is also

meant to inform the writing (instruction) of students by providing multiple process points in their work.

Because the data collected in these studies is qualitative, my method for analysis follows an interpretative process of pattern recognition and category formation that arises from what Lauer and Asher describe as “interplay between the data and the researcher’s knowledge of theory” (17). In the second classroom study (Chapter 3), which examines the opportunities provided by Wikipedia for students to gain rhetorical knowledge through their interaction with multiple audiences and authorities, for instance, my analysis of the data is informed by my understanding and use of other scholars’ research on “rhetorical knowledge” (Cummings; Penrose and Geisler). Connecting this research to the collected data, as a qualitative method of analysis, involves the process of thematic analysis, which is useful in the interpretation of open-ended responses provided by surveys and other qualitative data. In *Transforming Qualitative Information*, Richard Boyatzis describes thematic analysis as allowing for analysis of a data set through recognition of “pattern[s] found in the information...that describe and organize possible observations [and/or interpret] aspects of the phenomenon” (vii). My reliance on this method of analysis informs the major methodological approach in the classroom studies conducted for this dissertation, and further defines the descriptive-qualitative nature of this dissertation’s empirical design. It is also important to note that while Boyatzis’ definition of thematic analysis describes what appears to be a wholly inductive approach, my own research is necessarily influenced by pre-existing research questions (as well as instructor inclination and subjectivity) which inform the recognition of themes in the

data. The methodological alignment of this research acknowledges the presence of the instructor/researcher as a participant in the classroom culture of the study, whose presence will inevitably affect both collection and analysis of data. This condition admittedly limits the conclusions that can be drawn from portions of this research, yet it also enriches other elements of the dissertation that are informed by my identity as a teacher and researcher who comes to know more about the culture and practices of Wikipedia through both formal research and informal experience in the classroom. Purposeful sampling and emergent design flexibility (Patton), when combined with qualitative methods of descriptive inquiry, can ultimately paint a richer picture of the subjects being studied than could be accomplish by an investigator that does not have insider access to classroom contexts.

As becomes apparent from its methodological approach, a majority of this dissertation focuses specifically on how we can use Wikipedia to teach writing. Yet, by engaging with, examining, and coming to new understandings of the collaborative writing culture and politics of Wikipedia, this dissertation also deals with the community itself: especially its ambitious goal to represent all of human knowledge and open access, democratic ethos, and the problems of homogenous editorship and article coverage that have emerged. Beyond its emphasis on student learning, this dissertation views the community itself as a text worthy of analysis. As Richard and Cynthia Selfe acknowledged as early as 1994, computer interfaces, much like alphabetic texts, are embedded with ideological, rhetorical, and political implications (“The Politics of the Interface”). The explosion of digital technologies since then, which parallels the rapid

growth of the fields of computers and writing and digital humanities, has further highlighted their insistence that we begin to view computer interfaces as “complex political landscapes” (2). The rise of social media and participatory Web 2.0 technologies, in which Wikipedia plays a central role, are massively changing the ways we communicate, learn, and access information. In being attentive to these changes, this dissertation is open to considering larger questions concerning the impacts of digital media on “traditional” education.

As a whole, this dissertation considers the following research questions:

- How can teaching with Wikipedia, by asking students to interact and write in the community, inform and benefit composition pedagogy?
- How do students experience this type of interactive pedagogy? And what do they gain from it?
- How might Wikipedia be applied to different teaching approaches (for example, community-engagement, cultural studies, place-based pedagogies)?
- What are some of the ways Wikipedia, as a community, accomplishes its open access mission? And how does it fail to live up to this mission?
- In what ways do Wikipedia’s epistemological practices limit the production of local (regional) knowledge and representation?
- In what ways do Wikipedia’s epistemological practices limits its ability to accomplish its own goals of representing all human knowledge?
- How might issues of epistemology, access, and representation in Wikipedia be related to the teaching of writing?

This dissertation is comprised of three “classroom studies,” each conducted in the second of a sequence of general education composition courses, *Writing & Rhetoric II*, over the course of three years. These studies build on each other as the research evolves and moves toward new questions and issues. Classroom study 1 is more concerned with ensuring this type of pedagogy can accomplish learning outcomes common to composition and rhetoric, while classroom studies 2 and 3 move toward involving research partners and exploring the value of local research for Wikipedia writing projects. The evolution of these studies, and their corresponding research goals, is also a result of my own experience (as a teacher) learning about both the needs of students working on these projects as well as the culture and practices of the encyclopedia. Such a research process, as described previously, employs an emergent design flexibility that best allows for an ongoing dialogue between phenomenon, researcher, and research. The research questions below, provided for each study, further illustrate the research goals and pedagogical models of the three studies, as they evolved:

Classroom Study 1

- Can engaging students in online discourse—such as that made available by Wikipedia—fulfill traditional course competencies, as outlined by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA)?
- Does the encyclopedia actually provide opportunities, as suggested by Hood and Purdy, for students to learn about writing processes and to study and engage in writing as a social-collaborative act?
- How does the presence of online audiences influence student writing?

- How do students respond to this type of pedagogy?
- How can teachers maximize student-editor interaction in Wikipedia?

Classroom Study 2

- What can academic archivists and composition classes (both students and instructors) gain through collaborative, cross-disciplinary curriculum development that engages with Wikipedia?
- How might students' perceptions of audience and authority differ in an assignment that attempts to accomplish public goals within Wikipedia, one that incorporates a number of different audiences and collaborators?
- How can Wikipedia writing projects help students gain “rhetorical knowledge”?
- Do students identify cross-disciplinary projects like this as more or less motivating than previous English assignments?
- How do students respond to this type of cross-disciplinary pedagogy?

Classroom Study 3

- How can Wikipedia be used for critical goals of cultural studies projects that deal with identity politics and cultural representation?
- What can students learn from a project that asks them to engage with local (Appalachian) issues in order to update and expand Wikipedia's coverage on these topics?
- What do (non-Appalachian) students need to understand about identity and Appalachia in order to take on such a cultural project?
- How do students perceive, understand (or misunderstand) the problems of cultural

representation on Wikipedia?

- How might Wikipedia itself be improved by academics and students intent on dealing with problems of representation of marginalized cultural groups?
- How do students respond to this type of pedagogy?

While comprehensive answers to all of these research questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation, the main body chapters, described below, do offer a rich description of the pedagogies made available by Wikipedia, how they can specifically inform our teaching and how these types of projects should best be approached. Furthermore, as the dissertation progresses, it also offers more analysis and speculation of the ways in which Wikipedia itself might benefit from critical examinations of its editing culture, genre conventions, and epistemological practices and policies.

Chapter 1 focuses on identifying specific learning outcomes of student participation in the encyclopedia's community, and what those outcomes mean for students' understanding and practice of writing. Robert Cummings, James Purdy, and Carra Leah Hood have all made arguments that using Wikipedia to teach writing can provide opportunities for students to gain concrete knowledge about writing processes, engage with public audiences, and to experience and understand writing as a social-collaborative act. Yet, many of these claims have been made without qualitative data that recounts student experience to confirm these opportunities. Through examination of student learning perceptions gathered from survey data, the first study tests the feasibility of those claims, as it seeks to determine how much collaborative opportunity the encyclopedia actually offers, and what types of procedural knowledge they can gain by

writing for and observing the Wikipedia community. While testing the claims of Cummings, Purdy, and Hood are central to this classroom study, I also forward the argument that teaching with Wikipedia can fulfill traditional course outcomes common to general-education composition pedagogy, including outcomes related to five categories of learning outlined by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA): rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; knowledge of conventions; and composing in electronic environments. In addition to articulating a coherent set of concrete learning outcomes, Chapter 1 also reveals how the interactive potential of writing community like Wikipedia (which makes many of these learning outcomes possible), while always available for observation, is not always open or available to student/novice editors, especially if they are creating new articles or editing less notable articles that receive little web traffic. This study ultimately demonstrates that just because Wikipedia's culture is interactive and collaborative, that does not automatically imply that students will have immediate or easy access to that culture.

In the second of these classroom studies, I continue to work with the specific opportunities for learning afforded by Wikipedia, by focusing on the ways students can gain rhetorical knowledge as they practice negotiating with other Wikipedians and move away from a traditional "teacher-as-authority" classroom dynamic. This study, which involves a collaborative, cross-disciplinary relationship between a writing class and the university libraries' special collections (archives) also engages students with curators as they perform research on regional and university related issues to edit and create corresponding Wikipedia articles on those topics. This adapted pedagogical model also

attempts to maximize student interaction with Wikipedia editors and other research partners in order to demonstrate how such rich community engagement can further enhance Wikipedia projects, and the associated learning opportunities they provide.

Chapter 3 seeks to add to Robert Cummings' examination of the “transitional learning” afforded by Wikipedia. When students discover and interact with multiple authorities, outside the classroom, I argue, they are also provided the opportunity to gain “rhetorical knowledge,” an understanding of a rhetorical, constructivist model of knowledge production and the role of personal subjectivity in that process.³ In examining a pedagogical model that seeks to engage students with both the Wikipedia community *and* a local research community (curators of special collections), I explore the possibilities for community engaged learning and how that model can further expand students’ motivation and lead to increases in rhetorical knowledge, their understanding of the ways they can gain authority in their writing. Furthermore, this study answers calls from those researchers in service-learning and related fields to provide case studies for cross-disciplinary models of community involvement in writing studies.

The more structured apparatus for collaboration set up in this classroom study was, in part, a result of my own realization that students might not achieve access to the kinds of rich and interactive collaborations often promised in previous literature without conscious designing on the part of the instructor. The necessity of such design also demonstrates how Wikipedia’s community, despite some of the these previous claims

³ Rhetorical knowledge has been recognized as a “knowledge domain” essential to the understanding, practice, and transfer of writing knowledge by many in the field. See Anne Beaufort, *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*.

made by researchers about its interactive and democratic potential, is not always as accessible and productive, at least for novice editors (which students typically always are). Engaging local partners helped to create a scaffolded and supportive environment for students in this project, one that did result in an interactive experience. But it also helped me realize the value of engaging students with local research: with the social, historical, and institutional data that is abundant on their own university campus and in their own community. Furthermore, emphasizing this type of “local research” productively challenges some of the epistemological features central to Wikipedia and Commons-based Peer Production, especially verifiability and notability, a challenge that is taken up further in the third chapter.

While the first two of these classroom studies focus more exclusively on what and how students learn in projects that involve them in the Wikipedia community, the third study emphasizes a pedagogical approach that seeks to engage students in the cultural-political work of recognizing gaps of representation on Wikipedia and addressing those gaps through their own editorial work. Wikipedia’s open access mission has been hailed as inclusive and democratic—and in many ways this ethos is evident in its policies and other artifacts that speak to the encyclopedia’s culture-of-use. The encyclopedia’s ambition to “collect the sum of all human knowledge and distribute it freely to every person on the planet,” articulated by co-founder Jimmy Wales in a 2004 interview, further promotes an ethos of accessibility and universal coverage (Wales).

Yet Wikipedia has failed, in some ways, to encourage participation by editors beyond its mostly white, male editor base. It has also been criticized for its lack of

attention to the representation problem that arises because of such homogenous participation (Cohen). While most of the critical scholarship addressing these issues focuses on the encyclopedia's gender gap—its failure to represent women and women's issues—there remain significant problems in other areas of cultural representation as well. In Chapter 3, I describe a pedagogical approach that introduces students to the problematic information politics of Wikipedia while engaging them with a specific task for widening cultural representation in the encyclopedia, one that deals specifically with Appalachian identity and issues. More specifically, students working on this project improve Wikipedia's coverage of Appalachian topics by editing existing articles and creating new ones. In providing a classroom study that demonstrates this model of pedagogy, this dissertation makes the argument that Wikipedia itself can benefit from students and instructors in English-studies becoming involved and critical editors, that academics, in a sense, can “teach” Wikipedia.

My examination of the pedagogical approach detailed in Chapter 3 emphasizes how engaging students in writing projects that extend the coverage of the encyclopedia to marginalized identities and topics can accomplish critical-cultural goals. While projects like these have been attempted⁴ outside academia, there remains a significant gap in the research about what teachers of writing can accomplish with Wikipedia from a cultural studies' standpoint. This third classroom study also continues to explore the opportunities for students to engage with their local and regional communities because it focuses

⁴ See, for instance, *Eyebeam's* write-up of an Edit-a-thon project that sought to extend coverage of women artists: <https://eyebeam.org/events/art-feminism-wikipedia-edit-a-thon>.

specifically on the project of extending coverage of Appalachia in Wikipedia. Such a project deals specifically with the ways that the Appalachian region, and the identities of its inhabitants, are rhetorically and discursively constructed in American culture.

Accordingly, recent work in Appalachian studies that deals with identity stereotypes, literacy, and critical pedagogy provide a theoretical basis for the cultural project of this study. Furthermore, because it is concerned with identity politics, I contextualize this study with research that deals with issues of access and representation. While many authors extoll the community's politics of accessibility and inclusion, others are beginning to challenge the encyclopedia for the ways in which it fails to represent and encourage participation from already marginalized social and cultural groups and issues pertaining to them (Cohen; Lovink and Tkacz). As is evident from Cohen's recognition of Wikipedia's gender gap, one of the largest issues facing the encyclopedia is its lack of women editors and the systemic bias resulting from its homogenous editor base.

However, Lovink and Tkacz's anthology *Critical Point of View* offers a number of critiques of the identity politics of the encyclopedia, and how those politics limit the encyclopedia's project of accessibility and representation. In "Wiki Space: Palimpsests and the Politics of Exclusion," for instance, Mark Graham argues that Wikipedia is "characterized by uneven geographies, uneven directions, and uneven politics influencing the palimpsests of place" (271). Graham's attention to regional knowledge, although it focuses more broadly on international gaps of representation in Wikipedia, provides a useful critique of the encyclopedia's epistemological policies, which tend to devalue local

(regional) knowledge. Such devaluation, I also argue, leaves the encyclopedia with huge gaps of underrepresented (local) cultural and geographical topics.

My examination of the encyclopedia's epistemological policies and practices in Chapter 3 is expanded on in the conclusion of this dissertation, which attempts to understand Wikipedia as project that allows for a dual notion of knowledge curation. Specifically, I argue that Wikipedia is characterized by both postmodern and enlightenment ideologies. The encyclopedia is postmodern in that it is revisionary, in-flux, and open to the ways in which the technology of the wiki can transform knowledge making practices. Yet, as an encyclopedia, Wikipedia also remains tethered to enlightenment ideologies that adhere strongly to print culture and to western, ethnocentric knowledge making practices, particularly evident in its policies on verifiability, notability, and no original research.

These policies are challenged, to some extent, by the work my students performed when they engage with local knowledge and local topics, especially in their use of archival sources in the second classroom study and in their attention to cultural gaps of representation in the third study. Because of the specific knowledge-making practices that are attached to the encyclopedic genre, Wikipedia often omits or misrepresents local and marginalized knowledge. The conclusion to this dissertation speculates on this issue by exploring Wikipedia's reliance on western epistemological conventions and how those conventions limit its ability to utilize marginalized forms of knowledge production and represent marginalized cultures, identities, and geographies. I ultimately suggest that engaging with Wikipedia in the composition classroom, in addition to informing our

teaching and student learning, can serve a significant role in the continuing development and revision of Wikipedia, especially through encouragement of projects that engage local knowledge-making practices to represent local and marginalized subjects. In asking students to deal with the cultural politics of Wikipedia (as the pedagogical model outlined in Chapter 3 does), we can also encourage them to question Wikipedia's epistemology and homogenous editor base, as well as how its enlightenment goals are hindered by its own policies. In asking students to become editors of Wikipedia to help fill gaps of representation, writing teachers are also potentially helping to diversify Wikipedia's homogenous editorial base.

Ultimately, I suggest that we emphasize the elements of the encyclopedia that are more revisionary and in-flux—the “History” and “Talk” pages—as a way to value the more open (and postmodern) epistemological modes offered by Wikipedia (and the lessons on writing they offer students). These spaces are important because they remind editors and readers of the encyclopedia's ability to evolve to meet the world's knowledge needs. Drawing attention to them, and developing pedagogies that emphasize their importance can also help us better understand the ongoing tension between co-existing postmodern and enlightenment paradigms operating in Wikipedia. Spaces that demonstrate the collaborative and ongoing construction of knowledge are, in themselves, implicit critiques of the “objectivist” discourse found in Wikipedia's article mainspace—the part of the encyclopedia that most of its readership actually accesses. Giving students access to what happens “behind the scenes” in Wikipedia can help them see the rhetorical process of knowledge construction and curation. Such access can also help them realize

that the most popular and widely used general reference source—far from being completely neutral and objective—is always informed by ideological functions of Wikipedia’s writing technology (the wiki) and the social culture that has emerged around it.

CHAPTER 2: FROM OPPORTUNITIES TO OUTCOMES: STUDENT LEARNING IN WIKIPEDIA

Despite a growing amount of research, asking students to practice and learn about writing by becoming contributors to Wikipedia remains an experimental endeavor. This hasn't stopped scholars from speculating about the potentials of the encyclopedia for informing composition pedagogy. Already, existing research speculates on a number of opportunities for students observing and participating in the encyclopedia's community. Among the most prevalent claims in this literature, the encyclopedia allows students to engage with public audiences, gain knowledge about writing processes, and experience writing as a social-collaborative act, all while contributing to a public knowledge project (Cummings; Di Lauro and Shetler; Hood; Moxley and Meehan; Purdy; Sweeney; Vetter). Furthermore, the encyclopedia's public revision history offers composition students a chance to challenge the notion of the finished product (Hood; Purdy). Such history allows students to deconstruct authority in public and "published" texts (Purdy). Finally, because the encyclopedia is built on the wiki platform, it can provide opportunities for collaboration and interaction with outside audiences (Moxley and Meehan).

Together, these scholars have recognized that the encyclopedia is dramatically changing the ways information is produced and disseminated in the twenty-first century and that engaging students in this type of online knowledge production is vital to their understanding of the digital environments in which they live, think, and write. Because it focuses on the *possible* opportunities of a pedagogy that utilizes Wikipedia, much of this literature has also been characterized by a persistent optimism, as teacher-scholars get

caught up in the encyclopedia's ethic of democratic accessibility and its potential for the classroom. Such optimism is not misplaced: the encyclopedia does offer numerous opportunities for composition pedagogy. Yet, the trope of optimistic possibility hasn't yet been followed up with what should be a significant element in this research: the learning experiences and perceptions of students engaged in this type of pedagogy.

In this chapter, I argue that in order for the research on teaching with Wikipedia to evolve, we must move beyond speculation toward a more concrete realization of the specific learning outcomes that can be achieved. To begin this work, I report on a classroom study⁵ designed to accomplish two major goals. First, I test previous claims made by researchers regarding Wikipedia's utility in teaching about writing processes and providing students opportunities to study and engage in writing as a social-collaborative act (Cummings; Hood; Purdy). Second, I extend the conversation on learning opportunities by asking whether or not (and how) Wikipedia can fulfill other "traditional" course outcomes, outcomes common to first year composition as outlined by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). Ultimately, I propose a coherent set of learning outcomes that emerges from the synthesis and testing of previous research, and that adds to outcomes currently being developed by the U.S. Wikipedia Education Program.⁶ These outcomes, combined with the learning opportunities already articulated by previous studies and supported with qualitative and quantitative data from

⁵ For a definition of "classroom study" methodology, refer to the introduction.

⁶ The Wikipedia Education Program is a public policy initiative begun in 2011 by the Wikimedia Foundation that seeks to support schools and instructors using Wikipedia in their classrooms. It has recently begun developing a set of learning goals and outcomes that can be applied across disciplines.

a particular classroom model, demonstrate more than just *potential* ways using Wikipedia can enhance and inform writing pedagogy. They provide a concrete realization of what Wikipedia writing projects can accomplish in terms of student learning through consideration of students' own experiences.

Designing the Assignment; Designing the Study

The methodological approach for this study, as in subsequent chapters in this dissertation, emphasizes student perception by describing and re-creating classroom contexts and, most significantly, gathering data from students themselves about their experiences writing in Wikipedia. In the following, I describe the course context, student demographics and assignment sequence used in the course in which this study was conducted, as well as my methods for collecting and analyzing data.

In the fall of 2011, I designed and taught a general-education composition course, Writing & Rhetoric II, which, at the university where I was employed, was listed as a 300 level course. Students were generally juniors and seniors (between the ages of 18-24), and of the eighteen students enrolled, seventeen agreed to participate in the study. I used Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs' 2011 *Writing About Writing* textbook, supplementing that text with readings about Wikipedia. The course spent about 4 weeks on the Wikipedia assignment sequence, with the remainder of the time devoted to a curriculum more in line with the pedagogy outlined in *Writing About Writing*. These four weeks were positioned at the beginning of the course and the assignment sequence consisted of two assignments. The first, Project 1, asked students to compose a Wikipedia article. In the second assignment, students were required to write a reflective essay on

their experience with Project 1. The remainder of the course was devoted to an ethnography assignment (Project 3) and a rhetorical analysis assignment (Project 4). The survey (questionnaire) was administered before students moved on to Projects 3 and 4, but after they had completed the Wikipedia assignment sequence. Additionally, students had read a number of texts from Wardle and Downs' *Writing About Writing* that would enhance their understanding and awareness of social and procedural writing knowledge, including Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts," James Porter's "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community," and Barbara Tomlinson's "Tuning, Tying, and Training Texts: Metaphors for Revision." Accordingly, students in this course were learning *about* writing as well as practicing it, and, for the discourse community ethnography, were studying the social contexts of writing communities. Consequently, in designing the Wikipedia assignment sequence, I was particularly interested in how I could use the encyclopedia to both support the major goals of a Writing About Writing approach (an approach that values metacognitive writing knowledge), and supplement it where I saw gaps—most notably in terms of skill-based learning, documentation, and research. As such, the design of an assignment sequence focused on multiple goals, including the following:

- To use Wikipedia as a tool to teach about social and process theories of writing;
- To reinforce the importance and need of traditional writing and research skills (tone awareness, source retrieval and evaluation, documentation, etc.);

- To give students the opportunity to write publicly and collaboratively;
- To encourage students to think about the way computer networks are changing how information is being produced and distributed.

To accomplish these goals, the assignment (See Appendix A) asked students to compose a Wikipedia article entry on a topic not yet written about by following a number of recursive, detailed steps. Students were also given the option to update, edit, or revise an existing article. Additionally, the project included a multimodal element in which students were required to add an image to increase their article's notability, a measure used to determine whether or not a topic deserves an entry on the encyclopedia. In a follow-up assignment (Appendix B), students were asked to write a reflective essay about the assignment process in which they narrated and reflected on their experiences with Wikipedia and what they learned about writing in terms of traditional skills, as well as the act of writing as a socially-influenced, multilayered process.

As a type of descriptive, classroom research, data collection for this study attempts, as much as possible, to follow the course of various writing assignments, and, furthermore, to enrich students' writing processes rather than distract them. Accordingly, my methods for collection emerged from two sources. First, students completed an online questionnaire (Appendix C) consisting of both multiple-choice and short-essay prompts about their experiences with the assignment sequence. Multiple-choice prompts were more pointed, directed questions meant to gather information regarding the assignment sequence's capacity to fulfill course outcomes, engage students in genuine collaboration and enrich students' understanding of procedural (process) knowledge. The need to

address these issues directly and to accumulate straightforward, quantifiable data influenced the multiple-choice format. The open, short-essay prompts, in contrast, were designed to give students more freedom to express individual experiences with the assignment sequence. These questions were meant to gather information on students' perceptions of the assignment sequence's educational outcomes as well as how well those outcomes were achieved throughout the sequence.

The second source of data is drawn from samples of students' reflective essays, written in response to an assignment that followed their work on Wikipedia articles. This assignment asked students to narrate their experiences composing the article and comment on what they gained from the experience in three areas: "traditional" writing skills like source retrieval, evaluation and incorporation, summary, quoting, writing styles and tones; writing as a social act (intertextuality and collaboration); and writing as a recursive, multifaceted process. Ultimately, the collection of this open-ended data allows students themselves to have a voice in the articulation of learning outcomes, which can be developed with their feedback, and in the testing of previous claims made in the relevant research.

The questionnaire was administered in Week 5 of an 11-week term, after students had completed the article and reflection assignments. At this point, students had received grades for the article, but not for the reflection essay. Students were given 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire, and were also provided the opportunity to refuse to participate in the study. Furthermore, students were informed that the study would not affect their grade or status in the course.

My analysis of data gathered from multiple-choice questions consisted of a tally of the most prevalent responses and report of their percentage in the results section. Multiple-choice questions were designed to include a gradation of responses about a specific skill or exercise provided by the assignment. For example, students could select that they “strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree” with a specific statement. For the sake of brevity and clarity, results presented are categorized in broader terms: e.g. “agree” consists of both “strongly agree” and “agree” choices. Treatment of the second type of questions is based on a form of thematic analysis drawn from Richard Boyatzis' *Transforming Qualitative Information* (1998). Boyatzis recognizes the usefulness of encoding information with themes: "pattern[s] found in the information...that describe and organize possible observations [and/or] interpret aspects of the phenomenon" (vii). Such a model allowed me to create four specific themes or categories by counting words and phrases and to organize, interpret and present data using those themes. These themes included social knowledge (writing as a more social experience and indications of the usefulness of a wider audience), procedural knowledge (identifying the usefulness of Wikipedia for learning about productive writing processes), research knowledge (source retrieval and incorporation), and general writing skills (such as style awareness, punctuation, grammar).

While I was unable to include all positive responses, negative feedback about the assignment sequence is represented fully. Data collection and analysis of reflective essays followed a similar method of thematic analysis. Information gathered through this

process went through a coding process in which common themes were identified in the assignment itself and students wrote towards those specific topics:

- “traditional” writing skills like source retrieval, evaluation and incorporation, summary, quoting, writing styles / tones, etc.
- writing as a social act; intertextuality, collaboration, etc.
- writing as recursive, multifaceted process (See Appendix B for full assignment).

Accordingly, results are organized around these predetermined themes. Because this set of data, the reflective essays, was so much larger, however, a limited number of samples from the essays were selected to represent those themes. Negative feedback, as in the survey analysis, is fully represented. Ultimately, the collection of data from three sources (quantitative, forced-choice survey questions; open-ended essay survey questions, and reflective essays) provides a level of triangulation that further ensures the validity of this research.

While this study was designed with IRB permission and according to careful planning, it should also be noted that its findings are limited by a few significant constraints. First, the study was limited by its small sample size, which was comprised of only 17 students. Furthermore, my examination of the assignment sequence’s capability to “teach” writing theory was undoubtedly influenced by other aspects of the course, most notably our reading in the rhetoric textbook *Writing About Writing* (2011), edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs. Also, unlike the information collected via survey, the data gathered from reflection samples may have been influenced by the fact that these

reflective pieces were being graded. Additionally, the assignment's prompt could be seen as leading students to report certain "gains" from the experience. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful, generalizable data about the opportunities provided by online venues to teach composition as well as an adaptable model for other instructors hoping to implement this kind of experimental pedagogy in their own classrooms.

Student Learning Experiences

Research focusing on the ways Wikipedia can inform writing pedagogy has thus far emphasized two major learning goals: the acquisition of procedural knowledge and the practice of writing as a social-collaborative act. First, students of writing can gain procedural knowledge—a deeper understanding of productive modes of invention, revision, and writing process—by observing the community's practices and becoming more familiar with the affordances of wiki software, the platform Wikipedia articles are built on (Hood; Purdy). Second, researchers have also made the claim that we can maximize learning when students are engaged in writing activities that are rhetorically situated, social, and collaborative, that they are more motivated to learn in these situations and they can come to a better understanding of writing as a social act (Cummings; Di Lauro and Shetler; Vetter; Sweeney). Accordingly, a central question of this classroom study revolves around testing these claims by documenting student experiences with a specific Wikipedia assignment. Does the encyclopedia actually provide opportunities, as suggested by past research, for students to learn about writing processes and to study and engage in writing as a social-collaborative act? What do these opportunities look like in student responses? How do student understandings of

procedural and social knowledge manifest? In the following sections, I present research collected from students' experiences that confirm these claims, while also illustrating how students come to these new understandings, and offering practical advice for instructors teaching with Wikipedia.

Procedural Knowledge

Research on procedural knowledge has emphasized how students can learn from Wikipedia through observation as much as participation. James Purdy, in a study published in *College Composition and Communication* that analyzes the writing practices behind three Wikipedia articles, demonstrates how the community “exemplifies many of the tenets of composition that the field purports to value and can, therefore, be a valuable resource for teacher-scholars” (352). Among the tenets recognized by Purdy, procedural knowledge (invention, revision, process) figures prominently. Because they are built on the framework of a wiki, Wikipedia articles are unique documents that allow users a glimpse into their “history” – a record of all of the previous versions of an article, stemming from its creation. Such history is the result of the fact that articles on Wikipedia are immediately editable; they can be and are updated and revised constantly by readers, as they notice the need for revision. As Purdy has argued, the affordances of the writing interface in Wikipedia represent significant opportunities for students’ understanding of revision and invention. Not only does Wikipedia’s design “encourage visitors to contribute to the development of knowledge through writing” (354) and thereby model a developmental and recursive process of writing production, it also

demonstrates what that writing process can look like by keeping an archive of all the changes made to individual articles.

Furthermore, although some of these edits are grammatical or superficial, a majority of them, as Purdy has found, are substantial revisions that emerge from a users' rhetorical engagement with an article's content: "While notions of revision can still center on polishing and perfecting texts, thereby positioning a correct end-product as the goal, through its focus on writing as idea generation, Wikipedia advances a model of revision based on difference, positioning rhetorical flexibility as the goal" (354). Purdy's acknowledgment that the Wikipedia community values rich revision and invention over superficial edits is also emphasized in earlier scholarship by Carra Leah Hood. Focusing more on Wikipedia's extensive use of article histories, Hood furthers the notion that observation of the encyclopedia's writing production can be useful for students, especially in terms of the rich and sustained writing processes it demonstrates. "Wikipedia delivers pedagogy," Hood argues, "a pedagogy familiar to writers and to teachers of writing. The online encyclopedia values writing process, not to the exclusion of product, but as a respectable, long period of negotiation with words" ("Wikipedia in Composition," para. 2).

Hood and Purdy, scholars in rhetoric and composition and familiar with the theoretical movements in writing theory of the last fifty years, both recognize how observation of Wikipedia's community can teach process. But what happens when students, being introduced to some of these ideas for the first time, observe and participate in the community? How do they experience and learn about process in an

assignment that asks them to write in the encyclopedia? In both survey data and reflective essays, students overwhelmingly recognized Wikipedia's capacity for teaching a recursive, multi-layered writing process. Survey data found that 100% of students found the assignment sequence effective "at contributing to a growth of [their] understanding of revision and writing as a recursive process," as a process that is ongoing and revisionary, for example. While this statistic demonstrates students' positive evaluation of the assignment's attention to procedural knowledge, more interesting findings emerged in qualitative responses from students, both in short survey questions as well as reflective essays.

Gains in procedural knowledge emerged as a common theme in response to a qualitative survey question that asked students to "describe the educational benefits of this assignment sequence" and identify how the sequence improved their understanding of concepts of writing and rhetoric. Students who discussed procedural knowledge in response to this prompt emphasized the ongoing and recursive nature of writing on Wikipedia, in which an article is never truly "finished," as well as the social aspect of this process, in which a piece of writing is collaboratively built by multiple editors :

This assignment sequence was educationally beneficial in regards to learning about writing and rhetoric because it was a social experience as well as a process. Instead of simply putting your words on paper, turning it in and never looking at it again, our pages will be on the web for as long as Wikipedia is. Also the writing process really isn't over yet. People can still edit my page, making corrections and revisions to it.

Another student focusing on procedural knowledge stressed how the public nature of the assignment served as a motivating force to improve their writing process:

To me the educational benefits included sharpening my writing process skills and learning about online writing whether it be on Wikipedia or blogging. It was helpful because I have never written an article like this before. I am so used to doing the same writing process I learned in high school but this was different, this audience was different and I wanted to write this article the best I could because the world can see it now.

Because of this I put much more effort into fixing my old ineffective writing process and learning better ways to structure my writing in this class.

Such attention to process was not always common in this data set, yet it appears spontaneously, without any specific prompting about procedural knowledge. In their reflective essays, students *were* prompted to reflect on how the assignment sequence influenced their understanding of the writing process. Here's how one student describes their new understanding of Wikipedia and their experiences working with the assignment:

Wikipedia is forever changing the way we see knowledge and how it is distributed in the twenty-first century. It allows us to see the dynamic process that is writing, and demystifies the processes behind the writing. Before Wikipedia we were never able to see the whole process from start to finish. We were only able to see the finished product, the ink

on the pages that had been printed only after several edits and revisions....Now, with Wikipedia we can look back to an article's poor first draft all the way to its much more robust and meaty current state.

What the student is referencing here, of course, is the history feature of Wikipedia, which allows readers to access past revisions of any article. Such access is valuable on multiple levels. Reviewing the history of a given article can help students realize how that article has changed over time, in response to new editors and even changes in the topic. Most importantly, by examining article histories, students can make the realization that nearly all rhetorically effective writing undergoes multiple drafts. Doing so will initiate the discovery of their own writing processes, and may ultimately improve their writing.

Student responses to survey data, both quantitative and qualitative, as well as reflective essays, all demonstrate positive experiences with learning outcomes that emphasize procedural knowledge. Composition students can both practice and observe a recursive writing process in Wikipedia because both its underlying technology and community already highly value a rich and ongoing model. However, composition instructors should also be emphasizing these values, and the ways in which the technology displays them, as much as possible. Outside readings on writing process and/or Wikipedia are also recommended to further support such learning outcomes.⁷

⁷ James Purdy's essay "Wikipedia Is Good For You?!" (*Writing Spaces*, Vol. 1) is a great resource for showing students how they can learn about writing by observing productive writing practices in Wikipedia.

Social Knowledge

Just as the history function of Wikipedia articles enables students to gain procedural knowledge, Wikipedia's underlying technology is also built for a number of social functions that provide opportunities for students to practice and understand writing as a social-collaborative act. Wikipedia is perhaps the most well known instantiation of "Web 2.0," the socio-technological shift in Internet technologies that has allowed for more participation between creators of web content and their audience. Wikipedia's crowd-sourced model actually invites readers to edit the encyclopedia as they read. Further social opportunities emerge in an examination of each article's "Talk" page. Like the history function, talk pages are documents that track and facilitate an article's development. Yet, instead of documenting an article's revisions, talk pages allow and keep records of conversations between editors about an article's development, needed revisions, and other issues relating to the article's topic. Introducing students to talk pages allows them to see the messy, collaborative nature of writing, how article developments often need to be negotiated among different editors, and alerts them to the very "public" and rhetorical task of writing in Wikipedia. One of the major advantages of asking students to write in Wikipedia is that it often provides immediate audiences for their writing, both in terms of an article's readers and other editors. As Robert Cummings has argued, such a situation can maximize student learning and writing because Wikipedia writing assignments enable "authentic" writing situations and audiences:

If there is staleness in the composition classroom, it is often found in students' view of their audience. Most assignments ask writers to imagine

an audience—and then to compose for their composition instructor as a surrogate for that idealized, fictional audience. Walter Ong’s notion that all audiences are fictional aside, [Commons-Based Peer Production] and wiki assignments allow students to write for an authentic audience beyond the classroom. And, in the case of the Wikipedia writing assignment...these audiences often write back. (5)

For a majority of students, Cummings’ claims about the productive learning environments created by authentic writing situations hold true. In this study, student responses do show a positive assessment of the assignment sequence’s social element. In multiple choice survey data, 100% of students found the sequence “more social than writing tasks in previous composition courses” in terms of online Wikipedia editors and classmates. This result is further demonstrated in short-answer survey questions as well as data from reflection essays.

In open-ended survey questions, multiple students stressed the public nature of the writing they were doing in Wikipedia: “This social aspect of writing was extremely beneficial because I took my time creating this page, knowing that it was up for the world to see. I didn’t want to embarrass myself by putting up a sloppy and incomplete piece of work.” Other students identified a similar motivation as the effect of an audience beyond the instructor. Additionally, students tended to feel positively about the multiple opportunities for feedback afforded by the assignment, both from Wikipedia administrators and by their classmates: “When it wasn’t good, we had our peers and the reviewers on Wikipedia to tell us what our article was lacking and what could be

improved. Getting other people's opinions can enhance your writing dramatically." Many of these responses, however, provide a more personal account of how Wikipedia administrators or other editors made an impact on their writing. One student in particular, who edited an existing article rather than creating a new one, identifies the article's talk page as an important place in which they could share their knowledge of the topic with other editors. This student was adding information to the article for a local historical site and was able to use the discussion page to discover a "gap" in the research, an entry point for their own contribution:

Another way I used the Discussion Board was to help answer people's questions. I felt I had a huge advantage with contributing to that page because the State Hospital was located right down the road, and I had primary sources within the library. Someone had previously asked how many square feet the facility took up, so I dug through the entire plot plans and there were records circa 1960, stating how much square footage the hospital truly took up.

This kind of engagement within a specific research community is rare in the undergraduate composition class, yet Wikipedia provides such opportunities.

Furthermore, passages from student reflections that demonstrated excitement about the article's audience were the most rewarding to read because the prose is so vibrant and the writers so honestly excited. Publishing their articles, or "going live," was an exhilarating moment for these students because they had produced something of value for an outside audience, something that went beyond a more traditional composition

assignment in which the audience is typically limited to the instructor: "Once completed, I went live! This was incredibly exciting for me. I called my family and friends and asked them to search it and they found it! I felt very accomplished and proud that I had contributed to something public and informative." Students who edited an existing article, on the other hand, experienced another type of audience—that of other contributors: "Getting permission to revise an already existing article was really interesting and laid the pressure on a lot more. The original article was created years ago and had been edited over a hundred times already. I felt as if an audience was watching me as I wrote down the facts that I pulled out of the [library] archives." In both cases, students were given an opportunity not only to negotiate audience, and to realize their rhetorical import, but also to feel that thrill of "real" writing, writing that goes beyond an academic exercise and involves outside audiences whose presence informs the text.

Qualitative data that illustrates student experience is further supported by the frequency in which students reported a growth in social knowledge through this assignment, as demonstrated in Table 1. When asked in the survey to report on whether or not this assignment allowed for more opportunities to engage with a social model of writing, 100% of student responded positively. In short-answer responses, 63% of students reported that the assignment provided opportunities to experience writing as social act. Finally, in their reflection essays, 75% of students reported on the social elements of the assignment and their growth in terms of social and collaborative knowledge.

Table 1
Self-reported "Social Knowledge" across Data Sets

Data Collection	Survey	Short Answer	Reflection
n(N)	16(16)	10(16)	12(16)

Despite these success stories, some of which may be due to the emphasis placed on social knowledge by readings and in data collection prompts, in some cases students received very little actual interaction or feedback from the Wikipedia community (editors and administrators). As a teacher trying a project like this for the first time, it started to become clearer to me how some Wikipedia articles, and their corresponding talk pages, are more active than others. High profile articles such as “Democracy” or “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” will likely always be highly active, with frequent edits and robust conversation within their talk pages. Articles on less trafficked topics (such as regional or local subjects which the students gravitated towards) are typically less active. Perhaps one of the most useful lessons I learned from this first experiment teaching with Wikipedia is that finding a balance between high profile and obscure articles for students to work on is essential to a successful student experience. Let a student sign on to contribute to a highly active article and their edits may face censure or deletion from an already established and highly critical editor. Yet, having them work on an obscure, local article, may lead to no community interaction or feedback whatsoever, at least not immediately. So while working on Wikipedia articles always provided a social-collaborative experience for students in terms of the public audience that Wikipedia is

always subject to, actual interaction with editors isn't always guaranteed. Students might be able to observe social interaction among editors and the collaborative creation of articles, but they do not always find such interaction on their own, especially working on less visible topics. Accordingly, this early study brought about the realization that, in order to ensure collaborative interaction with others on their work, student projects might need to be structured (by instructors) in such a way as to include outside collaborators, a task I take up in studies presented in the second and third chapters.

However, it's also important to remember that the majority of students (ranging from 100% to 62% across data sets) did respond positively to prompts and survey questions concerning the social-collaborative element of the assignment sequence. Recognizing that their work was (at least) visible to a public audience proved, as Cummings has argued, to be a valuable motivator. Such conditions can lead to real growth in terms of social knowledge on writing, especially when combined with instructor guidance that optimizes interactive experiences. Data from this element of the study, when combined with the results that investigated student acquisition of procedural knowledge show positive gains in terms of the claims made by researchers on these outcomes. In the following section, I seek to add to these researchers' claims by demonstrating how writing in Wikipedia also contributes to additional learning outcomes common to first year composition.

The Rhetoric of Community Conventions: Additional Learning Outcomes

Because Wikipedia maintains genre features common to encyclopedic, tertiary writing, students working on these projects are not primarily practicing argumentative writing. Making this realization early on led me to recognize the importance of pairing the article assignment with a reflective assignment, as well as to stress argumentative writing in other major course projects. But this realization also led me to question whether or not Wikipedia could accomplish additional learning outcomes common to the composition course, but not cited in previous literature.

From my experience working with students, as well as the data collected from their work on the assignment sequence, I've found that Wikipedia projects can help students achieve learning outcomes beyond the social and procedural knowledge emphasized in previous research. The following sections address seven outcomes often taught in composition courses: writing style awareness and surface level skills (editing, documentation), research, rhetoric and textual authority, and visual rhetoric and copyright. Using survey and reflective essay data, these sections demonstrate how students respond to the questions of whether and how these outcomes were achieved. Yet these outcomes also demonstrate that, despite the fact that article conventions in Wikipedia require a specific neutral style and encyclopedic tone, students can learn a lot about how conventions often reflect a community's rhetorical goals, and that to write successfully in a community, they should also be aware of that community's values and common practices. Students in this course also studied discourse community theory, a central concept in Writing About Writing pedagogy, and that concept helped them to

understand how learning to write in Wikipedia meant learning its values, goals, genres, and conventions.

Writing Style Awareness and Surface Level Skills

Wikipedia is first and foremost an encyclopedia (“WP: Five Pillars”). Accordingly, its community strives for a particular linguistic register, or style, that remediates, in the interactive platform of the wiki, traditional encyclopedic writing. In addition to striving for neutrality or Neutral Point of View (NPOV), the community encourages editors to write in “consistent, clear, and precise language,” to use “Plain English” and to “avoid ambiguity, jargon, and vague or unnecessarily complex wording” (“WP: Manual of Style”). Furthermore, it’s core policy of “No Original Research” prohibits users from referring to material “for which no reliable, published sources exist” and from engaging in “any analysis or synthesis of published material that serves to reach or imply a conclusion not stated by the sources” (“WP: No Original Research”). In short, any information included in a Wikipedia article needs to be verifiable: “people reading and editing the encyclopedia [should be able to] check that the information comes from a reliable source” (“WP: Verifiability”). Such policies demonstrate Wikipedia’s commitment to accurate and credible coverage, written in encyclopedic prose that is succinct, clear and well supported. These policies, and the underlying goals and values of the Wikipedia community, often motivate students to take great care with surface-level skills such as documentation, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. In fact, 94% of students agreed that the assignment sequence offered opportunities to practice these skills.

Yet such policies also limit the types of writing students can perform in Wikipedia assignments. Indeed, traditional course outcomes for first year composition call on students to perform writing that enables them to practice purposeful, well researched, and opinionated prose, in which they are often required to forward their own original argument. Of the students surveyed in this study, one expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the article assignment did not allow for persuasive writing practice, claiming “the article itself does not provide the opportunity to argue one’s beliefs about a particular subject, due to the neutrality of Wikipedia.”

However, when paired with an additional (reflective) writing assignment, as was the case in this sequence, students have the opportunity to practice both reflective and argumentative writing, as the assignment asked them to both to discuss their experience with the project and to make an argument about “how online forums like Wikipedia are changing the way knowledge is distributed and created in the 21st century” (see Appendix B). Between the two assignments, students were able to practice multiple styles of writing, and in the process of studying and working with the encyclopedic style, gain an awareness of different types of writing and how those types conform to the rhetorical goals of a community or genre. Despite the constraints enacted in Wikipedia article writing, in multiple-choice survey data, 100% of the students found the assignment sequence effective in exposing a variety of writing styles, although the degree of this efficacy varied. Furthermore, an identified theme from short essay survey responses included students’ recognition that the assignment sequence allowed them an opportunity to improve general writing skills, especially their knowledge of tones and styles. Because

encyclopedic entries follow a set genre, students were able to practice a neutral tone and third person, objective style. Most students perceived this exercise as valuable: “I also learned about adapting my writing style and tone to fit the paradigm of a specific discourse community.”

Ultimately, instructors building Wikipedia writing assignments should be sure to engage students in alternate genres, both in Wikipedia assignment sequences as well as other assignments in course that include those assignments. Furthermore, they should view the rhetorical constraints on linguistic register in Wikipedia as opportunities to teach students how a community’s goals and values can influence the texts it produces.

Research

In addition to defining a specific linguistic register, Wikipedia’s policies on verifiability and “no original research” also provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in hands-on research, source integration, and documentation. Furthermore, Wikipedia’s policies on credibility mirror closely the types of sources college-level writing instructors would deem reliable and recommend to students. In Wikipedia, “the most reliable sources are: peer-reviewed journals; books published by university presses; university-level textbooks; magazines, journals, and books published by respected publishing houses, and mainstream newspapers” (“WP: No Original Research/#Using Sources”). Finally, because any claim that might be challenged needs to be supported by outside research, students working on articles in this community quickly learned the importance of solid research. In the quantitative element of this study, 94% of students reported growth in terms of research skills. Additionally, 100% found that the assignment

sequence increased their understanding of source evaluation and incorporation. In qualitative, short-answer survey data, students overwhelmingly identified positive growth in research skills. Despite the fact that students were only required to utilize 3-5 sources for the initial article entry, one student admitted “a high amount of research for this project, where as if I were writing simply a paper, I don’t think I would have utilized the sources I did.” Another describes the process as aiding their ability to select and examine potential sources: “It helped to gain a better understanding of how to find good websites and articles. I was also finding myself reading the articles more in order to determine its credibility.” Yet another student compares the research he performed in this assignment sequence to past experiences with writing assignments: “I learned more from this assignment about finding, analyzing, and incorporating sources than any other writing assignment I’ve done.” Such responses confirm the assignment’s capacity to engage students in scholarly research and to learn, by appreciating the policies, values and goals of a community, how Wikipedia articles build on existing data from a multitude of sources.

Rhetoric and Textual Authority

Perhaps one of the most obvious benefits of writing in Wikipedia is the immediate audience it provides for students’ work. When students edit or create a new article in the encyclopedia, they’re contributing to a global, public forum, one that receives an enormous amount of web traffic. Their writing, to put it simply, is read by individuals beyond the instructor: the Wikipedia reading public, other editors, and their peers. This kind of richly rhetorical, public writing can have positive effects on students’ motivation

levels, as Robert Cummings has argued; but it can also increase students' knowledge of rhetoric and textual authority. For most students, the assignment sequence led to an awareness of audience that hadn't been available to them in other courses. Eighty-eight percent of students reported an increased sense of audience compared to other writing assignments, while 12% reported no change. Furthermore, students also gained an understanding of how audience shapes the rhetorical situation, with 100% of the sample responding positively, in varying degrees, to the sequence's usefulness in contributing to their rhetorical understanding of the concept of audience.

In addition to increased interaction and recognition of multiple audiences, writing in Wikipedia also provides opportunities for students to realize the rhetorical and collaborative construction of texts, and to critique the authority they so often attribute to finished or published texts. Purdy (2010) has argued that the encyclopedia allows us to deconstruct the authority of "published" texts through the *recognition* of error in the articles we read, but *composing* an article also allows this lesson, as one student realizes below:

I guess in some ways that's what surprised me the most throughout this project: the revelation that I personally had contributed a legitimate article and added to the knowledge on Wikipedia. Also though, it did make me realize that many of the articles I had read and fully trusted over the years may have been put together by people that didn't know what they were doing any more than I did at that moment. It was something to think about for sure.

The ability to doubt or question authority in “published” material is a crucial critical thinking skill. But it remains to be seen whether or not such a lesson transfers to discourse beyond Wikipedia. Another student seems to think that the displaced model of authority seen in Wikipedia does apply outside its bounds, and, in this example, imagines how crowd-sourced epistemologies might apply in academia:

With the creation of Wikipedia and the participation of its users, one begins to see the formulation of a new method of constructing academia. One in which an expert or authority with an area of expertise does not maintain hegemonic power within that particular area. People can bring their knowledge together and decide upon the validity of material as a community.

This student’s realization that Wikipedia represents a new model of communal, rather than individual, authority is particularly astute. In another passage in the reflection, the same student discusses the more fluid roles of author and audience the encyclopedia allows:

When contributing to the discourse community of Wikipedia, one offers their partially completed product up for deliberation between those that wish to partake of the knowledge the article provides. However, the major difference of the relationship of writer and reader in this case is that the writer and reader can literally reverse their roles and provide their input from both perspectives.... Therefore, as the original author I am supplying the community's readers with material to observe and analyze. Then when

the readers have input to provide they can become the writer and do so instantaneously.

There have been many arguments in composition that stress how assignments that provide richly contextual, rhetorical situations for students to participate in are more effective than other, decontextualized assignments. While many teacher-scholars have recommended the creation of journals or magazines as venues for student writing⁸, such initiatives often require large-scale programmatic support. As an already established writing community which prides itself on accessibility and transparency, Wikipedia represents a productive venue for students to encounter and interact with multiple audiences, to question the authority of texts published online, and to consider the more fluid roles of writer and reader in Web 2.0 environments.

Visual Rhetoric and Copyright

Wikis, because they were originally used as a platform for sharing and collaborating on computer programming projects (Leuf and Cunningham), are typically used for textual collaboration—with very little opportunity for working with visuals. Yet while Wikipedia, as an encyclopedia, is primarily a text-based website, it still contains and offers opportunities for students to work with visuals. In the assignment sequence used in this study, students were explicitly required to add an image to the articles they were working on. The initial impetus for this requirement was based on conventional practices and guidelines in Wikipedia that argue that an article could be significantly “enhanced with images, sounds or videos” (“WP: Notability”). In working to achieve this

⁸ See my discussion of Rosinski et al. and other undergraduate journal initiatives in Chapter 3.

requirement, students needed to consider how a specific image could sustain and improve a particular article's topic coverage. The assignment sequence proved to be slightly less successful in this learning outcome, yet a majority of students did report positively. Specifically, according to quantitative data, 88% of students agreed that the assignment sequence allowed them to utilize visual rhetoric and to consider the connections between visual and alphabetic texts. Furthermore, working on this part of the project also forces students to consider Wikipedia's policies for regulating image copyrights. New (author-created) visual content, in Wikipedia, must be uploaded to the Wikimedia Foundation's Image Commons and given a free license so that it can be shared without copyright infringement. While this requirement expands the assignment's capabilities to directly address visual rhetoric, it also raises concerns about licensing and copyright. Instructors who include this requirement in a Wikipedia assignment should be careful to review copyright policies and practices, especially related to freely available content and the public domain.

A Coherent Outcomes Set

Teaching with Wikipedia allows students to accomplish a wide range of learning outcomes, outcomes common to traditional first-year composition goals, and consistent with the major values or "tenets" (Purdy) of the field of composition. The learning outcomes tested in this study, when viewed as a whole, also match closely many of the outcomes recommended by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), which are separated into four major categories of "writing knowledge, practices, and attitudes that undergraduate students develop in first-year composition" ("WPA

Outcomes Statement”). Table 2, below, displays the WPA outcome categories and a short description of each alongside the learning outcomes tested in this assignment sequence that correspond to those categories.

Table 2
Comparison of Tested Wikipedia Learning Outcomes to WPA Outcomes Categories

WPA Outcomes Categories	Tested Learning Outcomes
<p><i>Rhetorical Knowledge</i></p> <p>“the ability to analyze contexts and audiences and then to act on that analysis in comprehending and creating texts”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Understand and practice the rhetorical and collaborative construction of texts *Gain an understanding of how an audience shapes the rhetorical situation *Practice writing for a particular audience in a particular community *Utilize visual rhetoric and consider the connections between visual and print texts
<p><i>Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing</i></p> <p>“the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Practice evaluating and critiquing the authority of “published” digital texts *Locate and evaluate appropriate research materials for use in a particular community context
<p><i>Processes</i></p> <p>“writers use multiple strategies, or composing processes, to conceptualize, develop, and finalize projects”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Understand and practice writing and revision as a recursive process *Understand writing processes as social and collaborative
<p><i>Knowledge of Conventions</i></p> <p>“conventions are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres, and in doing so, shape readers’ and writers’ perceptions of correctness or appropriateness. These expectations are not universal; they vary by genre...discipline...and by occasion”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Understand and practice community conventions for source integration and documentation *Recognize and conform to surface-level conventions of documentation, grammar, spelling, and punctuation within a particular community *Gain an awareness of the linguistic register (tone) expected within a particular genre of a community *Practice and become aware of a variety of writing styles and their use in certain genres

As becomes obvious in the above comparison, while this assignment sequence does not fulfill a majority of learning outcomes recommended by the CWPA, it does accomplish a good number of them. It's also important to keep in mind that the outcomes listed on the right side of the table represent *only those* tested for in this study, and other learning opportunities can also be present in Wikipedia projects, as I discuss further in the second and third chapters. Furthermore, when considering that this assignment sequence can (and should) be paired with additional assignments in a writing course, the multiple opportunities it presents for learning demonstrate the richly complex set of activities students can encounter and learn from by writing and participating in this community.

The articulation of specific learning outcomes for Wikipedia projects in this study also allows for the elaboration of existing outcomes developed by the Wikipedia Education Program, a public policy initiative of the Wikimedia Foundation to help support college instructors build Wikipedia writing assignments. First begun in 2011, the Education Program has undergone a number of transformations providing a steadily increasing amount of material to support instructors and working to develop arguments for the use of Wikipedia in the classroom. The learning outcomes (below) publicized by their outreach program, accordingly, remain in an early stage of development.

Students learn a variety of skills through using Wikipedia in the classroom, some of the main ones are:

- Media literacy — students identify bias and partisanship; particularly with respect to Wikipedia, students recognize whether an article is credible or not.
- Critical thinking — in contrast to many class assignments which require an argumentative or persuasive paper, Wikipedia's neutral point of view policy helps students think about class material in a new way.
- Expository writing — students practice writing in an encyclopedic summary style.
- Collaboration — students work with others to develop high quality encyclopedia articles.
- Community of practice — some students find a group of people within the Wikipedia community who work and learn in the same field.
- Literature review — students get a lot of practice finding and summarizing appropriate sources for their topic.
- Citation — students learn how to reference and use reliable sources correctly.
- Online etiquette — in today's computer driven environment, it is common to work with people one may never meet in person; students learn this essential skill.
- Wiki markup — students learn simple basics of coding and working with wikis.
- Understanding copyrights — students learn the basics of free licenses.

- Practicing digital and online citizenship — students embrace the opportunity to participate in a large-scale knowledge project as peers and face the unique obstacles associated with such participation in a digital and online environment. (“Reasons to Use Wikipedia”)

While many of these Education Program outcomes are relevant to composition courses, they are primarily designed, as an outreach tool, to help instructors *across* disciplines understand the learning opportunities Wikipedia projects can provide. The coherent set of outcomes articulated in this study, as an elaboration and addition to the Education Program Outcomes, accomplishes three important goals. First, it allows researchers and instructors to more accurately define and recognize learning outcomes geared specifically toward the (general-education) composition course. Second, it demonstrates how those outcomes accomplish many of the learning goals recommended by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). Finally, it is supported by rich qualitative and quantitative evidence provided by students themselves, which allows for a more accurate and honest assessment of the usefulness of this type of pedagogy. Ultimately, this study finds that engaging students in Wikipedia projects can accomplish a number of learning outcomes, including but not limited to areas of procedural and social knowledge, as well as more traditional outcomes related to writing style awareness and surface-level skills, research, rhetoric and textual authority, visual rhetoric and copyright. Like any assignment, achieving these outcomes may also required additional readings, especially in process and social theories of writing. Furthermore, Wikipedia projects should always be paired with additional course assignments, especially ones that ask students to write

persuasive arguments and interpret sources with original analysis. Finally, this study made it crucially apparent that asking students to write in Wikipedia doesn't guarantee immediate interaction with other editors, especially if they're working on less visible articles. In the second chapter, I describe a classroom study designed to engage students more thoroughly with Wikipedia editors and other research partners in order to demonstrate how such engagement can further enhance Wikipedia projects and learning opportunities.

CHAPTER 3: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: A MODEL FOR CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS OF WIKIPEDIA

The classroom study reported on in the first chapter allows for the articulation of a coherent set of learning outcomes made available by Wikipedia writing projects. In asserting these outcomes, researchers can move beyond speculation toward a more concrete realization of how using Wikipedia in the writing course helps achieve specific learning goals related to procedural knowledge, social knowledge, and other traditional course outcomes common to first year composition. For a number of researchers in writing studies (Hood; Purdy; Cummings; Sweeney), a major advantage to asking students to write in Wikipedia lies in the fact that this encyclopedia is also an interactive community that can allow students to both observe and participate in collaborative writing. As Robert Cummings has acknowledged in a discussion of the authentic rhetorical spaces offered by the encyclopedia, Wikipedia audiences and editors “often write back” to students (5). Wikipedia does represent a valid venue for *observation* of these collaborative practices. Yet, as I found in the study conducted for Chapter 1, asking students to write in the encyclopedia doesn’t explicitly guarantee immediate interaction with other editors, especially if students are creating new articles or editing less notable articles that receive little web traffic (both in terms of readers and editors). However, such interaction *can* be greatly increased when instructors consciously create assignments that engage and collaborate with partners outside the classroom.

In this chapter, I describe a classroom study specifically designed to accomplish this goal: to engage students more thoroughly with Wikipedia editors and other research

partners in order to demonstrate how this kind of rich community engagement can further enhance Wikipedia projects, and the associated learning opportunities they provide. In particular, I argue that involving multiple outside agents and audiences and providing more opportunities for interaction can help students gain rhetorical knowledge: an understanding of a rhetorical, constructivist model of knowledge production and the role of personal subjectivity in that process. But such an initiative also provides much needed insight into how community or “service” based learning might be adapted to include both face-to-face and digital partnerships and how these partnerships can enhance student learning while expanding the traditional boundaries of our classrooms.

In the past few decades, innovation and research in pedagogy across academic disciplines has sought to engage students with materials and forums outside the classroom. In the field of composition, service or “community” learning—the application of student assignments to goal-oriented, community-based projects—has become an increasingly popular and pervasive manifestation of these movements. Pedagogies that value civic or community engagement (Herzberg; Weisser) are also intrinsically linked to this trend. A rhetorical education centered on public discourse can be traced back to the sophists (Jarratt), but a more recent motivation for this move away from the classroom can be found in the emergence of social-epistemic theories of language in the late 1980s and early 1990s and their application to writing and literacy studies. The acknowledgement of the influence of social groups⁹ on the production of texts has played

⁹ This acknowledgement was (and remains) contested as scholars identified multiple theoretical issues with a stable conception of the “discourse community” and its implications for teaching. See James Paul Gee’s “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics:

a significant role in the field's turn towards pedagogies that are situated in social contexts. More recently, proponents of service learning in composition have offered a number of rationales for the shift towards public discourse. Community-engaged service learning furthers the pedagogical agenda of the social turn by expanding the audience for student writing and enabling the study of discourse within specific communities. Such models also allow for the crossing of cultural and class boundaries as students go beyond the immediate and often homogeneous cultures of the university (Deans). Researchers in composition studies have found that service-learning leads to increased levels of motivation, as it promotes a greater sense of responsibility on the part of students who undertake writing assignments that engage with outside audiences (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters; Feldman). The recognition and general acceptance of these educational gains has prompted scholars to begin thinking about the position of service-learning in the academy and how it might be further promoted, positioned, and sustained (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters).

Even more recently, scholars have appropriated figures as diverse as John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas as proponents for a public pedagogy (Barton; Richards). The use of these figures emerges within a slightly different context, however: that of digital pedagogies and the affordances of Web 2.0 technologies that allow users to interact and to produce discourse in virtual, online forums. Daniel Richards, for instance, utilizes Dewey's ethical pragmatism to argue for the capabilities of blogs as tools for civic

An Introduction," Joseph Harris' "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing," Patricia Bizzell's *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, and John Swales' "The Concept of Discourse Community."

activism. Matthew Barton, in an examination of Habermas' conception of a critical public sphere as essential for participatory democracy, encourages the use of blogs, wikis, and discussion boards in the composition classroom. In the context of service and community-engagement learning, my use of "public pedagogy" is intended to evoke an educational model that moves beyond (private) educational spheres and involves students in projects that interact with one or more extra-academic publics, often for the purpose of providing opportunities for civic engagement and cultural participation.¹⁰

Ultimately, a move toward public pedagogies, digital or otherwise, is representative of a significant shift of the boundaries of educational spaces, not only in composition but also across disciplines. As communication technologies continue to make information more accessible, our roles as educators also need to change: from knowledge-guardians and gatekeepers to mentors and guides who can demonstrate to students how to engage with the significant amount of information available to them. Academic librarians and archivists, the professionals we so often work with to integrate research into student writing processes, have not been immune to this shift either. These professionals are increasingly challenging the static roles of "information-keepers" in order to find new and effective methods of engaging with their academic communities (Ismail et al.).

It is within these disparate yet connected contexts—service learning, civic engagement, digital pedagogies, and library research—that this chapter, which details a cross-disciplinary relationship between a writing program and a university library's

¹⁰ Such a conceptualization departs from Henry Giroux's use of the term to describe the political and educational effects of mass media and global culture.

archives (special collections), is situated. In the following, I describe an assignment model for cross-disciplinary, digital pedagogy I piloted in a junior-level composition course. This model is illustrated through a case study of a single student's experience with the project and also a class study, which examines the affordances of such a model. While the case study exemplifies the specific assignment model under examination in order to illustrate a student's negotiation of the project, the results of the larger study, including survey data and process logs, provide some insight into students' overall perceptions of the assignment. I ultimately argue that this type of learning is a productive means to increase students' rhetorical knowledge by exposing them to multiple authorities and audiences and that this, in turn, allows them to realize their own (personal) authority which is so often "denied in [traditional] school contexts" (Penrose and Geisler, 515). My use of the concept *rhetorical knowledge* is meant to signify an understanding of a rhetorical, constructivist model of knowledge production and the role of personal subjectivity in that process. I further define such knowledge by invoking Stuart Selber's identification of digital "rhetorical literacy" ("Multiliteracies"). In Selber's framework, the "multiliterate" individual capable of interacting efficiently in the digital age should be capable of practicing three types of literacies. The first of these, functional literacy, provides the skills and knowledge needed to use technologies as tools. Second, critical literacy provides the skills and knowledge needed to question and critique technologies from a cultural perspective. Finally, rhetorical literacy, as a culminating literacy dependent upon the previously described skills and knowledges, allows individuals to become capable agents who can engage in "reflective praxis" to

produce and interact in media and technological systems (145). For students to acquire this type of rhetorical literacy, I argue, they must also develop their own sense of authority by engaging with other authorized writers and by taking on meaningful public work within a specific community. Furthermore, I also assert that student writers are more likely to gain authority by working on community-engaged projects which increase motivation levels, a claim that extends the work of Deans and Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters. This study also answers calls from Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters to begin thinking about how service learning might be positioned in the academy by examining the opportunities made available by cross-disciplinary relationships.

Finally, the model described here demonstrates the pedagogical benefits of a project that encourages *digital*, as well as physical, community engagement. Students working within this pedagogical model complete a public writing task that requires the translation and transmission of local knowledge sets (in the form of physical archives) to an openly accessible (online) public database, providing them with valuable insights into how knowledge is produced and shared in digital forums, especially those that employ collaborative methods of production. Students become familiar with specific digital community conventions in order to accomplish this work, and, finally, learn the importance of critical evaluation of information created in a collaborative, open access encyclopedia.

A Collaborative Effort in Curriculum Development

In early fall of 2011, I was contacted by the Head of Art and Archives for Libraries at Ohio University, a midsize public university enrolling around 20,000

undergraduate students, and the same institution in which the classroom studies detailed in Chapters 1 and 3 were conducted. She was interested in the possibility of collaboratively developing a writing assignment for a course I was teaching in the upcoming term that would engage students in research in the library's archives and special collections. Students completing this assignment would be made aware of the available materials in these collections and would be able to return to them for future research endeavors.

Over the next few weeks, we developed an assignment that would accomplish this research goal and also raise awareness of special collections resources through a more public venue: the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. The encyclopedia had recently piloted its Global Education Program, a public policy initiative sponsored by the Wikimedia Foundation, which seeks to “engage students and professors across disciplines, universities and countries in using Wikipedia as a teaching tool” with the goal of “improv[ing] Wikipedia’s coverage of course topics” (“Wikipedia: Education Program”). The program provides sample course designs and assignment ideas, as well as support for students in the form of “help” chat channels and online ambassadors who are available to answer questions and solve issues.

With this ultimate venue for publication in mind, we constructed a project consisting of the following processes and goals. Students would perform original research in the university archives and special collections to discover materials regarding a university-related topic and then update or “edit” a corresponding article on Wikipedia. In the process, students would develop relationships with the special collections curator

whose collection they were researching, as well as with an assigned online ambassador, an experienced Wikipedian who volunteered time to assist students on the project.

Ultimately, student-edited articles would help publicize and raise awareness of special collections because readers of these articles would be exposed to reference-links to the university archive's website.

The project was not designed entirely as a service to special collections and archives, however. From my own perspective as a writing instructor, I was interested in using the encyclopedia as a way of teaching students about how textual conventions of a particular genre reflect a community's values and goals, as well as exposing students to a dynamic, social-process oriented model of knowledge construction. Because Wikipedia is built on a wiki platform, it allows multiple users to contribute to a single document while saving a record of individual contributions. Such a platform showcases collaborative writing processes, and having students observe and engage in these processes can be helpful on a number of cognitive and meta-cognitive levels, especially in terms of procedural, research and genre knowledge (Hood; Purdy; Vetter), as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Perhaps my most significant motivation was my desire to engage students with audiences and authorities outside the classroom, to get them to write for purposes beyond the course and teacher, which I had realized could be a powerful motivator in the previous study.

The collaborative nature of this project was influenced significantly by Kenneth Bruffee's 1984 landmark article "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" In what is now a well-known argument for collaborative learning, Bruffee

insists that we thoughtfully organize collaborative learning situations that contribute to “a genuine part of students’ educational developments” (652). Bruffee is careful, however, to recognize the problematic aspects of peer group learning when he poses the following questions: “How can student peers, who are not themselves members of the knowledge communities they hope to enter help other students to enter those communities? Isn’t collaborative learning the blind leading the blind?” (646). Bruffee answers this difficulty, partially, by emphasizing the ways that such an assumption reifies a model of knowledge in which these peer groups are themselves unqualified to access an outside source of knowledge. If we move beyond these reductive assumptions toward a model in which we begin to value the knowledge sets students bring as well as the collaborative work they engage in to negotiate and build knowledge, we can begin to value their contributions more thoroughly.

In the collaborative, cross-disciplinary model presented in this study, my intent is both to support Bruffee’s evaluation of peer-group learning as well as to insist that students benefit from the inclusion of collaborators outside their immediate peer group: special collections’ curators and Wikipedia ambassadors, collaborators whose expertise and knowledge contribute to and motivate students in this project. I was also interested in finding out whether or not these collaborators could mitigate what Bruffee himself recognizes as the “pitfalls” of peer group learning: the “conformity, anti-intellectualism, intimidation, and leveling down of quality” that so often emerges when students depend on their peers for collaborative projects (652).

Designing the Study

In designing a classroom study that would explore the possibilities of this kind of collaborative-digital pedagogy, I was interested in the following research questions:

1. What can academic archivists and composition classes (both students and instructors) gain through collaborative, cross-disciplinary curriculum development?
2. How might students' perceptions of audience and authority differ (from more traditional assignments) in an assignment that attempts to accomplish public goals, one that incorporates a number of different audiences and collaborators?
3. Do students identify cross-disciplinary projects like this as more or less motivating than previous English assignments?
4. How do students respond, positively or negatively, to this type of cross-disciplinary pedagogy?

Participants in the study, which received IRB approval, were students enrolled in a junior-level, general education course—*Writing & Rhetoric II*—I taught during the winter quarter of 2012. Sixteen students overall, between the ages of 18 and 24, participated in the study. Because the study, like those presented in Chapters 1 and 3, was situated within the practices and exigencies of the course, procedures for data collection followed closely the processes of the assignment. Students invented and researched topics in the library's archives and special collections after attending a presentation by curators on materials and policies of the collections. Their topic selections were limited,

somewhat, to the availability of specific materials in the collections. Accordingly, archive curators helped students brainstorm possible topics based on what was most available in the archives. Students then studied a corresponding Wikipedia article to find “gaps”—places they could identify as needing updating or revising. Next, students wrote a proposal letter to their assigned curator in which they described their plans for the article edit (see Appendix D for further description of the assignment sequence). These letters were followed by face-to-face interviews with the curator. Students then performed additional research and submitted a draft to their assigned Wikipedia online volunteer, who returned feedback concerning Wikipedia conventions.¹¹ In the final segment of the assignment, students “published” their drafts.

Throughout the various assignment processes, I collected three sets of data. At two intervals in the assignment sequence, students wrote process logs to describe the influence of curators and ambassadors on their writing and research processes. Prompts for these process logs (see Appendix D) were intentionally open-ended to avoid leading students and were designed to gain data about students’ perceptions of the value of incorporating outside authorities. Additionally, after they had submitted their drafts for publication, students completed a questionnaire meant to gauge their perceptions of authority and audience, as well as their overall response to the project (see Appendix E). Students were given twenty-five minutes to answer nine open-ended, short response questions during which the instructor (myself) left the room. As stipulated by IRB,

¹¹ Online volunteers, or ambassadors, are experienced Wikipedia editors who have agreed to help support students in their Wikipedia writing projects. They are available for all types of questions and support, but are most frequently incorporated into Wikipedia projects as reviewers of article edits.

students were given the option of refusing to participate and were informed that their responses would be collected anonymously and would in no way affect their grade or standing in the course.

As all of the questions were qualitative, open-ended short responses, interpretation of the data, as in Chapter 1, was based on a type of thematic analysis drawn from Richard Boyatzis' *Transforming Qualitative Information*. A theme, according to Boyatzis, allows for qualitative analysis of a data set through recognition of "pattern[s] found in the information...that describe and organize possible observations [and/or] interpret aspects of the phenomenon" (vii). My use of this analytical method entailed the creation of codes or themes that commonly emerged in responses. In responses that generated multiple possible themes, all themes were included. For example, if a student lists two different themes in one question, such as identifying both the instructor and the Wikipedia public as significant authorities in the project, both were reported toward result totals. The qualitative data collected in this study informs the following two sections, in which I present a case study of a single student's experience navigating the project, and then the results of the larger class study, which focuses on student perceptions of authority and audience.

From Archive to Screen: Tracing One Student's Experience with the Archive Project

The project to perform archival research and improve a Wikipedia article on a university-related topic comes alive through a case study of a particular student, whom we'll call Mark. A baseball fan and journalism major, Mark became intrigued by university alumnus (1909) and professional baseball player George "Krum" Kahler, a

particular interest of one of the archive curators. After hearing the curator talk specifically about the availability of materials in special collections related to this figure, Mark checked out the Wikipedia article for Kahler and discovered that it could use some work. In particular, Mark noticed a number of what he had come to think of, through class discussions and the project assignment, as “gaps”—omissions that might be filled in order to expand and improve the article. He noted many of these in a letter to the curator (see Appendix A for assignment prompt), excerpted below, which served the purpose of an introduction and project proposal:

As you have seen from his Wikipedia page, the information on Kahler does not do him justice. Although his career was short and relatively average, he deserves more than merely three sentences for his biography. The information on there covers some of his general statistics such as earned run average, win-lose record, strikeout totals and birth and death dates. Needless to say, there is an enormous amount of information that could be added to this [Wikipedia article]. New sections could include his minor league career, information about his family, information on his football and basketball careers and his life after baseball.

Mark’s proposal letter goes on to describe some of the materials he had already found in the library archives, including the Kahler Scrapbook, which according to Mark “gives an immense amount of information on Kahler by including articles, box scores and pictures of the athlete from his . . . high school days to his stint in the pros.” Mark ends the letter by thanking the curator for his help and by expressing excitement about the project's

goals. “Since Kahler was seen as a local hero,” writes Mark, “it also adds more motivation to tell his story to the general audience.” Such an attitude can tell us a lot about how students become motivated in research situations where there is a genuine audience as well as subjects they are invested in. Mark’s investment in the research topic, and the relationship he formed with the curator who was also heavily invested, led to his motivation to share that interest with a larger audience. Later in the project, in one of his process logs, Mark wrote the following about the motivation he felt working with the curator one-on-one: “[The curator] sat down and showed me the information available at the Mahn Center along with giving me additional sources of his own [to] use. The excitement and enthusiasm he has for my subject has been rubbing off on me as well.”

But Mark’s comments are also evocative on another level. Because the project involved working across disciplines to collaborate with curators of special collections, students were able to access research materials that are not, by definition, broadly accessible to a larger audience. Working with these materials and making them more public allows students to participate first-hand in a process of research that goes beyond synthesis and argument. Mark, as well as his classmates, was able to share information with a public audience that was previously only accessible to visitors of the archive. In doing so, these students were also able to witness how digital technologies are changing the way information is created, stored, and made public, to re-imagine what an archive can look like in the twenty-first century.

Yet Mark’s process on this project did not stop at his interactions with the special collections curator. As part of the collaborative nature of this assignment, Mark also

interacted and worked with a Wikipedia “ambassador,” an experienced Wikipedian who volunteered time to help students learn, employ article conventions, and participate in the encyclopedia’s development. Working with an ambassador allowed students to come to terms with specific writing conventions of Wikipedia and to translate their archival research into a format acceptable to the Wikipedia community. In particular, Mark recognizes the significance of the ambassador's support in relation to learning the Wikipedia community conventions of article organization:

The advice that I received from [the Wikipedia ambassador] was very helpful in editing my article. She gave me more feedback than expected, mainly dealing with the organization of my article. I think it is very beneficial to have articles reviewed by experienced Wikipedians who know the guidelines and restrictions. After receiving [the ambassador’s] advice, I was able to polish my page to make it better suited for Wikipedia.

While Wikipedia articles are never truly “finished,” Mark’s revisions based on the feedback received from the ambassador represent his final work on the project; and soon after, he “published” those revisions as his final draft of the assignment on Wikipedia.

While Mark did not create the article on George Kahler, his contributions were significant. When he first stumbled upon the article, it was extremely brief, including only a one-line description or “lead” of the baseball player and a single reference. Mark’s contributions included additions to the lead section, new sections on Kahler’s “Early Life,” “Professional Baseball Career,” and “Post Baseball Career” – including significant

content for those sections, as well as multiple references. Furthermore, nearly three years later, Mark's edits remain in the article ("George Kahler").

As becomes evident in a case study of Mark, students working on this project benefit immensely from a cross-disciplinary, digital model that invites multiple collaborators into the process. Students are challenged and motivated by the opportunity to work with different individuals, each bringing a separate agenda and interest to the project. The curator, for instance, is interested in sharing knowledge about a particular part of the archives as well as promoting and making archival materials more accessible through a public venue such as Wikipedia. The curator, however, rarely has a thorough understanding of conventional practices and politics of Wikipedia. Ambassadors working with students on this project met this need by helping students translate their research into article edits that were consistent with the encyclopedia's norms. Involving these figures in an assignment not only allows for added support and motivation for students working on a very public writing assignment—one with lasting consequences—but it also creates a situation where students need to be able to forward their own vision, and assert their own authority, among those outside individuals. The next section deals with this issue of authority, and how students working on projects with multiple collaborators and audiences might learn to take on personal authority by gaining access to rhetorical knowledge.

Authorities, Audiences, and the Possibilities for Rhetorical Knowledge in Public Writing

In the study discussed in Chapter 1, I found that, among other outcomes, Wikipedia writing projects are a productive means for students to become more familiar with key concepts related to “rhetoric and textual authority.” One highly evident outcome to emerge from this section of the study was students’ increased sense of audience, and their new understanding of how audience shapes the rhetorical situation. However, it was through this first study that I also realized that, for students to more fully develop “rhetorical knowledge,” they would also need to make some key realizations concerning authority and personal subjectivity. It isn’t enough for student writers to be able to name the different elements of the rhetorical situation, they also need opportunities to engage in a highly rhetorical, constructivist act of knowledge creation and assume authority within and through that act.

This need is further discussed by Ann M. Penrose and Cheryl Geisler in “Reading and Writing without Authority,” as they analyze the writing and reading processes of two student writers—one a college freshman, the other a doctoral student—in order to better understand how novice and expert writers differ in their ability to assume authority over their writing. They argue that the freshman, “Janet, has difficulty assuming authority in a complex writing task because of her strong commitment to an ‘information-transfer model of education’” (515). Janet’s commitment to this model, perpetuated by the types of traditional writing assignments common in academic contexts, prohibits her from taking a constructivist approach. Instead of seeing other texts and authors as making knowledge claims “subject to interpretation and criticism” (515), Janet insists on a truth-

finding writing process in order to compile an objective report, and refrains from inserting or assuming an authority of her own to negotiate multiple sources. Roger, the more experienced writer, on the other hand, is able to acknowledge and negotiate multiple perspectives or points of view in order to compare the various positions in the literature. Penrose and Geisler's examination of these two student-writers allows them to challenge preconceived notions of how students gain authority over their writing. "The traditional response to the problem of lack of authority," they acknowledge, "is to try to increase the domain knowledge upon which authority is supposedly founded" (516). Domain knowledge, the mastery of a set of subject-specific topics in a given field of inquiry, *does* provide writers with strategies to negotiate meaning. However, to assume that mastery of a complex writing task requires *only* domain knowledge is, according to Penrose and Geisler, an oversimplification. A writer's authority must also come from "rhetorical knowledge," an understanding of a rhetorical, constructivist model of knowledge production and the role of personal subjectivity in that process:

We would instead argue for the role of rhetorical knowledge in the development of authority. In order for Janet to take authority in this or any other situation, she needs to believe there is authority to spare—that there is room for many voices. She needs to understand the development of knowledge as a communal and continual process. Thus an alternative to the information-transfer model would be to insist on more interactive models of education in which a genuine rhetorical perspective is not only taught but enacted. (517)

An “interactive” pedagogy that allows students to participate in the ongoing rhetorical construction of knowledge proposed by Penrose and Geisler might be accomplished in a number of ways. The digital-collaborative model presented in this study, one responsive to community-engagement and service learning, represents a particularly productive response to their recommendations. As a wiki, a writing technology that allows for multiple, ongoing contributions to a single written product, Wikipedia itself is a productive means for understanding the social construction of knowledge. Yet students also have much to gain through their negotiation of the multiple authorities and audiences afforded in a cross-disciplinary, public writing project. The involvement of these extra-academic authorities and audiences, as the results of this study suggest, allow for a pedagogy that significantly displaces the instructor as sole authority over student work and provides public audiences for student writing. Such a shift dramatically increases opportunities for growth in rhetorical knowledge, as students negotiate multiple authorities and audiences to produce written work for users of Wikipedia, as seen below in Table 3.

Table 3
Student Perceptions of Authority Distribution

Authority Figure	n (N)	%
Professor	8 (16)	50%
Wikipedia Public	8 (16)	50%
Student (Self)	6 (16)	38%
Curator	4 (16)	25%

Table 3, which presents survey data (see Appendix E, question 7), displays student perceptions of authority figures operating in the project. As is evident from the percentages, many students identified two figures of authority. While a large portion of students (8 of 16) depicted the instructor as the most significant authority—often citing the “grade” as reasoning—this selection does not represent a majority. Rather, authority was distributed among the various audiences and research partners of the assignment. An equal portion of students (8 of 16) described Wikipedia ambassadors or Wikipedia public audiences as authorities. Students in this category often reported a desire for their work to remain public on the encyclopedia (i.e., for their work not to be removed by another editor). As one student responded, “I believe the Wikipedia public held the most authority because at any moment they could say your article was crap and go in and change it. This pushed me to write a better article that was constructed really well.”

Additionally, a sizable portion of students (6 of 16) saw *themselves* as authorities in the project. Many of them discussed their “control” over the project, citing the public

audience as a major factor, although these perceptions might also be interpreted as a refusal to acknowledge outside influences:

I held the authority, even with an online ambassador helping me and [offering] guidelines to follow. It is all my decision on what the page would consist of and how professional it would be. I cared about the assignment so I wanted to make sure that everything looks as good as possible for readers and for general public.

Finally, a smaller number of students (4 of 16) identified the special collections curator they worked with as an authority. While student perceptions are necessarily somewhat limited, these data demonstrate the possibility of displacing the instructor's authority in a public writing assignment, of enabling students to navigate multiple resources and authorities and, more importantly, cultivate their own authority in order to create knowledge in a public venue.

Much like their perceptions of authority, student conceptions of audience in this particular writing task varied greatly from a more traditional assignment in which they write for an imagined academic audience or for the instructor exclusively. Such conceptions were certainly influenced by the number of different individuals and communities involved in the project. Curators at the university library's special collections provided access to topics and materials and helped to guide students in the research process. Online Wikipedia ambassadors commented on student drafts of article edits. Students discussed their work in class among their peers and with the instructor, who would be assessing their work. Add to these specific audiences the Wikipedia

public, encyclopedia users who would read the articles, and what emerges is quite complex. Toby Coley, writing about wikis in general, provides a vivid description of such complexity:

The concept of audience is challenged in the wiki because students now have to consider the identity of the audience on a much larger scale, since they have the ability to “publish” materials online. Though this audience may be limited by administrators, the students’ conceptions of audience are still challenged through the immediacy of the audience and its impact on the physical (or digital) text. The audience is now an amalgamation of single-member audience, limited audience, undefined multi-audiences, fictionalized audience, addressed, and invoked audience. (“Wikis and the Rhetorical Audience,” para. 13)

Coley is drawing from Lunsford and Ede’s influential 1984 work “Audience Addressed / Audience Invoked,” but also relevant here is Keith Grant-Davie’s identification of the audience as co-negotiating discourse with the rhetor “to achieve the rhetorical objectives” (268). For students to be able to perform such negotiations, for them to see how discourse both affects and is affected by audiences, they need to be writing for audiences beyond the instructor. A model of public writing with specific goals for production and distribution, one that involves multiple audiences and collaborators, enables students to engage and interact with other writers and researchers within a goal-oriented and community-driven project.

When asked to identify the audience that “mattered the most to you as a writer” in the assignment sequence, students participating in the study overwhelmingly chose an outside audience, as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4
Student Identifications of Significant Audiences

n (N)	%	Identified Audience
9 (16)	56%	Wikipedia public
6 (16)	38%	Wikipedia Ambassador
3 (16)	19%	Curator
3 (16)	19%	Professor

While some students selected two audiences, which accounts for the skewing of percentages, the majority of students (9 of 16) selected the “Wikipedia public,” often citing specific expectations from this audience: “The Wikipedia public mattered to me the most. I tried to put myself in someone else’s shoes and think ‘if I was researching the topic, what are they key things I would want to take away from it and what would I find most interesting?’ With these points in mind, I put together my article.”

Another large portion (6 of 16) chose the “Wikipedia Ambassador,” often pointing to their expertise in the Wikipedia community and the required processes of the assignment: “The ambassador’s opinion would probably mean the most. He is supposed to be knowledgeable in the area of writing Wikipedia articles and their format. It also dictated how much more work was to be put into the project. If he didn’t like it I would

have to change more of the writing.” Finally, an even number of students (3 of 16) chose either the curator or professor as important audiences, citing either the curator’s expertise in the subject area or my final assessment as reasoning.

Interestingly, by prioritizing the professor as authority but not as audience, students overall perceived a real difference in what makes a piece of writing successful within a specific community like Wikipedia and effective in a college writing course. Furthermore, and perhaps the most striking finding in this data, students *did* largely see themselves as writing for outside audiences. Such a finding suggests that despite the omnipresent threat of assessment and professor-authority, we can create curricula that allow students to negotiate among audiences outside the classroom and enact a pedagogy that supports students’ development of rhetorical knowledge.

Factors of Motivation

In the study in Chapter 1, many students remarked on how their sense of audience when writing in Wikipedia made them feel more motivated to succeed in the project, a benefit to using Wikipedia writing projects first suggested by Robert Cummings. In this study, I’ve conducted a more formal investigation of how and why students become motivated in situations that involve extra-academic audiences by asking the following: How do students perceive a model of cross-disciplinary, digital pedagogy in comparison to previous composition assignments? Because they were students in a junior-level composition course (the second in a two-course general education requirement), participants in the study brought with them a range of experiences and opinions concerning previous exposure to composition pedagogy. Table 5 details student

responses to the following prompt: “Compare this assignment to an assignment in a previous English course. Were you more or less motivated? Why?”

Table 5
Self-Assessed Student Motivation

n (N)	Motivation Level	Reasoning/Motivator
6 (16)	“More motivated”	Public/audience
4 (16)	“More motivated”	Research process/curator involvement
3 (16)	“More motivated”	New, different, unknown project
3 (16)	“More motivated”	Personal connection to topic
1 (16)	“More motivated”	Familiarity with Wikipedia
1 (16)	“Equal motivation”	Grade

Significantly, no student reported being less motivated and only one reported feeling “equal motivation.” The majority of students were “more motivated” for a variety of reasons. Chief among these (6 of 16 students) was the public audience targeted by the assignment. Students were extremely motivated by the idea of “publishing” their work on Wikipedia. “The fact that I was working on a Wikipedia page,” wrote one student, “was also more fun than just writing down facts on paper for my professor to see. It’s cool that it’s in [the] public domain and that helped motivate me.” Others compared this larger audience to the limited audience they had written for in previous writing classes: “This was different in that I have never had an assignment that would be open to public viewing in an English class. All of my previous assignments were only read by the instructors and

my classmates. This added motivation, knowing of the audience that would be reading my work.” Wikipedia, as a very public and popular resource, and as a website that students themselves visit frequently, tends to add to students’ sense of audience even more than other online venues (blogs, personal websites, and social media). While there are certainly other factors, this perception of audience is likely due to students’ recognition of Wikipedia as appearing frequently in Internet searches and in their own web browsing practices.

While the public audience plays a large part in motivation, one-fourth of the students were also motivated by the research process and curator involvement in the project:

At first I was scared of the workload. How to balance between classes, but once I got into the library I knew this was something I was going to enjoy. The researching aspect was definitely my favorite. I had never before been in the University archives, so that experience was awesome. Not only did I research for my own topic, but also went in and researched my true passion: photography. The curators even let me scan an old photo and create a poster of it to hang in my room. They were amazing which pushed me to do my best.

Yet another significant portion of students (3 of 16) were motivated by the “new” and “different” assignment model: “I believe this project motivated me because it is interesting and different. I have [been] told that using Wikipedia as a source for research was banned for such a long time. I never thought that I would be creating an article

myself.” An equal number of students were motivated by the opportunity to write on a topic they had a personal interest in. Finally, a smaller number of students were motivated by the opportunity to gain familiarity with Wikipedia processes and conventions and by the grade they would receive for the assignment.

Student Recommendations

While the data previously discussed demonstrates that students felt more motivation in this project as compared to previous writing assignments, this study is also concerned with answering a more specific question: would students working on this kind of cross-disciplinary, digital assignment recommend a similar model to future classes? Survey results regarding this question found that students participating in this study unanimously (16 of 16) recommend the assignment, but not all for the same reasons. As might be expected, students spoke highly of the public, dynamic nature of Wikipedia as a writing forum open to the public to “read, revise, and edit.” Additionally, a good number of students saw this as a publishing opportunity: “Because of this project...I can brag to my friends that I am now a published author. This gives me great satisfaction.” Students also commended the assignment for being different from writing tasks they had completed in the past, one participant calling it a “breath of fresh air compared to typical research papers that every other class is doing.” Others recognized the value of multiple audiences beyond the instructor and valued gaining knowledge of the library’s special collections. Finally, students also recognized the project as challenging and requiring them to “go outside [their] comfort zone.” A few students, however, did have some reservations. The project would not be easy for students wanting to “slack off and write

easy papers” and some stated that more time and guidance would have been helpful. Such reservations were always couched in positive terms, however, and overall students expressed satisfaction with the project.

Local Topics, Global Audiences

While this study is certainly limited by its small sample size, there is much to gain from a close examination of a model of cross-disciplinary, digital pedagogy. From the perspective of university libraries, and specifically special collections, this type of project accomplishes significant goals of mainstreaming and raising awareness of library archives and special collections.¹² The use of special collections is “mainstreamed” in that students see this type of research as one of a growing number of paths available to them in the search for information. Student-participants who carried out this assignment are now more likely to utilize resources in special collections for future research endeavors and more likely to spread an awareness of archival resources among their peers. Further, awareness of the university’s special collections is also cultivated for the public, as other users of Wikipedia are exposed to references and external links used in student-edited encyclopedia articles. The assignment also provides an opportunity for students to develop relationships with special collections curators (library archivists). Finally, the use of Wikipedia in a cross-disciplinary writing assignment also exposes librarians and curators to the numerous opportunities presented by the encyclopedia as a new model for information literacy. The importance of this collaborative model has only

¹² For a discussion of how this project achieved the goals of special collections and archives at Ohio University Libraries, see Matthew Vetter and Sarah Harrington, “Integrating Special Collections into the Composition Classroom: A Case Study of Collaborative Digital Curriculum.”

recently been recognized by academic librarians, as is evidenced in a recent study by Norah Bente Ismail et al.: “Few have realized the opportunities for cross-disciplinary relationships and pedagogy offered by the online encyclopedia as an alternative and more democratic episteme which might provide librarians an opportunity to engage in public intellectual tasks” (63). The curricular model offered in this study, then, is a manifestation of such opportunities, one in which librarians can engage in digital information curation outside their institutions as much as students. This “democratic episteme” also provides opportunities, according to Meghan Sweeney, for students to gain practice with information literacy skills by taking a “critical stance” to evaluate Wikipedia content. Such skills are becoming ever more relevant in the 21st century, and are more frequently endorsed by organizations such as NCTE, CCCC, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (Sweeney, 257).

From the perspective of the writing classroom, students also have much to gain from this model. Because it required local archival research and the translation of that research into a publicly accessible forum online, the collaborative, cross-disciplinary conditions of the project allowed students to both participate in and observe the ways in which digital technologies are changing how information is produced, shared and accessed in the twenty-first century. Opportunities for the displacement of authority figures and the negotiation of multiple audiences make the enactment of rhetorical knowledge and the assertion of student authority a viable learning goal in the composition classroom.

Of course, there have been many examples of pedagogies that employ audiences beyond the classroom to enrich student learning. A particularly relevant and sustained movement has been the creation of journals and other media outlets specifically for undergraduate student writing. National journals in composition studies such as *Young Scholars in Writing* and *Queen City Writers* are two examples of this, though these are more particularly geared to undergraduates affiliated with a writing studies program. Other manifestations of this movement include institutions creating journals or other media outlets specifically marked as venues for their own students (across general education writing courses and other courses) to publish in. The *PIT Journal* at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill or *EM—Journal* at Eastern Michigan University (Rosinski et al.) both allow student writers to participate in a genuine community, and to publish their work in an established venue.

Compared to these efforts, Wikipedia stands out in a few ways. First, it already has an incredibly active community, culture, and politic that is difficult to emulate (or quickly build) in an institutionally created journal. Second, as a global reference resource, it's already recognizable to students. Students are motivated to write in Wikipedia and learn how it works because they already use it quite frequently. Finally, as realized by scholars studying the convergences of Wikipedia and writing pedagogy and confirmed in Chapter 1, students exposed to the acts of composing that take place in the encyclopedia can also gain an understanding of writing as a recursive, collaborative, and social process (Cummings; Hood; Purdy; Vetter). That student-participants in this study unanimously recommended the assignment model further demonstrates their perception of its value.

Ultimately, coming to more concrete realizations of the opportunities provided by digital pedagogies and their implementation into cross-disciplinary, service-learning environments also answers calls from Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters to identify more sustainable ways to promote and position service-learning in the academy. Forging cross-disciplinary relationships with university archives and special collections and working together to contribute to a digital, public knowledge project such as Wikipedia helps us reimagine the notion of the archive in light of recent and rapid technological change. Etymologically speaking, *archive* connotes the collection and storage of public records, yet the word is also linked to definitions of authority and power. *Archive* shares a morpheme with cognates *monarchy* and *oligarchy*, and is, in its most basic form, evocative of the power of the state to regulate public knowledge. Reconfiguring the archive in the twenty-first century, and harnessing digital technologies that are themselves more democratic, serves librarians and students in very positive ways, while also demonstrating what public writing pedagogies can accomplish outside the academy.

Finally, the study presented in this chapter also reveals the significance and pedagogical value of engaging students with local research: with the social, historical, and institutional data that is abundant on their own university campus and in their own community. Wikipedia, as a global resource that organizes collaborative writing among multiple editors dispersed both geographically and temporally, has, in some ways, faltered to value the opportunities for knowledge production that can arise when individuals research and interact with people locally. While the model of dispersed peer production has helped the Wikipedia community succeed in building the largest and most

comprehensive encyclopedia to date, it has also resulted in significant gaps in coverage, most notably among topics that are locally situated. Through the first and second classroom studies, I gradually realized that students would be more successful in Wikipedia projects if they worked with underdeveloped articles that reported on local topics, mostly due to the fact that these articles offered more opportunities for textual engagement.

But emphasizing this type of “local research” also productively challenges some of the epistemological features central to Wikipedia, especially verifiability and notability. As discussed in Chapter 2, the principle of verifiability in Wikipedia requires that articles are sourced with reliable content that can be easily verified, that is published and widely available either in digital or print form. The principle of notability requires that topics (to be represented in Wikipedia) have significant coverage from reliable sources independent of the subject (“WP: Notability”). While these policies do not completely negate the possibility of local research, they do tend to encourage a more dispersed peer production. The use of archival collections, as explored in this classroom study, poses specific challenges to the policy of verifiability. While these archives are open to the public, the materials contained within are not massed produced and are not readily available to those outside the immediate geography. To represent them is problematic, according to existing Wikipedia policies. But to ignore them is to neglect a major source of locally sourced knowledge, resulting in an encyclopedia with major gaps in representation. In the third chapter, I report on a study that attempts to further identify “local” gaps of representation in Wikipedia by focusing on its treatment of Appalachia,

and describe a pedagogical model in which students work to improve the encyclopedia's coverage of that region, which many of them call home.

CHAPTER 4: MAKING THE LOCAL GLOBAL: CRITICAL-CULTURAL STUDENT PROJECTS IN WIKIPEDIA

The classroom studies reported on in the previous two chapters demonstrate how Wikipedia writing projects can accomplish a number of specific, articulated learning outcomes, and how those same projects, when designed carefully to include outside collaborators, can also provide a means for increasing students' rhetorical knowledge—their understanding of a rhetorical, constructivist model of knowledge production and the role of personal subjectivity in that process.

Outside collaborators, when combined with the already rhetorically and contextually rich atmosphere of Wikipedia, can further help create productive writing projects in which students accomplish public intellectual work in a highly visible venue, while also meeting traditional learning outcomes. Throughout the process of each classroom study, as my students learned, so too did I. I became more familiar with the practices and values of Wikipedia, as well as its shortcomings. I also realized that my students could make more of an impact in the encyclopedia when they focused more on local issues that they could connect with more concretely—issues that weren't already well represented in the encyclopedia. In this final case study, my research reflects these lessons as I present a model for pedagogy in which students address the problems of representation and cultural politics that arise in Wikipedia *and* engage with local knowledge by improving content related to the region in which they live and attend school.

As I have described in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, Wikipedia's open access mission, evident in its policies and practices, is often praised as inclusive and democratic. The community's ambition to "collect the sum of all human knowledge and distribute it freely to every person on the planet," articulated by co-founder Jimmy Wales (Wales), further describes an ethic of accessibility and universality. Yet Wikipedia has faltered to encourage participation beyond its mostly white, male editor base. In the most prominent study to date, the editor base of the (English) encyclopedia was identified as 87% male and only 13% female (Cohen; Glott, Schmidt, and Ghosh). Such a demographic is problematic on a number of levels, but the way it surfaces most visibly is in the gaps of representation that emerge in actual content coverage. It becomes very difficult to discuss these issues without relying on stereotypes and overgeneralizations. But the fact remains that many subjects which male-identified readers might care more about—pop culture, videogames, athletics—are simply better represented in the encyclopedia. Not only are articles devoted to these subjects better developed and more mature, but there also exist more articles on these topics. Subjects that may matter more to female or transgender-identified readers, however, are often missing or underdeveloped. Noam Cohen, writing for the *New York Times* in 2011 describes the gap by focusing on how it often manifests in terms of emphasis of coverage:

With so many subjects represented — most everything has an article on Wikipedia — the gender disparity often shows up in terms of emphasis. A topic generally restricted to teenage girls, like friendship bracelets, can seem short at four paragraphs when compared with lengthy articles on

something boys might favor, like, toy soldiers or baseball cards, whose voluminous entry includes a detailed chronological history of the subject.

(para. 7)

In the last few years, many projects have emerged to address the gender gap. “Edit-a-Thons” devoted to enlarging the encyclopedia’s representations of women artists, for instance, (“Eyebeam”) and initiatives within the encyclopedia itself, such as WikiProject LGBT¹³ have begun to tackle the androcentric and heteronormative coverage of topics in Wikipedia. But ultimately, Wikipedia’s gender gap is only one symptom of a larger systemic failure to both represent and give access to the multicultural, multi-vocal demographic the encyclopedia envisions in its “global” rhetoric. Collecting “the sum of all human knowledge” has, so far, been a project taken on by predominantly young, western males.

In “Wiki Space: Palimpsests and the Politics of Exclusion,” Mark Graham acknowledges the exclusionary functions of Wikipedia beyond the gender gap as it represents, and fails to represent, global geographies. Recognizing the dominance of Wikipedia as “de facto global reference of dynamic knowledge,” Graham argues that the site’s construction of geographic knowledge, “how places are represented and made visible (or invisible) in [the encyclopedia] has a potentially immense bearing on the ways that people interact with those same places culturally, economically, and politically” (269). Using the encyclopedia’s own system of geo-tagging articles, Graham’s analysis

¹³ Wikiprojects are task force groups devoted to expanding and developing specific content areas in the encyclopedia. They share common goals and help each other to improve the encyclopedia’s representation of a particular topic.

of Wikipedia illustrates the massive disparities in representation between western geographies and the places of the global south. Even more troubling, Graham's findings also show how, when non-western locations are represented, they are often written about from an outsider perspective. In other words, a place's people have no voice in that place's representation. Graham uses the term "uneven" to characterize the information politics of the encyclopedia and to challenge the accepted notion that it is unbiased, claiming: "Wikipedia is characterized by uneven geographies, uneven directions, and uneven politics influencing the palimpsests of place" (271).

It is the contention of this chapter that the "unevenness" of geographical and cultural representation in Wikipedia is not only confined to non-western voices, cultures, and geographies, but that it is also found in already marginalized aspects of American culture and geography: specifically, its representation of the history, culture, and places of Appalachia. While it can be difficult to "see" under-representation of a subject in Wikipedia (as it often manifests in the *absence* of coverage), my recognition of Wikipedia's treatment of this region is based on an exploration, further in this chapter, of WikiProject Appalachia, a task force dedicated to extending coverage of related articles as well as its identification of articles that do not exist or need development. Working to address these gaps, I argue, allows students opportunities to engage in the cultural politics of representation and access, as described above, and to improve the encyclopedia's coverage of underrepresented topics. Evidence for these arguments emerges from descriptive-qualitative research conducted during a course taught in the summer of 2014 that introduced students to Wikipedia's problematic politics while also using the

encyclopedia to teach general composition outcomes. Much like previous chapters in this study, I emphasize student experience through descriptive, classroom research. Students in this course—taught at Ohio University, a mid-sized public university in Southeast (Appalachian) Ohio—improved Wikipedia’s coverage of Appalachian topics by editing existing articles and creating new ones. In doing so, they also worked towards an understanding of how Wikipedia influences public knowledge and how they can contribute to a project that improves awareness of their local culture. Ultimately, this pedagogical approach emphasizes both the value of Wikipedia for teaching writing and the ways academics can contribute in meaningful ways by attending to gaps of representation.

By examining three sets of classroom data, and working directly with students’ experiences of a particular course design, this chapter asks that we consider Wikipedia as a venue for teaching the cultural politics of representation and access in digital spaces and demonstrates how that goal can be integrated into a pedagogy that pays attention to rhetoric, writing, and digital production. Furthermore, this chapter also asserts that we need to become more attuned to the ways Wikipedia’s homogenous editor-base leads to the distortion, misrepresentation, and under-representation of a number of already marginalized subjects. Involving students in the cultural politics of Wikipedia can teach much-needed digital critical skills. Furthermore, working with them in a project to attend to gaps of representation can help them understand the significance of community and regional engagement and how they can use writing and goal-directed research as a tool for social change.

Designing the Course; Designing the Study

As the final investigation in a set of three classroom studies, my research for this chapter sought to align, as much as possible, with the qualitative-descriptive designs employed in the classroom studies detailed in Chapters Two and Three. As in these studies, I place significant emphasis on students' experience, especially in regards to their perceptions concerning learning. Above all, I seek to provide a rich set of qualitative data on how students perceive Wikipedia writing assignments, and what they feel they can gain from such experiences. The methodological approach of this study, as in previous chapters, is again immersive and contextual. By describing day-to-day classroom activities and gathering first-hand, qualitative responses from students concerning their reactions to a specific pedagogical model, I employ a type of classroom research that is non-disruptive, that follows the course of the various writing assignments undertaken by students, that enriches students' writing processes instead of diverting them, and that values student experience and brings their voices into the scholarly narrative.

The methodological alignment with previous studies allows for a consistent and thorough investigation of three specific course designs, while also providing a descriptive-qualitative model for future research. Similarly, the analytical methods employed in this study, described further below, also align with previous case studies. However, this study departs from my previous research in two significant ways. First, while the course and demographic being studied is the same—a junior-level, general education course, *Writing & Rhetoric II*, made up of 18-24 year old students—its design was influenced by the fact that it took place in a summer session and was limited to a

seven-week timeframe, as opposed to the ten-week, quarter system, courses described in previous chapters. Such a constraint influenced the course's design as well as its focus, which sought to engage more thoroughly and holistically with Wikipedia as a central theme for the class. By scaffolding a more coherent assignment sequence around the theme of Wikipedia, I felt I could do more, as a teacher, to engage with course outcomes and provide a positive learning experience for students in a shorter timeframe. Yet the design of this course, subtitled *Writing in Wikipedia*, was also influenced by the research questions of the classroom study, questions which move away from issues regarding learning outcomes (established in previous chapters) towards a project of defining and describing how a critical-cultural agenda might be mapped onto a Wikipedia writing assignment sequence.¹⁴ These research questions follow:

1. How can Wikipedia be used for critical goals of cultural studies projects that deal with identity politics and cultural representation?
2. What can students learn from a project that asks them to engage with local (Appalachian) issues in order to update and expand Wikipedia's coverage on these topics?
3. How do students perceive, understand (or misunderstand) the problems of cultural representation on Wikipedia after working on a Wikipedia writing project?
4. How might academic and students engage with Wikipedia to improve its treatment and representation of marginalized cultural groups?

¹⁴ See my discussion of the concept of “emergent design flexibility” (Patton) in the introduction for a fuller rationalization for this kind of evolving research model.

To address these questions, this course featured a sequence of four assignments. First, students wrote a short essay in which they employed rhetorical analysis and personal reflection to examine representations of Appalachia in mainstream media, and connect those representations to their own experience. Above all, this assignment was designed to get students thinking about the ways Appalachian identities and cultures are distorted and marginalized in popular culture. Next, students worked in groups to perform genre analyses on sample Wikipedia articles, in order to identify major conventions of the genre and the underlying values and goals those conventions reflect in the Wikipedia community. Groups then presented their findings to the class in order to teach each other and come to a mutual understanding of the types of writing undertaken in Wikipedia. In the third project, the central research component of the course, students identified a Wikipedia article on Appalachian culture, history or place that was in need of development and/or revision. Most students were encouraged to revise existing articles rather than create new ones. In some ways, this constraint limits how much content students can add, but it also ensures that their work is improving existing content rather than adding new content that might be underdeveloped. To begin, students wrote a proposal in which they identified “gaps” and made suggestions for development. Students then performed research on their article topics and, finally, working with online ambassadors¹⁵ and each other, published their edits to the Wikipedia article. In the final project of the course, students wrote a reflection essay in which they examined their own learning in the course. Students were especially encouraged to reflect on the critical-

¹⁵ See Chapter 3 for a description of online ambassadors.

cultural goals of projects one and three, which allowed them both to uncover the production of stereotypes surrounding Appalachia in mainstream media, and to help produce a more nuanced and realistic representation of this marginalized culture in Wikipedia.

In addition to the collection of these assignments—projects one and three—I also collected three other sets of data. As in the classroom study described in Chapter 3, students wrote process logs by responding to open-ended prompts at two intervals in the assignment sequence. The first, which was collected before students began work on project three, asked them to describe their developing understanding of the cultural politics at work in representations of Appalachia in mainstream media, and to use their growing understanding of writing and rhetoric to discuss those representations. In the second process log, collected after students had completed their Wikipedia article work, they were asked to reflect on how their understanding of Wikipedia, especially its politics of access and representation, had changed since they began work on the project. Both process log prompts are available as Appendix F. As with all data collection for this study, students were given ample time to complete logs, while the instructor (myself) left the room. As stipulated by IRB, students were given the option of refusing to participate in this study at the beginning of the course, and were informed that their responses would be collected anonymously and would in no way affect their grade or standing in the course. Overall, 17 students participated in the study.

As in studies described in Chapters Two and Three, my method of analysis for interpretation of this qualitative data was informed substantially by Richard Boyatzis’

Transforming Qualitative Information, in which he details a method of thematic analysis which allows for the recognition and interpretation of “pattern[s] found in the information...that describe and organize possible observations [and/or] interpret aspects of the phenomenon” (vii). My use of this method entailed the creation of common themes that emerged in student responses to process log prompts. My analysis of survey data also takes a thematic approach as I count the most frequently common responses to particular questions. In responses that generated multiple possible themes, as in previous chapters, all themes were counted. For example, if a student wrote about coming to a new understanding of the goals and values of Wikipedia *and* described their new understanding of Appalachia in a single response, both themes were tallied. In the following sections, I explicate data from both process logs in order to show how students, in this assignment sequence, came to understand how rhetoric operates in mainstream media to misrepresent Appalachia, how a similar marginalization has occurred in Wikipedia, and how they can use writing as a tool to work towards increased understanding and representation. Between the reports of these process logs, which students respond to before and after the main Wikipedia project, I describe the major contributions they made to Wikipedia, and explain how those contributions have improved the encyclopedia’s representation of Appalachia.

The (Rhetorical) Invention of Appalachia

Allen W. Batteau’s *The Invention of Appalachia* forwards a primarily symbolic understanding of this region, as a signifier that has come to accrue a number of political, social, and cultural meanings. The *idea* or *invention* of Appalachia, Batteau contends, can

be understood as an identification with a number of symbols and stereotypes that have multiplied and gathered impetus over the passage of nearly two hundred years. (Batteau and others argue that the *idea* of Appalachia was fully formed as early as the 1830s.) Today, Appalachia, as an invention, remains a cultural other: it exists on the fringes of cultural hegemonies of power, politics, and language. It is the unknown wild, the natural world, the horrifying, the uneducated, uncultured and unrefined. Through “process[es] of invention and media presentation” (Batteau, 56), such cultural meanings remain as apparent markers of a region which continues to be represented from those typically outside the region.

Yet, as useful as the idea of invention is for acknowledging how symbol works to construct Appalachia as an idea, it has also led to the neglect of the material realities of the region itself, as well as its people. “Labeling Appalachia as a fictive invention does limit our ability to accurately account for the persistent economic, political, and social problems found in the region,” argues Todd Snyder in *The Rhetoric of Appalachian Identity*. These material issues are, in part, a function of the rhetorical construction of the region by various cultural forces. “The Appalachian Hillbilly,” Snyder acknowledges, “did not write his way into the American imagination. The Hillbilly was given a collection of histories, each with its own rhetorical agenda.” (23-24). Snyder’s theoretical model— “Hillbilly Learnin’”— which he compares to Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony, furthers his critique of Batteau by describing a co-constitutive model that works to construct the cultural assumptions of individuals both outside and inside Appalachia. Hillbilly Learnin’ is “the process by which outsiders come to form

assumptions about Appalachian peoples via their interactions with the culture industries,” (38). Hillbilly Learnin’ is also the process whereby “Appalachian peoples form dehumanizing cultural and intellectual assumptions about themselves.” Such a process “devalues the lives of an oppressed group by refusing to acknowledge their full humanity” and ultimately “provides justification” for the exploitation of the lower class (53).

The emphasis of the material experiences of Appalachians, which serves as a counterpoint to Batteau’s theorization in Snyder’s work, recurs across other research in rhetoric and composition. Scholarship on Appalachian students from a literacy studies perspective, in particular, has played a role in shifting the focus to the particular needs and experiences of Appalachian individuals. A majority of these scholars agree on the need to recognize rural and working-class identification categories as multicultural subjects worthy of study (Beech; Donehower; Sohn; Webb-Sunderhaus). These authors diverge, however, when considering local groups of individual students. Katherine Keller Sohn’s “‘Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia,” for instance, focuses on the narrative of eight women, former Appalachian and working-class students, whose acquisition of literacy empowered them to “[make] their voices heard by using literacy in their jobs, community, and homes” (443). In Sohn’s article, the Appalachian subject is able to return to her Appalachian community successfully and un-problematically, without the conflicts often attributed to literacy acquisition by working-class and rural populations.

In other research narratives, however, Appalachian identity is more contested. Sarah Webb-Sunderhaus' "A Family Affair: Competing Sponsors of Literacy in Appalachian Students Lives," for instance, demonstrates the difficulty in trying to locate a stable Appalachian subject whose literacy habits can be studied. In particular, Webb-Sunderhaus shows how many individuals who subscribe to Appalachian identity do not subscribe to some of the most commonly attributed identity markers, for example, "familism"; the notion that Appalachians are more comfortable and more "themselves" around family members (22). In both Webb-Sunderhaus' and Sohn's work, academic spaces are often presented as solutions to issues of illiteracy, the institutions which will help rural students overcome many of the social problems ascribed to the region. Such a perspective is challenged by Kim Donehower, who asserts that we need to acknowledge different types of literacy rural students bring from their communities. Moreover, Donehower's argument that academia is at least partly to blame for many of the stereotypes of illiteracy challenges some of the optimistic narratives of literacy acquisition presented by others.

This research has expanded our understanding of regional and working class identities, provided alternate methods of working with students that represent those backgrounds, revealed our own complicities (in academia) with the cultural representations of illiteracy, and, finally, suggested ways we might consider the non-academic literacies these students bring with them. This research also begins the deconstructive work required to strip cultural stereotypes of their power, especially within educational contexts. However, focusing on literacy alone does limit the scope of

what can be accomplished in terms of re-writing and re-routing cultural assumptions of Appalachian and rural culture. This kind of deconstructive work is given more attention in critical approaches, such as Jennifer Beech's "Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom." Beech describes a pedagogical model employed with working class populations in which she brings popular cultural stereotypes into the classroom and asks students to deconstruct the language in order to understand its implications and influences on their own lived experiences. Beech suggests having students confront, for instance, popular texts like Jeff Foxworthy jokes and juxtapose them with more critical-cultural scholarship to "denaturalize and historicize language" while also "gain[ing] valuable research and reading skills (176). Beech's model shows how productive engaging students with this type of work can be for both academic literacy and cultural-critical goals.

The pedagogical model described in this chapter aligns with Beech's work in that students begin the class by engaging with contemporary and popular examples of Appalachian stereotypes in mainstream media, to deconstruct those representations and begin thinking about how they are formed rhetorically through language. However, the assignment sequence tested here also goes beyond this initial denaturalization phase towards a method of praxis that contributes to the re-shaping and re-construction of cultural narratives of Appalachia through public writing in Wikipedia. Because the course took place in a state university in a portion of Southeast Ohio considered Appalachian, a good portion of students—but by no means a majority—identified with this identity. In a follow-up survey, 36% of students answered that "yes" they would "identify themselves

with the label/identity category ‘Appalachian’; 14%, that they “somewhat” identified with the label/identity category; and 50% identified “not at all.” Furthermore, when asked whether or not their “hometown” fell within the Appalachian region, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission, approximately 43% answered “Yes,” 43% “No” and 14% answered “Bordering.” Accordingly, while I cannot claim that I was working with only Appalachian students in this study, Appalachian students did make up a significant portion of the class. My main motivation was not for students to investigate their own identities, however, but rather to become more engaged with the region they have lived in during their undergraduate career, to make realizations about how rhetoric plays a role in the construction of stereotypes, and to work to help re-write those cultural narratives through public writing. I am also suspicious, as Webb-Sunderhaus, of the ways we cast Appalachian identities as stable and coherent when they might be understood more productively as intersectional and fluid.

My personal experience further informs this suspicion. As a graduate student and Teaching Associate at a university within Appalachia, and as someone who grew up in Appalachia (Eastern Kentucky), I have spent most of my career as a teacher and student trying to put distance between the stereotypes of the region and my own presentation of self. I can vividly remember, in one of the first year seminars in my PhD program, a professor remarking how it will be “interesting” to see if retain my accent throughout the program and into my academic career. My language became, in this seminar, a mark, a give-away of my identity, one of someone who traveled only a few hours from their hometown to attend a PhD program, when most others in my cohort traveled across the

country. I was, at once, an outsider and insider. I didn't really belong in or feel much of a connection with Appalachian culture, place, or values, yet a central part of my being, my speech, labeled me as "Appalachian" or, at the very least, local. I did, however, begin to notice something throughout my five years of teaching at this "Appalachian" university. There existed a pretty significant disconnect between the people of Athens County, the county the school is located, and the people that attended or worked at the university. Students tended to live, work, and socialize within the small radius of the university, while locals, especially those of lower economic classes, tended to avoid it, citing the higher cost of food and housing. This silent contract of avoidance was broken occasionally, especially when students moved out at the end of an academic year, leaving all kinds of furniture, appliances, dishes, and other household items that were too much trouble to pack, and locals, seizing the opportunity, would enter the college district to scavenge, often filling pickup trucks with the castoffs of students. I also began to realize that the distance I tried to create between my upbringing and my professional trajectory as a graduate student was itself a type of avoidance. In engaging the subject of Appalachia in this course, then, I was trying to reimagine my own connection with the place of Appalachia and to ask the same of my students, those, who, if not *from* the region, were at least spending their undergraduate careers here.

Our discussions in class, accordingly, centered on the stereotypical representations of Appalachia in mass media culture: in film, TV, and print journalism. We read, watched, and talked about the ways identities especially are produced in these different venues and what bearing those identities have on our understanding of the

region: how, to use a term from Batteau, Appalachia is “invented” in media cultures. Alongside these readings and discussions, students in this course were asked to write a short essay in which they combined rhetorical analysis of media representations with personal observation and reflection to examine their own socially constructed understandings of Appalachia.

This assignment, and its function within the larger sequence, was designed to prompt students to begin thinking about the unfair and unrealistic ways in which Appalachia continues to be marginalized in mainstream media culture. The follow-up assignment, Project 3, asked them to “re-write” such negative representations by contributing to Wikipedia and building a more complex, nuanced and ultimately, more positive, representation of the region by editing and revising existing articles in Wikipedia. In between these projects, immediately after the first reflection and observation essay, students wrote the first of two process logs by responding to the following open-ended prompt:

So far, what is your understanding of the problems of representation of Appalachia in mainstream media? How might those problems be understood or explained using concepts you’ve learned about writing and rhetoric? (Appendix F).

Because the process log format encouraged open-ended, individual writing, students’ responses were diverse and varied in terms of length and content. However, using thematic analysis to interpret the data does allow for the identification of at least four common themes in student responses, as shown in Table 6, below, and described more

fully in the following sections. The creation of these themes emerged from a thorough review of student process logs that resulted in the identification of four distinct patterns in the data, a realization that student responses could be categorized into one of four themes. “Stereotypes and Negative Representations,” the most common recurring theme in the data, were tagged and counted according to students use of specific language identifying and realizing negative portrayals of Appalachian in mainstream media. The term “stereotype” was often used in these responses but logs that discussed any negative portrayal of the region were also counted. The second most frequent theme counted, “Rhetoric as Epistemic,” synthesizes student responses that demonstrate an understanding of the function of language and/or rhetoric to influence social experience and understanding of Appalachia. Responses that discussed the effect of rhetoric on identity, subject, place, reality etc. were counted in this theme. Another sizeable pattern in the data includes responses that invoked “Geographical or cultural isolation” as a motivating factor in problems of representation. These responses typically reported that Appalachia, as a region that is “cut off” both geographically and culturally from mainstream culture and place, becomes a misunderstood or feared subject because of this isolation. Finally, a smaller percentage of students reported that negative representations of the region persisted because they helped “sell” a product or form of media. All of these themes are represented in the below, in Table 6. Furthermore, each form of representation— “Stereotypes and Negative Representations,” “Rhetoric as Epistemic,” “Geographical/Cultural Isolation,” and “Economic Motivations”— is discussed in more detail in individual sections following the table.

Table 6
Problems of Representation, Appalachia in Mainstream Media

n (N)	%	Problems of Representation
17 (17)	100%	Stereotypes and Negative Representations
15(17)	88%	Rhetoric as Epistemic
6(17)	35%	Geographical/Cultural Isolation
3 (17)	18%	Economic Motivations

Stereotypes and Negative Representations

The most frequent theme in process log responses involved students positively identifying stereotypes and other negative representations as frequent and common problems of representation of Appalachia in mainstream media. I offer a few of responses below, with discussion. Students understand these stereotypes as largely untrue, misleading, and not representative of a whole culture/people. “The main problem,” writes one student, “is that most of the time Appalachians are generalized into false stereotypes that give a misunderstanding to them and often negative view— such as being uneducated. The problems they face are also misunderstood in news, which also relates to these stereotypes such as drug problems and bad graduation rates, which are not true for all Appalachians.” While this student realizes that the negative representations are sometimes rooted in statistical data, they also acknowledge how even news outlets misrepresent Appalachia by applying a stereotype to the whole region. Another student’s

process log details the recognition of how horror films often forward violent portrayals of Appalachian people:

Throughout this course, I have learned about a variety of stereotypes within mainstream media regarding Appalachia. Appalachians are framed as uneducated, poverty stricken, violent, backwards, and homogeneously white ‘hillbillies.’ This course has introduced me to many examples within the media that magnify these stereotypes including the popular subgenre of horror films known as ‘hillbilly horror’ which hyperbolizes the inhabitants as deranged mountain men thirsty for the blood of outsiders.

Significantly, this student employs especially sophisticated diction as they discuss the processes of media representation. First, Appalachians are “framed” – not represented, which implies a conscious skewing, a deliberate presentation of identity. Second, this student recognizes the “hyperbolic” nature of these representations, the exaggerated and dramatic presentation of Appalachian identities as feared other. In another response, a student further investigates the role of fear in the perpetuation of these stereotypes:

Appalachians are poor, white, and uneducated: these are the stereotypes that have perpetuated throughout society. At the core of this issue is fear. Pop culture depicts Appalachians in an inhuman manner, which allows many to fear Appalachians and avoid the area at all costs. By doing so, people never really learn who Appalachians are or what the Appalachian region is all about.

The fear of the Appalachian, alluded to by this student, serves a dual function. It provides a response for the media consumer, who may not know how to approach the “unknown” of the Appalachian other. It also perpetuates and strengthens the cultural barriers set up between Appalachia and mainstream culture. The stereotype creates fear and the fear strengthens the stereotypes because it prohibits more nuanced understandings. What was most remarkable about these student responses, and there were many that were similar in content, was the focus on people, on identities. These students quickly realized how damaging negative representations can be to the people who inhabit the region, rather than only the region itself.

In a final example in this theme, a student turns their attention to Wikipedia as a form of media and, somewhat incredibly, describes the way the encyclopedia itself further reflects misrepresentation of the region through absence: “Examples of the misrepresentation of Appalachia are seen on Wikipedia. There are few pages dedicated to Appalachia and many of those are marked as incomplete or low importance. Perhaps this is a visual manifestation of stereotyping: Appalachia is not significant or worth discussing.” This student had already grasped the significance of Project 3 long before we began, and had also come to understand how absence—how silence on a particular subject—can be seen as negative representation in Wikipedia.

Rhetoric's Role: Rhetoric as Epistemic

One of my major goals for this course was that students begin to understand the social-epistemic functions of writing and rhetoric. I engage here with James Berlin's conceptualization of rhetoric as a “political act involving a dialectical interaction

engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (488). I want students to see “texts and writing as tools that mediate social realities (identities, stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes)” and, through the assignment sequence, to understand how “texts and other media contribute to our experience with and understanding of the region and culture of Appalachia” (Syllabus, Appendix G).

As Batteau, and others writing from a poststructuralist standpoint in Appalachian Studies, have acknowledged, the rhetoric of Appalachia itself becomes a powerful influence on how the region is socially constituted through a range of discourses across media. Yet the “invention” of Appalachia through media presentation is only part of this complex process. It is a process that also involves the economic, social, and political realities of those living within the region, those identifying with the Appalachian label, and their own actions and reactions amongst the “culture industries.” Snyder’s “Hillbilly Learnin,’” as a co-constitutive model which identifies the “writing” of culture both among and beyond the Appalachian subject, moves us beyond Batteau’s conception towards one that allows for both the recognition of the production of cultural stereotypes and the possibility of their imaginative re-writing.

Furthermore, Snyder’s articulation of the ideological function of writing in the construction of the social *and* the individual serves as a productive theoretical basis for the way I hoped students would begin to see the representation of Appalachia in mainstream media. And, in process logs, a large majority (88%) of students *did* write about rhetoric as a social-epistemic force acting on identity, behaviors, attitudes, etc. Many of these students especially focused on rhetoric’s influence in the construction of

Appalachian identities. One student, for example, recognizes how both textual and visual rhetoric can combine to create the “identity of the ‘hillbilly’ as a sort of empty signifier for a variety of political, cultural, and environmental factors to which we associate with each and every resident [of] the expansive area of Appalachia.” In a similar vein, another student discusses the powerful influence of the media to influence identity production: “The power of the media to spread these ideas of what the people are like in Appalachia,” s/he writes, “shows the power of rhetoric and its influence on everything we do.” Still others did not limit their analysis to identity production, recognizing that the way we experience stereotypes, and even reality, is contingent on language:

Rhetoric plays a large role in developing a stereotype. Through the use of images, the media is able to provide a very narrow view of Appalachia. By seeing these images time and time again (and often through notable media outlets), the public begins to believe that these stereotypes are a reality, a reality that is socially constructed and in fact, not real at all.

Such a reality includes both individuals—the people of a particular region, their identities, characteristics and attributes—as well as a whole culture, its history, geography, and artifacts, as noticed by another student who notices how “reliance on stereotypical representations of Appalachia by the media shows an ignorance of the true complexity of a culture and furthermore shows how rhetoric can control how people view subjects, even entire areas.”

While many of these students identified the negative influence of rhetoric in the media on Appalachian culture, others identified how rhetoric can be taken up by the

individual to improve representations of a subject, a task the class would work on in Project 3 (the Wikipedia writing project). One student, for example, identifies the positive agency that can be gained once writers understand how powerful rhetoric can be in re-writing cultural representations and, ultimately, reality:

It is very seldom that we hear about the accomplishments or success of Appalachia in the media. We can use rhetoric as writers to disprove former ideas that are not true about the Appalachian culture or area. The media and sources like Wikipedia can be used to explain the area better....The more positive information written about Appalachia and its culture, the better chance we have for making a change in the way it is viewed. Writers use rhetoric as a way of building information using former ideas.

Similarly, another identifies the need for individual writers who have first-hand experience with the region to play a role in its rhetorical construction. The problematic representations of Appalachia, s/he writes “can be fixed by incorporating voices from the Appalachian region into discussions and by having people go into the Appalachian region [to] learn more about their culture of life....That is the only way they will be able to truly see how these people live and why they do the things the way they do.”

Geographical and Cultural Isolation

A final common theme in students’ understandings of Appalachian representation cites geographical and cultural isolation as a major factor in the production of

stereotypes. More than a third (35%) of students wrote about Appalachia's isolation in process logs, noting how such isolation allows audiences to accept misleading rhetoric:

Because Appalachia is made up primarily of isolated communities with minimal outside contact, most people living in the world are not familiar with the region or the people who live there. Outsiders can be prone to believing misleading stereotypes....Because the consumer of this media has minimal first-hand contact with the people of Appalachia the stereotypes portrayed are often taken as truth.

These students identified a significant disconnect between how a place is represented and experienced by outsiders and how people who are more familiar with the region understand Appalachia. Because they attend a college in Appalachia, these students had some experience with this. They were able to realize for instance that the unfamiliarity of audiences with Appalachian stereotypes and realities "creates a sort of fish bowl out of Appalachia in which the rest of America is looking into from the media's perspective."

Examining student perceptions in the first process log, written before students worked on the major Wikipedia project, but after they had reflected on mainstream media representations of Appalachia in the first essay, provides significant insight into how students understand and process a social-epistemic notion of rhetoric that engages with the cultural politics of representation. Interestingly, only one student admitted being completely unfamiliar with the Appalachia as a cultural marker, all others, we can assume, were at least somewhat familiar with the term. Finally, and more importantly, the common themes found in these process logs also demonstrate how powerful this specific

pedagogical model can be for helping students to understand rhetoric's influence on everyday life, and the ways Appalachia has been constructed in the media through language and image. In the next section, I examine the Wikipedia's treatment of Appalachia and the specific contributions students made to its representation. Following this, I report on what students learned about the encyclopedia's cultural politics by examining process logs they wrote after the culminating Wikipedia writing project.

Appalachia in Wikipedia

The Wikipedia community is not unaware of the gaps in representation that exist in the encyclopedia. Rather, many who understand it as a resource that is constantly in flux and constantly being improved, see the encyclopedia as a work-in-progress. The wiki platform itself is a software designed to be immediately edited if a reader sees a gap or opportunity. If something is missing from Wikipedia, and you are the one to notice it, you're also in a good position to add that content.

The Wikipedia community's awareness of gaps in coverage manifests most visibly in the existence of multiple Wikiprojects, of which there are currently over 2,000 in the English edition. A Wikiproject is a kind of dedicated task force, a "group of contributors who want to work together as a team to improve Wikipedia" and that often "focus on a specific topic area (for example, women's history)." These projects serve members with common interests and motivations by providing "resources to help coordinate and organize the group's efforts at creating and improving articles" within the project's scope ("WP: Wikiproject").

One such project is Wikiproject Appalachia, which among other goals, is dedicated to the goal of “creat[ing], improv[ing], and/or maintain[ing] articles relating to Appalachia or the Appalachian Mountains.” Examining the Wikiproject Appalachia page, which is set up very similarly to other articles in the encyclopedia, one learns a great deal about the current lack of representation of Appalachian subjects in the encyclopedia. The “Articles in Need of Attention” section, for instance, lists over 40 articles in need of development or major re-organization. Additionally, the projects links to over 400 Appalachian county articles in needs of “basic copyediting and clean-up.” Most striking about these “articles in need,” however, are those listed that would seem notable or recognizable enough to have already been well-represented. While some of the topics are obscure, more mainstream topics like “Appalachia,” “Hillbilly,” and “Appalachian Music” are also listed as needing development (“WP: Wikiproject Appalachia”). The existence of Wikiproject Appalachia itself demonstrates the encyclopedia’s misrepresentation of the region. But the articles the Wikiproject has identified as needing work also show that this misrepresentation cuts across both notable and non-notable article topics.

For students working on improving the encyclopedia’s coverage of this region, Wikiproject Appalachia proved to be tremendously useful. Not only did students explore the “Articles in Need” list to help guide their selection of articles to work on, they were also able to post questions and comments in the Wikiproject’s “Talk” page to ask others for help. Centering a classroom assignment around a Wikiproject, it turns out, is an excellent way to encourage more interaction between students and other editors, and to

ensure they have the most resources available to help them choose a suitable article to work on. Many of the articles students eventually chose to work on were pulled from the Wikiproject. These articles represented a diversity of topics relating to the geography, culture, history and even places, both geographical and political (municipal) of Appalachia. These articles included the following: “Appalachian Stereotypes,” “Gordon K. Bush Airport,” “Henry Reed (musician),” “Western Maryland,” “Appalachian League,” “Hillbilly,” “October Sky,” “Vinton County, Ohio,” “Holy Ghost People (1967 film),” “Highland County, Ohio,” “Social and Economic Stratification in Appalachia,” “Jesco White,” “The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia,” “Greenfield, Ohio,” “Norris Lake,” “Cumberland Gap,” “Pound Gap,” “Moccasin Gap,” “Shelton Laurel Massacre,” and “Cold Mountain (novel).”

While a few students struggled to have their edits accepted by other editors, (see further discussion of this below in the “Student Access” section), the majority of students were able to make significant contributions to these articles. Measuring those contributions is more difficult. Rather than count words or pages, which we tend to do in academia, Wikipedia counts edits and bytes. An edit could range from something as minor as the insertion of a comma to the addition of a 500 word section within an article. In my assignments, I typically ask students to complete the equivalent of 1000 words in a Wikipedia article or articles. This number might seem low, but is actually difficult to attain. Wikipedia strives for brevity and clarity and, of course, wants the majority of content sourced. This can lead to students having difficulty meeting a length requirement. In this particular course, I encouraged students to consider revision, and re-organization

of existing content in their word counts as well, which further complicates the task of measuring their contributions. In my own formal assessments, I used Wikipedia's "Compare Revisions" feature, which allows for a side-by-side comparison of an article before and after students' work. This feature allowed me to see the level of their contributions, but I also take into consideration students' use of sources, formatting and organization, and interaction with the Wikipedia community. The project assignment (Appendix H) further spells out criteria. In other words, I wanted students to take a holistic approach that went beyond word count to really improve articles among different factors. For instance, in my assessment of a student working on the "Hillbilly," I summarized the major work they had done on the article in the following points:

- Expanded the lead section to better define the term and "preview" the article's information
- Added content and revised the History section
- Added a section on popular culture which now includes an interesting analysis of the term in popular media (TV and film)
- Made revisions to the Music section
- Added a section on "Cultural Implications" with new content
- Added wikilinks
- Added references to support claims
- Rewrote/revised a lot of the original content to be consistent with Wikipedia style

As is evident from a review of these changes, this student was able to make substantive and significant changes to the article in question. And while not all students were as

successful, the majority of them did change the representation of Appalachia on Wikipedia by editing and revising these articles on its people, places, and culture. In addition to making these contributions, of course, students also learned a lot along the way about the cultural politics of Wikipedia, which the next section details more thoroughly.

Teaching Wikipedia's Cultural Politics

After writing the first process log, students completed a group project in which they employed genre analysis to come to a clearer understanding of Wikipedia article genre features, and the community goals and values those features reflect. This group project was meant to familiarize students with typical writing conventions in Wikipedia, to prepare them for writing in the encyclopedia, and to teach them the function and advantage of using genre analysis to be better prepared for a variety of writing tasks. In the third project, students chose to either create a new Wikipedia article or revise and develop an existing one (See Project Assignment in Appendix H). The course's focus on Appalachian rhetoric meant that students were asked to choose from topics that were representative of Appalachian place, history, or culture. Such a constraint did not prove to be limiting, however, and students still had a great deal of choice. After completing this project, students wrote the second of two process logs, answering the following prompt: "How has your understanding of Wikipedia (especially its politics of access and representation) changed since you've worked on this project?" (Appendix F)

The open-ended nature of this prompt, as in process log 1, encouraged a variety of responses, and accordingly, provides a useful analytic for assessing student learning

experience in this project. In my interpretation of their responses, four major themes emerged as common responses to the prompts. As Table 7, below, demonstrates, two majority responses emerged in the data. Students overwhelmingly reported increased knowledge about Wikipedia and increased understanding of cultural politics of Wikipedia. Smaller clusters of responses reiterated how unprepared other instructors are to help students understand and use Wikipedia effectively. Finally, a much smaller majority commented on the difficulty they felt in accessing and writing in the Wikipedia community. As in the analysis of process log 1, themes were identified through extensive review of process log data and the identification of common patterns according to recurring textual cues. All four themes are explored in more detail in corresponding sections below.

Table 7
Developed Understanding of Wikipedia and Cultural/Information Politics

n (N)	%	Student Understanding
17 (17)	100%	<u>Increased Knowledge About</u> Wikipedia
15(17)	88%	<u>Increased Understanding of Cultural</u> Politics
6(17)	35%	Other (Previous) Academic Approaches
3 (17)	18%	Difficulty of Access

Other Teachers Just Don't Get It: Wikipedia as Writing and Research Resource

While not by any means a majority response, a significant number of students framed their discussions of how their understanding of Wikipedia has changed by reflecting back on other instructors' approaches to Wikipedia. Furthermore, all of these students commented on how previous academic authorities misunderstood Wikipedia as a resource and often banned it outright.

Before this class, I was always told that Wikipedia is not a "reliable source" and was never able to use it for class assignments so I would just cruise right by it in a search engine unless I was looking for brief useless information regarding something within pop culture. But now I feel it has gotten a bad reputation and is more useful than my previous professors were aware of. I plan to use Wikipedia a lot more in my research process. Such outright bans on Wikipedia serve to limit students' research processes, especially when they are taught to use Wikipedia article as a preliminary research venue to find search terms, other sources, and related topics.

Perhaps because students are so commonly told to avoid Wikipedia in their academic pursuits, a majority chose to respond to the prompt by discussing their increased knowledge about Wikipedia. One student wrote about how the community element of the site enforces accuracy and relevancy, saying, "Now I realize that Wikipedia is a community of people working together to share knowledge. Because it is a community of people, it's not a total free for all of posts that would lead to a lot of inaccurate information." Others recognized how much the community members do to

create a useful reference source: “I also had no idea how much work people put into writing the different articles. I think that I just assumed that the articles appear on the website and not really the background of it.” A number of students also discussed how Wikipedia can be a great venue for preliminary research if you know how to use it correctly. “Now that I have taken this class,” writes one student, “there is so much more that I know I can do with Wikipedia, and it can really help me in future writing.” Another spells out how the encyclopedia can help in more detailed terms, referencing Purdy’s “Wikipedia Is Good for You!?”—which they had read a few weeks earlier:

But now I feel it has gotten a bad reputation and is more useful than my previous professors are aware of. I plan to use Wikipedia a lot more in my research process within the recommendations from Purdy. When looking for online research I will not blindly pass over Wikipedia but start to embrace what it has to offer. I will read the article and when I find something that I believe to be useful, I will further research the source provided as a safeguard to verify the statement and then use that source for my work. This, I hope, will cut down on my research process and allow me to build more impactful papers.

Beyond coming to a more nuanced understanding of the Wikipedia community, how it works to construct and share knowledge, and how it can be helpful in their own research and writing, an overwhelming majority of students also reported positive gains in their understanding of information and cultural politics of representation and access in the encyclopedia, one of the central goals of the assignment sequence.

Politics of Access and Representation in Wikipedia

How do students perceive, understand, or misunderstand the problems of cultural representation in Wikipedia? When asked, in this process log, to comment on their new understanding of the politics of representation and access in Wikipedia, quite a few students responded positively and convincingly demonstrated new knowledge of these issues. First, they began to understand how the encyclopedia's homogenous demographic could negatively impact its mission to provide neutral, unbiased information: "The bias of the population (being that 85% are male) is a blatant violation of the premise behind the site. The purpose is an open access encyclopedia with knowledge from EVERY one. There are significant areas of Wikipedia that are lacking and would benefit immensely if those editing it would become more diverse" (emphasis in original). Other students took a more optimistic outlook, while still acknowledging the lack of diversity:

Although the site may not have the most diverse contributor base, it is still the best compendium of information ever compiled. I believe that with more classes like this, on more college campuses around the world, we can all look forward to a future of Wikipedia that includes a vast and diverse contributor base sharing their knowledge and experience with the collective mind of the world.

This student, in particular, echoed the positive spirit of Wikipedia's open access ethic, while commenting on how the participation by colleges and university could ultimately help the encyclopedia solve some of its demographic problems. Other students took up the implications and effects of the problems of diversity, noting especially how the

encyclopedia becomes less representative and accurate because of its editor-base.

Wikipedia, the student argues,

can be unreliable: gaps in gender, race, class, and age. I don't think this class was designed to make the students question the stereotypes of Appalachia but a more meta knowledge approach, to question all stereotypes and question everything. At the beginning of this process log I mentioned that my understanding of Wikipedia was what was told to me throughout my life, this right here is an example of what this class represents: our basic understandings of people, life, and pretty much everything is based on what people believe and perceive. So not only has this class changed my perspective on Wikipedia, but also the way I look at everything.

Significantly, this student was also able to gain a broader awareness of how the misrepresentation of Appalachia is just one example of the ways social hegemonies dictate our everyday thoughts, behaviors, lives. Their discussion of what they were told about Wikipedia by other teachers in the past serves as a striking illustration of how the assignment sequence challenged their ways of thinking. In other responses, students highlighted the importance of engaging in local research and working to disrupt stereotypes, as well as the basic opportunities for understanding and engaging in their environment, and translating that knowledge in a global platform:

After furthering my understanding of Wikipedia, I began to realize why this project is so relevant. As a class, we've lived in Appalachia for at least

the past few years. We know this area and we know the people. By revising articles related to the Appalachian region, we are (in a sense) fighting the Wikipedia political cycle. As ‘rookies’ we may lack some of the experience the top contributors have in terms of really knowing the Wikipedia genre. However, what we lack in experience, we make up for in knowledge. We were able to research our topics individually, while keeping in mind how we are representing Appalachia. We fought the stereotypes by engaging with them and Wikipedia was the perfect platform to do so.

This theme is furthered by another student’s response, who felt personally engaged with their article topic because it was on a subject relevant to their home community. “One reason I wanted to work on my article so much,” they write, “was because it was very short to begin with. It was the largest mining disaster in Ohio and there was barely any coverage. It made it seem unimportant in the grand scheme of things to me. That was hard for me to accept because it has such a large impact on my community.” This student’s recognition of how the shortness of the article makes the subject seem insignificant demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of information politics in Wikipedia. Marginalization often occurs through absence or limited coverage.

Many of these students have recognized how important it is that they, as individuals who have more experience with and access to the Appalachian region, contribute to Wikipedia and work to improve representation of their local culture. In a

final example, a student discusses how Wikipedia, as a global resource, still needs to value contributions on topics from individuals who are more connected with those topics:

In order to really understand the intricacies of a particular people, culture, event, etc., however, the coverage needs to be from within, not an outsider-looking-in approach. That's where the Appalachian misrepresentation we have focused on in class is tied in – distasteful portrayals of Appalachian people and their customs serve only to perpetuate stereotypes which exist because the area is little covered and understood.

While a quantitative analysis of process log shows that a larger majority of students wrote about gaining a familiarity with Wikipedia in general (as a research and writing resource), there was also a significant number of responses that demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the cultural politics in of representation in Wikipedia, and the causes and effects of those politics. Furthermore, the above examples demonstrate how students both perceive these issues and how they can gain a larger awareness of the politics involved in writing and rhetoric. Finally, these responses also show how Wikipedia can be used effectively to teach cultural studies projects and to make a positive impact on a global information source.

Student Access

The majority of students in this study learned about Wikipedia's cultural politics through a successful engagement with the encyclopedia—noticing gaps in coverage and working to fill those gaps through their own research and writing. However, highlighting

only those stories would misrepresent other students, whose planned edits weren't as successful. 18% (3 of 17) of students reported some level of access difficulty, noting their own struggle to enter and contribute to the Wikipedia community. Such access problems were rooted in a few different conditions. First, other (more experienced) Wikipedians often adhere too strictly to policy guidelines governing research and editing. Such adherence, for the novice editor, can be especially discouraging. As one student notices, "Browsing different talk sections of pages made it seem as if other editors in Wikipedia are perfectionists to a fault. I believe their intentions are pure but this can be a deterrent to some novice editors." Another student questions the "open access" narrative of Wikipedia through realizations of the difficulty they encountered in editing:

I've learned that while Wikipedia is available to anyone to edit, that's actually a really misleading fact. Wikipedia was actually a lot harder to edit correctly than what I thought it was going to be. It's also very hard to edit something that is popular due to other editors essentially blocking you out and it's hard to edit something that isn't popular because it's hard to find good source material. I felt like an outsider sometimes during this project because I was told that I couldn't edit certain things and when I finally found something to edit, I couldn't find source material that was sufficient.

This student's analysis of their experience provides an alternate narrative about the possibilities for individual rhetorical agency in Wikipedia, one that challenges rather than celebrates the encyclopedia. Yet it also represents a particularly insightful critique of

Wikipedia's "open access" ethos. This student has learned how "misleading" Wikipedia's democratic mantra can be to an uninitiated, novice editor, who has difficulty editing both popular and marginalized content. This student's identification of the specific difficulties involved also echoes my own struggles as an instructor to provide opportunities for students to both interact with other editors and be able to make meaningful (and lasting) contributions to the encyclopedia. Finally, this student's response demonstrates some of the epistemological functions that make editing local, marginalized topics more difficult. As a tertiary source that privileges written, verifiable sources for its content production, Wikipedia's dependence on dominant written culture will always limit its capability to represent topics that are already less represented.

Making the Global Local

Much of the "success" of Wikipedia, its fairly quick rise to a place of prominence and reliability, its rapid growth, and breadth of coverage, has been due to its adaption of an efficient model of commons-based peer production (Benkler) in which volunteers from all over the world (though admittedly mostly in the U.S.) have come together to collaboratively and incrementally build a global knowledge source. The platform of the wiki has allowed a form of collaboration that can be dispersed in both time and space. Editors don't need to meet face-to-face to work on Wikipedia; they can contribute in small pieces from all over the world, at any time. Such a model has been incredibly productive, as Yochai Benkler has explained, and has also played a significant part in a larger movement towards crowd-sourcing, "wikinomics," and peer production. At the same time, however, this distributed model has also served to de-emphasize and de-value

the place of local knowledge production and curation. As the students in this course came to realize, many of the problems of representation (of Appalachia, but also of other marginalized identities and cultures) can be traced back to problems of geographical and cultural isolation. The barriers between Appalachian and mainstream culture, both physical and discursive—because they prohibit mutual experience and understanding—also function to perpetuate stereotypes. Stereotypes explain the unknown, the unexplored, the other. These same types of social hierarchies are reproduced in Wikipedia as well, as the mainstream editor-base can sometimes fail to engage with the region and represent it. Ultimately, a distributed, commons-based peer production model is less effective when it comes to reporting on subjects that require local knowledge and experience.

By working to improve Wikipedia's representation of Appalachia in this project, students (and I) began to realize the importance of local engagement, research, and knowledge production in a global-information economy. Such local engagement allowed them to accomplish the critical-cultural goal of re-writing Appalachian stereotypes in a public venue. Through this process, they were also able to come to a broader understanding of the problems of cultural representation in Wikipedia and to improve the encyclopedia itself. Finally, students' learning processes paralleled my own recognition of a very central epistemological problem of the encyclopedia. If Wikipedia is to be a truly global, multi-vocal resource that "gathers the sum of all human knowledge," it will need to find a way to accommodate local knowledge practices and procedures in conjunction with dispersed peer production. In the final concluding chapter, I take up this issue by exploring Wikipedia's reliance on western epistemological conventions and how

those conventions limit its ability to utilize marginalized forms of knowledge production and represent marginalized cultures, identities, and geographies.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION: EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE

The three classroom studies presented in this dissertation focus primarily on articulating and testing specific pedagogies made available through the use of Wikipedia. When viewed together, they offer a number of compelling reasons for exploring and adopting similar educational models. Furthermore, because these models depend on immersive experience in the culture of the encyclopedia, they also provide a glimpse into Wikipedia's cultural politics of representation and access, into who gets to write, who gets represented, and how they are represented in its digital pages.

The research presented in Chapter 2 details a course that—as an instructor working with a Wikipedia writing project for the first time—I designed to experiment and test some of the previous claims made by researchers about the potential opportunities the encyclopedia provides (Cummings; Hood; Purdy). I was particularly drawn to the optimistic rhetoric researchers often used when discussing Wikipedia's democratic and open ethos and I was particularly interested in testing some of this research. What I found was that Wikipedia does make some of this learning possible. The study described in Chapter 2 moves the conversation from *potential* learning opportunities to an articulation of a concrete and coherent set of learning outcomes made available by Wikipedia writing projects. In asserting these outcomes, we can now focus more energy on understanding the strategies and knowledge needed to achieve these specific learning goals (including a more comprehensive understanding of the open access politics of the encyclopedia). This chapter confirms that Wikipedia writing assignments, in conjunction with an engaged instructor and sophisticated course design,

can teach procedural knowledge, social knowledge, and other traditional course outcomes common to first year composition, including writing style awareness, surface level skills, research, rhetoric and textual authority, visual rhetoric and copyright. The learning outcomes tested in this study, match closely many of the outcomes recommended by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), demonstrating how this type of pedagogy—while innovative and experimental— can still accomplish and align with current practices, values and goals of the field at large. The articulation of specific learning outcomes for Wikipedia projects in this study also allows for the elaboration of existing outcomes developed by the Wikipedia Education Program, a public policy initiative of the Wikimedia Foundation to help support college instructors build Wikipedia writing assignments. The outcomes developed in this study were not articulated in isolation from classroom practices but rather through and with the rich qualitative and quantitative evidence provided by students themselves, a condition which allows for a more accurate assessment of the usefulness of this type of pedagogy and how it is received by students. The inclusion of student experience and voice, moreover, is central to this entire dissertation, not only one chapter; the following chapters also bring in rich descriptive data collected from students dealing first hand with this pedagogical model. Employing a selective sampling qualitative strategy has allowed for a more detailed and thorough investigation of the immersive pedagogies Wikipedia enables, an investigation which values both student and instructor experience. Furthermore, employing an emergent flexibility design (Patton) in this research enables an elasticity of the research agenda as goals and conditions change throughout the three studies.

Chapter 2 also revealed that the interactive potential of the Wikipedia writing community (which makes many of these learning outcomes possible), while always available for observation, is not always open or available to student/novice editors, especially if they are creating new articles or editing less notable articles that receive little web traffic. This study revealed that just because Wikipedia's culture is interactive and collaborative, that does not automatically imply that students will have immediate or easy access to that culture. The evolution of an editorial culture that is difficult to gain access to runs against the widely held belief among academics and others that Wikipedia is an unreliable source because of its open editorial policies. Yet it also contradicts Wikipedia's own goals of creating a truly open access encyclopedia project that provides access to a diverse group of editors.

Such access can, however, be increased when instructors consciously exploit the collaborative potential of Wikipedia. The third chapter proposes an adapted pedagogical model that attempts to maximize student interaction with Wikipedia editors and other research partners in order to demonstrate how such rich community engagement can further enhance Wikipedia projects, and the associated learning opportunities they provide. This chapter further asserts that involving multiple outside agents and audiences and providing more opportunities for interaction can help students gain "rhetorical knowledge": an understanding of a rhetorical, constructivist model of knowledge production and the role of personal subjectivity in that process. Such an initiative also provides much needed insight into how community or "service" based learning might be adapted to include both face-to-face and digital partnerships and how these partnerships

can enhance student learning while expanding the traditional boundaries of our classrooms.

The study in Chapter 3 details a unique partnership with a university library that not only accomplished the goal of bringing in more engaged “outsiders” but also worked to promote use and awareness of the library’s archives and special collections. Students working on this project became more aware of the research resources available in their library’s archives and special collections. They also made those resources well known to others by using and citing these materials in Wikipedia articles. Because they worked directly with special collections curators, these students developed relationships with library staff as they carried out their research. Finally, this project’s cross-disciplinary use of Wikipedia also benefited librarians and curators as they were presented with new ways to think of the encyclopedia’s impact on information literacy.

Coming to more concrete realizations of the opportunities provided by digital pedagogies and their implementation into cross-disciplinary contexts also provides a sustainable model to promote and position service learning in the academy. Forging cross-disciplinary relationships with university archives and special collections and working together to contribute to a digital, public knowledge project such as Wikipedia helps us reimagine the notion of the archive in light of recent and rapid technological change. Finally, the study presented in this chapter also reveals the significance and pedagogical value of engaging students with local research: with the social, historical, and institutional data that is abundant on their own university campus and in their own community. Emphasizing this type of “local research” productively challenges some of

the epistemological features central to Wikipedia, especially verifiability and notability, a challenge that is taken up even further in the fourth chapter.

Working with the Wikipedia Education Program and other research partners in the classroom study described in Chapter 3 allowed students to experience a much more interactive writing space, one which could further promote their understanding of rhetorical knowledge. Yet the necessity of this support system (and its facilitation by the instructor) also made it clear to me that Wikipedia is not as free and open as it claims, a condition that results in gaps of coverage and misrepresentation of already marginalized subjects. Working through the first two studies also helped me to realize that students could make more of an impact in the encyclopedia when they focused on local issues that they could connect with more concretely, issues that weren't already well represented in the encyclopedia. The third classroom study (Chapter 4) confronts issues of representation and access by presenting a model of pedagogy in which students address the problems of representation and cultural politics that arise in Wikipedia *and* engage with local knowledge by improving content related to the region in which they live and attend school (Appalachia). This chapter further demonstrates how students can gain an understanding of the complex relationship between cultural politics, rhetoric, and identity. Ultimately, this chapter concludes that Wikipedia, to be a truly global, multi-vocal resource that “gathers the sum of all human knowledge,” will need to find a way to accommodate local knowledge practices and procedures so that it can further accommodate a wider swathe of global knowledge. In order to both represent more

subjects and invite more editors, the encyclopedia must open itself to alternative epistemologies that value local cultures.

As a successful instantiation of Commons Based Peer Production, Wikipedia has been incredibly successful at dispersing production of content across time and geographical space. It has been able to do so, in part, due to the ease with which digital networks allow the movement of text across these boundaries. Wikipedia is efficient because it has been able to take an old technology, the printed word, and maximize its circulation and production via the dispersed model of a wiki. However, such a model also comes with particular costs. As I have argued in this dissertation, the dispersed and displaced model tends to work more fluidly with materials that are already widely accessible to the encyclopedia's editors, especially print/published materials that have been mass produced (either via digital or analog technologies). The reliance on these dominant forms of communication results in what is, in effect, a hegemonic representation of culture. As a tertiary reference, Wikipedia must validate its content with other sources. Because they are the most widely available, such sources are typically representative of dominant and mass-produced cultural values. Wikipedia, to put it another way, reproduces existing hegemonies of culture precisely because it is acting within its own epistemological parameters as wiki and encyclopedia.

The classroom studies presented in Chapters Three and Four begin to challenge these typical parameters in a few different ways. First they introduce new editors into the culture of the community, some of whom diverge from average Wikipedia demographics. Second, these new editors often bring with them particular motivations and inclinations

for writing that are not common to the existing community (for example, being drawn to write in a more personal style that works against the objectivist register of mainspace articles). Third, in Chapters Three and Four, students were directed to fill in Wikipedia not by what sources were available but by what gaps of coverage were available in the encyclopedia's representation of local issues. Such an approach moves against standard practice because it challenges the idea that information on Wikipedia should be universally verifiable. Students brought their own experience of local issues and subjects, research that was not always mass-produced or globally available, and finally, an agenda to work on misrepresentation and non-representation in Wikipedia. Such conditions demonstrate a central conflict, a tension between the local epistemologies and values of our classroom culture and the dominant values of the Wikipedia community.

In this conclusion, I speculate on this issue by exploring Wikipedia's reliance on western epistemological conventions and how those conventions limit its ability to utilize marginalized forms of knowledge production and represent marginalized cultures, identities, and geographies. I ultimately suggest that working with Wikipedia in the composition classroom can play a significant role in the continuing development and revision of the encyclopedia. To help make this happen, I encourage projects that engage local knowledge-making practices to represent local and marginalized subjects as well as an increased emphasis on those elements of Wikipedia that are more open to alternate knowledge-making practices (such as Wikipedia's "Talk" and "History" pages). Introducing students to Wikipedia does not guarantee that they will continue to edit after the class is over, but it does give us more hope for diversifying an editorial population

that is overwhelming white male. Finally, I attempt to engage and promote Wikipedia's Fifth Pillar, "Wikipedia Has No Firm Rules," ("WP: Five Pillars") as a guiding philosophy that should continue to influence the encyclopedia's agenda for creating a global resource with a diverse editorship that is more open to alternate epistemologies.

In "What Is an Encyclopedia? A Brief Overview from Pliny to Wikipedia" Dan O'Sullivan charts a succinct history of the genre, noting its major epistemological tendencies as well as the ways in which encyclopedias have emerged as both conservative and radical textual enterprises. Moving quickly through history, O'Sullivan traces a western encyclopedic tradition by examining Pliny's *Natural History* (1st Century), Vincent de Beauvais *Speculum Maius* (13th Century), Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (17th Century), Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (18th Century), Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopedie* (18th Century), the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (19th Century), and finally Wikipedia (21st Century). As is evident, Sullivan places particular emphasis on the enlightenment period as crucial to the genre's major development and growth in significance. Furthermore, while all of these experiments share common goals of gathering and organizing human knowledge, instantiations of the genre in the enlightenment period mirror more closely some of Wikipedia's (and indeed modern encyclopedias in general) most basic epistemological motivations. The rationalism of the enlightenment insisted on the possibility of the collection and curation of all human knowledge, and its benefit to society. Thus, when Jimmy Wales' describes the project of Wikipedia by asking us to "imagine a world in which every single person is

given free access to the sum of all human knowledge” (Wales), he is also echoing enlightenment philosopher Diderot’s explanation of his *Encyclopedie*:

In truth, the aim of an encyclopedia is to collect all the knowledge that now lies scattered over the face of the earth, to make known its general structure to the men among whom we live, and to transmit it to those who will come after us, in order that the labors of past ages may be useful to the ages to come, that our grandsons, as they become better educated, may at the same time become more virtuous and more happy, and that we may not die without ever having deserved well of the human race. (277)

Nor do the similarities between Wikipedia and Diderot’s project end with this enlightenment philosophy. Diderot’s *Encyclopedie* was also committed to a form of democratic collaboration much like Wikipedia’s crowd-sourced model of today. Just as Wikipedia invites editors from all types of educational and vocational backgrounds, so to did Diderot imagine a project that invited collaborators from all walks of life: “This is a work that cannot be completed except by a society of men of letters and skilled workmen, each working separately on his own part, but all bound together solely by their zeal for the best interests of the human race and a feeling of mutual good will.” (283). Of course, the technologies and resources available to Wikipedia—specifically hypertext, wiki software, and a large base of public domain information freely available on the web—have made it a far more encompassing, if not more successful, project than print encyclopedias of the past.

While noting that encyclopedias are by nature conservative (limited by policies of notability and verifiability as to what they can collect and claim as human knowledge), O’Sullivan’s analysis recognizes a radical character in both Wikipedia’s and Diderot’s commitment to a more democratic method of knowledge collection. Diderot’s project, much like Wikipedia, was also “crowd-sourced” and collaborative. It also professed to value content and contributions from working class individuals, much like Wikipedia’s professed open access editorial policies. O’Sullivan further asserts Wikipedia’s radical character by noting its self-conscious and revisionary practices. “Wikipedia is radical,” O’Sullivan claims, “because its procedures show the way to a new concept of knowledge. In today’s world, knowledge should be flexible, fallible, refutable, and its quest should involve change, disagreement, and continuous partial revision.” (47). This is especially evident in Wikipedia’s commitment to showing the “History” of all its articles as they develop and change over time, as well as the dedicated “Talk” pages, where editors can discuss and negotiate article development. Yet O’Sullivan also recognizes conservative ideologies at work in Wikipedia, especially in its dedication to a “cautious, objective, yet omniscient witness-bearer to the real world”—the factual and unquestioned narration present in mainspace articles (47) and its rigid adherence to neutrality (“WP: NPOV”) that often marginalizes alternative viewpoints that are not well supported or easily verified.

O’Sullivan’s discussion of the dominant discourse presented in mainspace articles—that of an objective, omniscient, and single history—provides an initial recognition of the encyclopedia’s tendency towards conservative epistemological

practices. However, such a tendency is also greatly influenced by Wikipedia's somewhat paradoxical adherence to print culture. As described previously, the Wikipedia project, as it manifests within the genre boundaries of the encyclopedia, carries both enlightenment (rational) and postmodern ideological traces. Wikipedia is postmodern in the way it forwards an epistemology that is revisionary, in-flux, and conscious of its own practices. Its hypertextual and associative taxonomies, especially evident in its multiple wikilinks, further define its postmodern character. Yet, Wikipedia is a rational project in the way that it insists that the encyclopedic endeavor itself (the gathering of all human knowledge) is at all possible. Furthermore, Wikipedia's adherence to print culture, especially in terms of how it verifies factual claims (WP: Verifiability), both signals and reifies the rational and modern insistence on the primacy of the written word as dominant semiotic domain:

Wikipedia as an encyclopedia is rooted in a culture of writing—not simply in the usage of a writing system to express and conserve thoughts, but in the almost exclusive usage of written sources for the body of its content. In its endeavor to systemize and codify the knowledge of mankind it voluntarily restricts itself to facts that are supported by *reliable, published, third-party sources*, as defined by its editor community. (Gallert and van der Velden, 2)

Ultimately, this allegiance to print discourse—which has become so central to the encyclopedic genre itself since the invention of the printing press—also limits the genre from accomplishing its ambitions for creating and maintaining a universal “circle of

knowledge.” Rather than creating a truly open project in which knowledge-making practices outside the culture of print are allowed and respected, the encyclopedia refuses to grant editing privileges to those who practice or only have access to already marginalized knowledge-making practices, especially those not verified in print. Because of this, Wikipedia presents an epistemological condition that is essentially paradoxical.

As Noopur Raval argues,

making a platform open access does not automatically translate to equality of participation, ease of access, or cultural acceptance of the medium. The question remains: where does one start? Does one wait for the these thousands of un-become (those who cannot participate and cannot be recognized) digital citizens standing in the shadows to gradually emerge and adopt new technologies or does one rework the project’s imagination to make space for various stakeholders who may not speak/write and document in the same way?” (“The Encyclopedia Must Fail,” n.p.)

Wikipedia’s adherence to the practices and tradition of print place it firmly in the encyclopedia tradition, yet it is also this placement that prevents it from accomplishing its encyclopedic goal of becoming a global human knowledge source. This adherence manifests in three specific policies that maintain traditional western textual practices: the policies of verifiability, no original research, and notability. As described in Chapters Two and Three, the principle of verifiability requires that articles are sourced with reliable content that can be easily verified, that is published and widely available either in digital or print form (“WP: Verifiability”). “No Original Research,” as applied to article

mainspace, prohibits the use of “material—such as facts, allegations, and ideas—for which no reliable, published sources exist” (“WP: No Original Research”). Finally, the principle of notability requires that topics (to be represented in Wikipedia) have significant coverage from reliable (usually printed) sources independent of the subject (“WP: Notability”).

These three policies significantly define the encyclopedia’s epistemological practices, especially in terms of what is represented and who is writing those representations. Furthermore, the students participating in the classroom studies of this dissertation quickly learned how limiting these policies could be. In Chapter 3, for instance, students working with local library archives often had to disregard specific materials that weren’t immediately verifiable. The whole notion of the local archive, furthermore, calls into question the distributed model of Wikipedia, a model that relies on mass production of source material. Students working in these archives were, in some ways, challenging the dominant epistemologies embedded in Wikipedia’s culture by using archival material sources. Such materials are not immediately verifiable because they are not immediately accessible to all readers. Yet, such materials *have* been legitimized by the academic research library. In insisting on working with these materials, students (under my direction) forwarded an implicit argument about the value of local research and archival material.

In the fourth chapter, additionally, this issue again became relevant as students realized how marginalization of cultures is mirrored and perpetuated in Wikipedia. Because there are fewer representations of Appalachia in mainstream discourse,

especially the kinds of representations that provide complex, nuanced and more realistic portrayals of its people and culture, there are also fewer verifiable sources to work with. Is Appalachia less “notable” because of a lack of these types of sources? In the print culture of Wikipedia, it is.

The invocation of Appalachia’s “uneven representation” in Wikipedia also serves to remind us of the encyclopedia’s non-representation of the global south (Graham), especially those cultures that have long histories of indigenous knowledge. The dominance of print culture plays a significant role in the marginalization of indigenous knowledge cultures, especially when their knowledge is stored and transmitted orally. Peter Gallert and Maja van der Velden further explain what happens to these cultures in Wikipedia:

For many aspects of the culture, tradition, and knowledge of indigenous people, there exist no or insufficient written records. This puts indigenous knowledge in Wikipedia, particularly on its largest language edition, the English Wikipedia, into a disadvantageous situation. Oral information transmission is not regarded as a way of publishing by the online encyclopedia, knowledge keepers are often believed to be too close to their narrative’s subjects to follow a neutral point of view, and passing on songs and stories is not seen as a reliable way of preserving knowledge. As a result, Indigenous Knowledge is not often included in Wikipedia’s article system. (2)

Gallert's and der Velden's research further describes an initiative largely begun by Indian Wikipedian, researcher, and Wikimedia Foundation Fellow, Achal Prabhala, to introduce oral citations for the inclusion of more indigenous knowledge content in the encyclopedia. Such citations would serve to help verify content about subjects where there exists no written published source through a spoken interview with an individual knowledgeable of the subject. This interview is recorded, uploaded as a digital file to Wikimedia commons, and linked to in the article's references. In the case of the article on "Gilli-danda," (a traditional folk game in India), Prabhala supported new content with an oral citation that was linked to both the audio recording and interview transcript. This was used as a way to describe the game's equipment. Almost immediately, however, the reference was removed and the section on equipment deleted by another editor without comment. This silence does not, however, mean that there exists no cogent arguments against the use of oral citations. In their analysis of a "Reliable Sources Noticeboard," Gallert and der Velden identify at least four: 1) "The person being interviewed is not an academic authority on the subject." 2) "Oral citations cannot be checked for accuracy"; 3) "Acceptable content would need to have been published through a minimally reliable ethnographic recording structure."; and 4) "Often community truths are falsehoods." In the pro-oral citations category, Gallert and der Velden find only one major argument: the rejection of oral citations amounts to what is essentially cultural imperialism, the rejection of knowledge-making practices that lie outside western knowledge-making paradigms. Such arguments ultimately reveal Wikipedia's need of (and the importance) of cultural archivists that can work to bring these knowledge sets into digital databases,

as well as a broader acknowledgement and engagement with the problems of Wikipedia's epistemological ethnocentrism.

While the rejection of oral citation practices represents a major barrier to the creation of a Wikipedia that is open to a diverse set of knowledge-making practices, it is not the only barrier. Wikipedia's mission to gather and make accessible "the sum of all human knowledge" ultimately upholds an enlightenment narrative that pushes us away from considerations of how its own practices and practitioners fail to include identities and epistemologies outside of a western, male, logocentric paradigm. This failure occurs in three ways. First, the erasure of non-normative gender and sexual identities emerges as a condition of the dominant and homogenous editor base, as more males edit and thus control the content that is valued on the encyclopedia. Second, in its adherence to western print culture (itself also an accomplice of western enlightenment), Wikipedia marginalizes the epistemological practices of cultures with limited access to print sources. As a tertiary source, mainspace article discourse in Wikipedia is regulated by the sources used to verify knowledge claims. "Verifiability," furthermore, is typically expected to emerge through the condition of a claim to fact being readily accessible in a published/print book. On a systemic level, such a policy immediately marginalizes cultures with less access to printing technologies, especially cultures where indigenous knowledge is maintained orally rather than textually. Finally, while Wikipedia's "Talk" and "History" features demonstrate an epistemology that is at once comfortable with the postmodern condition of a knowledge production that is constant, in-flux, and revisionary, its mainspace articles maintain an objectivist, detached and "factual"

linguistic register that perpetuates rather than challenges enlightenment claims to “truth.” This register upholds western, logocentric notions of truth, reality and knowledge— notions that further displace already marginalized knowledge sets, identities, and subjects. As Gallert and der Velden assert when discussing Wikipedia’s neglect of indigenous knowledge, “If Wikipedia ever wants to get close to representing *all* human knowledge, something has to change.” (17).

These problems cannot be solved easily or simply. Furthermore, the classroom studies presented in this dissertation do not claim to offer comprehensive solutions. However, in engaging students in the encyclopedia’s culture through Wikipedia writing assignments, this dissertation does present an argument that there is value in teaching these problematic cultural issues, and engaging with the encyclopedia in order to teach both writing knowledge and critical-cultural awareness and practice. The educational model offered in the fourth chapter, in which students recognize gaps of representation and work toward a project of improving Wikipedia’s representation of marginalized subjects, offers an engaged pedagogy that is capable of disrupting Wikipedia’s dominant epistemological practices (or at the very least, the effects of those practices). When students question the uneven cultural politics of an information source they frequently use, when they work with local subjects and try to improve on the mis/non-representation of those subjects, they are engaging with and problematizing some of the encyclopedia’s dominant epistemologies. As novices to the community, and as demographically more diverse, they may also upset the encyclopedia’s homogenous editorial base. Such work benefits students greatly from a digital humanities perspective, by engaging them as

digital citizens. As Melanie Kill has argued, students immersed in the culture and production of knowledge in Wikipedia can become “generative producers and critical consumers of cultural products” and can learn to make “meaningful interventions in the world and lasting connections between their humanist training and public engagement” (390)

The encyclopedia itself, significantly, also benefits from this type of engaged pedagogy. Students and instructors working in English Studies can help to improve the Wikipedia’s coverage, can question its methods, and diversify its editorial ranks. They can serve to question its dominant culture-of-use, which has become far too homogenous and dedicated to a rigid and hegemonic adherence to print culture. Yet we can also question Wikipedia’s dominant information politics by paying attention to those spaces in the encyclopedia that remind us of the recursive and collaborative nature of knowledge production: the history pages which show multiple iterations of an article in development, and the “Talk” pages where editors negotiate an article’s development. These are the very spaces that drew me to Wikipedia as a teaching tool in the beginning of my research, and they remain useful for helping students come to a concrete understanding of social and procedural writing knowledge.

The dominant epistemologies of Wikipedia have accomplished a great deal. The sheer number of articles and topics covered, the breadth and scope of many of these articles, and the representation of subjects that would have never been covered in a print encyclopedia all point to the success of Wikipedia’s model for a large-scale crowd-sourced encyclopedia that remediates western conventions of the genre. Wikipedia has

opened up the encyclopedic project to a far greater number of contributors than has ever existed. It has made possible the critiques that it now faces – that it become an even more expansive and representative source. One way to work toward that future might be to imagine an encyclopedia that allows for multiple epistemological practices capable of valuing different cultural systems of knowledge transmission and curation. Some of this work needs to be accomplished in those recursive and open spaces that already exist in Wikipedia. But perhaps new spaces also need to be created. In attempting to imagine these possibilities, we might also invoke Wikipedia’s “Fifth Pillar”:

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. Their principles and spirit matter more than their literal wording, and sometimes improving Wikipedia requires making an exception. Be bold but not reckless in updating articles, and do not agonize about making mistakes. Every past version of a page is saved, so any mistakes can be easily corrected. (“WP: Five Pillars”)

Wikipedia was designed to evolve precisely because the project of knowledge collection, curation, and distribution itself must always be an evolving project. Questioning the project and introducing new editors, by integrating Wikipedia writing projects into the classroom, will help ensure that Wikipedia remains open to change as it continues to expand and cross epistemological, geographical and cultural boundaries.

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT 1: COMPOSING A WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

Introduction

Despite its ever-growing popularity and frequent use by students and professionals, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia has been victim to a significant amount of scorn in academic circles. Most students see the encyclopedia as a forbidden research database, having been steered away from using it by countless teachers and instructors in secondary and college English classes. For certain purposes and topics, however, Wikipedia might be the perfect source. For obscure subjects, it may be one of the few places where information is available. Erroneous entries can tell us about public misconceptions and ignorance. That Wikipedia has been vilified in academia is ultimately significant of a tremendous loss, as the database affords an exciting opportunity to produce public writing for a specific audience and venue. In practical terms, this project should aid your growth in the following general areas: audience awareness; writing styles and tones; source retrieval, evaluation and incorporation; familiarity with wikis as an example of online discourses and genres. But becoming familiar with the modes and methods of Wikipedia will also allow you to participate in and observe the social-collaborative writing process. The entries on this encyclopedia are products of multiple authors, thinkers and editors who talk and interact with each other and who create a text through multiple revisions, deletions, edits, and additions. Participating in this process should allow you to see how all writing, while not always so explicitly collaborative, occurs in a similar fashion.

For this project, your goal is to create a Wikipedia entry on a topic not yet written about. We'll be generating appropriate topics in class but here are some ideas to get you thinking about the possibilities:

- A student club / organization. E.g. People Acting for Gender Equality;
- A local musical group / artist. E.g. Poet Hollis Summers;
- A local event or festival. E.g. Ohio Pawpaw Festival;

- A local place of interest or history.

"[Requested Articles](#)" and "[Most Wanted Articles](#)" are two great resources to help you come up with an idea for an article. Be sure to keep the formal requirements of the assignment (found below) in mind when choosing a topic. Refer to the "Things to Avoid" section at "[Wikipedia: Your First Article](#)" for further guidance. We'll also be discussing the concept of notability as it is presented in "[Wikipedia: Notability](#)" as a way of identifying what topics are deserving of an entry. You might also consider using the [Article Wizard](#) to determine a topic's eligibility.

Alternate Option: You may also choose to edit an existing article. However, your choice of article should be guided by two concerns. First, the article in question should be in need of revision; it should be missing important information or in need of correction. Second, your edit should be able to meet the formal requirements of this assignment in terms of word count (length) and sources (3-5).

Assignment Elements and Expectations

A. Compilation and Evaluation of Sources

Generating a suitable entry topic that hasn't already been written about is just the beginning, of course. You'll also be expected to compile a list of (3-5) sources from which to draw information. Because your entry will ultimately be subject to editorial review and (worst case scenario) deletion, it is extremely important to evaluate sources carefully before deciding to include them in your entry.

B. Article Entry

The written elements of this project will vary in terms of length, depending on subject, but most entries should range between 750-1000 words. It's important to remember that the encyclopedic entry, as a genre, necessitates a specific format and style. Encyclopedia entries are meant to be as objective as possible and should not include analytical or opinion-based writing. We'll be examining a number of successful and unsuccessful

entries in order to learn to recognize and imitate this style.

C. Photographic Element

In addition to the written requirement, you are also asked to add a photographic element to the entry and incorporate at least two photographs into the entry. It's important that these photographs pertain to your topic. They have the power to increase the notability of local-interest entries, as suggested in "[Wikipedia: Your First Article](#)": "There is no consensus about such articles [local interest], but some will challenge them if they include nothing that shows how the place is special and different from tens of thousands of similar places. Photographs add interest. Try to give local-interest articles local color."

Publishing Expectations

While this project provides the opportunity to successfully publish your entry, it does not require that outcome. The chance that your encyclopedic entry will not remain on Wikipedia, its deletion, is a very real possibility. This does not mean that you will lose your work, as you will be saving your entry both on your Wikipedia user space and as MS Word documents throughout the project. However, this deletion does add an emotional risk to the project. I do not tell you this to add to your apprehension or disappointment, but rather, to make you understand that any real opportunity to share your work with a wide audience involves some emotional dangers. This project is no exception. It should be both frightening and exciting to imagine the end result.

Composing Processes

1. Review the [Wikipedia Editing Tutorial](#). The video tutorial found on this page is also very helpful. Remember you can always experiment / play in the [Sandbox](#).
2. Visit "[Writing an Article](#)" to learn more about the process of starting a new entry.
3. Begin generating possible article topics by searching the encyclopedia. Be sure to use different search terms, both broad and specific, to ensure that a topic hasn't already been

written about. We'll read the entry on notability and discuss the concept in class to get a better idea of what topics will be most appropriate. The Wizard can also help you figure out if your topic is sufficiently notable. Again, "Requested Articles" and "Most Wanted Articles" are two great resources to help you come up with an idea for an article

4. Begin compiling sources. Be sure to review the section on "Gathering References" at "Wikipedia: Your First Article."

5. We'll read and discuss a number of examples directly from Wikipedia, and then you'll begin drafting your own article. Review the guidelines under "Content" at the Article Wizard. Your article should adhere to the following:

- Your article submission must not violate copyright.
- Your article should also establish notability.
- Your article must be neutral in its tone.
- Your article should not engage in puffery.

6. Using a digital camera (which can be checked out at 215 McCracken Hall), you'll also want to take some photographs at this point to add to your entry. Have numerous options (pictures) for your peer reviewer to examine. Together, you can decide which are most appropriate at the peer review.

7. We'll hold an in-class peer review to workshop these drafts in groups of three. Reviewers will evaluate how well you meet the above criteria, your inclusion of at least one photographic images, the selection of sources, and how well those sources are incorporated and documented with the ultimate goal of providing constructive feedback for the writer.

8. Be sure to "publish" your article in your own Userspace before submitting it for review or going live. Like the sandbox, your Userspace is a great place to preview what the

article looks like and carry out experiments.

9. After additional revision, you'll submit your article for review at Article for Creation (AfC) using the [Article Wizard](#).

10. With feedback and approval of your AfC reviewer, Go Live! Using the [Article Wizard](#). You should also save the final version of your entry in your user space, as other Wikipedia editors may edit it very quickly.

Additional Resources

- This page on [citation templates](#) details citation standards followed by Wikipedia as well as providing models for various types of sources
- The Wikipedia "[Cheatsheet](#)" provides a list of commonly used wiki syntax commands, such as the command for bold text, or for creating a section heading.
- When creating a new article, students may also find it helpful to participate in a live chat with more experienced users, available at [Wikipedia IRC Help Channel](#).

A Note on Copyright and Citation: Incorrect citations are among the most common reasons for an article deletion on Wikipedia. The success of your project depends on your careful adherence to quotation and documentation standards. The photographs you end up using should be copyrighted in the photographer's name (you).

Evaluation

This assignment is worth 15% of your total course grade. The final article will be assessed for content, neutral style, documentation, and source selection. The photographs will be assessed in terms of notability. That is, how does the photograph's content increase the article's notability? This is not a class in photography and your efforts will not be graded on an aesthetic scale. The peer review will be modeled after the guidelines established by Wikipedia regarding copyright, notability, neutrality, and puffery.

Project Criteria

- Article exceeds / meets assignment length requirement (750-100 words).
- Article exceeds / meets assignment source requirement (3-5 sources).
- Article's sources are chosen with a rhetorical awareness of their reliability, verifiable content, independent angle, and reputation. See [Article Wizard](#): "Sources."
- Article's sources are incorporated with summary, paraphrase and quoting. Quotes are set up with signal phrases and parenthetical references.
- Article's writing emulates an encyclopedic style: is neutral, objective, and third person.
- Article's content provides useful, significant, notable information about the topic.
- Article's organization effectively guides the reader to different sections.
- Article makes use of an image to increase topic's notability.

Project Peer Review

A. Read your partner's draft on their user page thoroughly, noting any sources they're planning on using.

B. Go to the [Wikipedia Drawing Board](#) and create a report for your partner's planned article. Please include an article title, some details about the topic, and why you think an article is merited (that is, why a subject is notable). You should provide at least a couple of links (to demonstrate that there are reliable sources for such an article). Sign the report in your partner's name.

C. After creating the report, compose an email to be sent to your partner and CC'd to me in which you respond to the following questions.

1. How well does the author adopt a neutral, third person style? Are there any lapses in which the article is presented in subjective or first person terms? Is the information presented in a neutral, unbiased way? How might this area be improved? Point to specific places that might need revision and places that you feel are well written.

2. A topic is notable if it has been the subject of multiple, non-trivial published works

from sources that are reliable and independent of the subject itself and of each other. All topics must meet a minimum threshold of notability in order for an article on that topic to be included in Wikipedia. This requirement ensures that there exists enough source material to write a verifiable, encyclopedia article about the topic.

Is the topic notable? Does the author provide enough sources to show that the topic is notable? If not, where might they continue their research?

3. Information on Wikipedia must be reliable and verifiable. Facts, viewpoints, theories, and arguments may only be included in articles if they have already been published by reliable and reputable sources. Sources should have a reputation for fact checking and accuracy, and be independent of the subject. Citing sources is one of the core elements of Wikipedia and is official policy for every article on Wikipedia. Any unsourced material may be challenged and removed. For academic subjects, the sources should preferably be peer reviewed. Sources should also be appropriate to the claims made; for example, outlandish claims need very strong sources. If you're not sure if your sources are good enough, look at [Wikipedia: Reliable sources](#), and if you're still not sure, you can ask at the [Reliable Sources Noticeboard](#).

Consider your partner's sources. Do they meet Wikipedia criteria or are they questionable? Why? What other sources might the author consider using?

4. The content of the article should provide useful information without violating copyright. The author should write about the subject by summarizing other sources in his/her own words. Quotations may also be used but should be appropriately formatted with signal phrases and parenthetical references. The content should be organized with section titles. Finally, the content should avoid engaging in "puffery." Puffery is when an article attempts to exaggerate the notability of its subject. Puffery only serves to reduce the neutrality of the article and so it should be avoided.

Evaluate the content of your partner's draft. Is it written in a way that doesn't violate copyright laws? Does the author quote effectively? Is the content organized effectively? Does the author avoid puffery?

5. What's the best aspect of this article? Why? What needs the most work?

APPENDIX B: PROJECT 2: WIKIPEDIA REFLECTION ESSAY

Goals

For this project, you'll write a more traditional essay in the form of a reflection that recounts your experience with this project and what you've learned. You'll provide a narrative of your experience creating a Wikipedia article, your observations of other Wikipedia articles, and the various elements of Wikipedia as a discourse community (e.g. drawing board, article wizard, edit function, history function, discussion function).

Reflect on what you learned in three areas:

- “traditional” writing skills like source retrieval, evaluation and incorporation, summary, quoting, writing styles / tones, etc.
- writing as a social act; intertextuality, collaboration, etc.
- writing as recursive, multifaceted process.

In other words, how has your knowledge in these three areas grown as a result of examining *Wikipedia* as a model for writing and knowledge production? For example, what did you learn about writing from your participation on the “Drawing Board”? Conclude the essay by discussing and speculating on how online forums like Wikipedia are changing the way knowledge is distributed and created in the 21st century? Is this change an advantage over more traditional or established methods? Another way to think about this project: I want you to apply some of the concepts presented in *Writing About Writing* to the discourse community of Wikipedia and to your experience composing in that community.

Formal requirements

Length: 4-5 pp. (1200-1500 words)

Sources: 2-3

APPENDIX C: STUDY 1 SURVEY

1. Do you agree or disagree? This assignment sequence allowed you to utilize visual rhetoric and to consider the connections between visual and alphabetic texts.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. How effective was this assignment sequence at contributing to a growth of your understanding of revision and writing as a recursive process?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not at all effective

3. Was your response to your peer's writing during peer reviews less or more engaged than peer review work you've done in the past?

- Much more engaged
- More engaged
- Slightly more engaged
- Slightly less engaged
- Less engaged
- Much less engaged

4. How effective was the assignment sequence in exposing you to a variety of writing styles?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective

- Slightly effective
- Not at all effective

5. How would you rate your growth in terms of research skills?

- High growth
- Medium growth
- Slight growth
- No growth at all

6. How would you rate your understanding of rhetorical concepts ethos, pathos, and logos after having completed this assignment sequence?

- Extremely advanced
- Very advanced
- Slightly advanced
- Not at all advanced

7. How useful was this assignment sequence in contributing to your rhetorical understanding of the concept of audience?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Moderately useful
- Slightly useful
- Not at all useful

8. Do you agree or disagree? This assignment sequence allowed you to practice and exercise your skill at surface-level writing skills: documentation, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree

- Strongly disagree

9. Overall, are you satisfied with your experience completing this assignment, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?

- Extremely satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Slightly dissatisfied
- Moderately dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

10. Compared with work you've done for previous composition courses, how effective was this assignment sequence at exposing you to the theory of writing as process?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not at all effective

11. Both in terms of online Wikipedia editors and classmates, was this assignment sequence more or less social than writing tasks in previous composition courses?

- Much more social
- More social
- About the same
- Less social
- Much less social

12. How effective was this assignment at contributing to your understanding of source evaluation and incorporation?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not at all effective

13. Do you agree or disagree? This assignment sequenced enriched your understanding of the concept of plagiarism?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. After completing this assignment sequence, how would you rate your growth in terms of documenting sources in a particular documentation style?

- High growth
- Medium growth
- Slight growth
- No growth at all

15. Compared to other writing assignments, how did this assignment sequence influence your perception of audience?

- Increased sense of audience
- No change in sense of audience
- Decreased sense of audience

16. How did your sense of audience influence your level of engagement with the assignment sequence?

- Greatly increased engagement
- Slightly increased engagement

- Didn't influence engagement
- Slightly decreased engagement
- Greatly decreased engagement

17. Did the incorporation and use of technology in this assignment sequence enrich or detract from your experience?

- Strongly enriched
- Enriched
- Slightly enriched
- Neither enriched nor detracted
- Slightly detracted
- Detracted
- Strongly detracted

18. In a short essay, describe the educational benefits of this assignment sequence. How was it helpful to you as someone trying to practice and learn about writing and rhetoric?

19. In a short essay, make recommendations on how this assignment sequence might be modified to be more effective as an educational experience. Be sure to say why those modifications are needed.

APPENDIX D: STUDY 2 PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS

Process Log Prompt 1

After writing the proposal and meeting with your curator, describe this part of the project's influence on your progress. How has it affected the writing you've completed thus far on the project?

Process Log Prompt 2

After posting to your online ambassador's talk page and gaining their feedback, what have you learned about how a writer's audience can influence his or her writing? How has your interaction with the online ambassador influenced your writing?

Curator Proposal Letter Assignment

In “What Is It We Do When We Write Articles Like This One—and How Can We Get Students to Joins Us?,” Michael Kleine relates the knowledge he gains from interviewing eight professors about their writing processes. Among his findings, Kleine highlights the emphasis these professional writers place on their “involvement in genuine research communities” which serve as “starting points” for their own work (*WAW* 27). What we can learn from Kleine is that successful writing is always social and always requires input from and dialogue with other writers and thinkers who are involved in a community in which you are both “members.”

For this assignment, you'll initiate a conversation by contacting the curator who works in your topic area in order to gain valuable feedback about your proposed Wikipedia project. These curators are, in a sense, part of a community we've created that has a shared goal: to enable effective and valuable contributions to Wikipedia articles.

To accomplish this, you'll write a letter to the curator, utilizing the conventions of the genre of a letter (salutation and closing). Your letter should be 700–900 words and should be emailed to your assigned curator. Each email should also be cc'd to the instructor. As you write be sure to address the following:

- Thank the curator for their involvement in your writing process.
- Identify gaps in the article, sections that could be expanded or corrected/updated. If creating a new article, explain why such an article is worthwhile and what information you might need and have already found to warrant its creation.
- Discuss how you can fill this gap with research you've already done at the special collections and archives.
- Provide an outline of your proposed edits/additions or your new article.
- Ask the curator for help with additional research problems/questions.

- Confirm your interview time.

APPENDIX E: STUDY 2 SURVEY

1. How did having multiple audiences for this assignment (your peers, the teacher, curators, Wikipedia ambassadors, other Wikipedia users who might view your article) change the writing you did on this project?
2. What about those audiences who were outside the classroom (curators, Wikipedia public, ambassadors) more specifically? How did your awareness of them in particular affect your approach to the assignment?
3. Over the course of the entire project, which of these audiences seemed to matter the most to you as a writer?
4. In your own opinion, your success on this project depended mostly on your ability to meet the expectations of which audience or audiences? Why do you think that is?
5. Compare this writing assignment to an assignment in a previous English course. Were you more or less motivated? Why?
6. Think about how a teacher's authority and expertise (on the form and subject of your writing) normally influences a writing assignment. How was authority in this project distributed (or not) among audiences?
7. Who held the most authority for this project? And how has this influenced your writing?
8. Would you recommend this assignment to a future class? Why or why not?

APPENDIX F: STUDY 3 PROCESS LOGS

Process Log 1

At this point in the course, you've read and written about representations of Appalachia, learned about concepts central to writing and rhetoric, and been introduced to some of the practices and values of Wikipedia. Before we begin on the major project of the course, I'd like you to reflect back on these topics and how they might relate to each other. Please respond to the following prompt as honestly as possible. So far, what is your understanding of the problems of representation of Appalachia in mainstream media? How might those problems be understood or explained using concepts you've learned about writing and rhetoric?

Process Log 2

At this point in the course, you've just finished working on Project 3 and edited a Wikipedia article on Appalachia in order to improve the encyclopedia's coverage and representation. As you answer the following prompt, please refer to your experience with this project (and any other experience in the course). How has your understanding of Wikipedia (especially its politics of access and representation) changed since you've worked on this project?

APPENDIX G: STUDY 3 COURSE SYLLABUS

Writing & Rhetoric II: Writing in Wikipedia

Introduction and Overview

Let's face it. Wikipedia hasn't always been welcome in academic circles. It's unreliable, amateur, unstable, an insult to credible research, a major contributor to student plagiarism. Right? This is what its critics would have you believe. And perhaps they are right, to some extent. A crowd-sourced "open access" encyclopedia that anyone can contribute to *is* going to ruffle some feathers. It challenges many of the systems of credibility we've come to rely on, and dramatically changes the way we share and access knowledge. But if we accept these arguments completely, we're missing out on an exciting opportunity to learn from and contribute to a writing community that has made it the largest and most popular encyclopedia in history. Welcome to Writing & Rhetoric II – *Writing in Wikipedia*. Rather than ban or ignore it, this course invites you to learn about and practice writing by observing, analyzing, and contributing to Wikipedia. The encyclopedia has a lot to teach us, it turns out, about research, writing, collaboration, genre, authorship, and digital rhetoric—the way new media forms influence texts, and the author/audience relationship. Yet for all it can teach us, and in spite of its success, Wikipedia is still a work in progress. This course will ask you to critique and update the encyclopedia's coverage of a subject that we all have access to, if not immediate experience with: the representation of Appalachia, and its related issues and identities. In doing so, we'll also be studying how the encyclopedia, in its attempt to be "universal," often leaves out or fails to represent regional and local culture. Our practical goal for this

aspect of the course is to improve the encyclopedia's representation of Appalachia, its people, places, art, etc. But we'll also "zoom out" to think about some broader implications for understanding identity, rhetoric, and writing. How, for instance, does mainstream media perpetuate negative stereotypes about certain identities and regional cultures? How are these stereotypes circulated and promoted? How might they be reversed or dealt with? Finally, how can participation in Wikipedia serve some of these goals? Let's find out together.

Major Projects

1. Representations of Appalachia

A short essay in which you examine representations of Appalachia in mainstream media and connect those representations to your own understanding and experiences. *Key Concepts: Identity and Discourse, Rhetoric, Media Influence.*

2. Genre Awareness Presentation

Groups will work on analyzing featured Wikipedia articles to identify major conventions of the genre and how those conventions reflect community values, then present their findings to the class. *Key Concepts: Genre Awareness, Genre Theory, Imitation, Writing Metaknowledge and Transfer.*

3. Proposal and Article Edit

Identify a Wikipedia article in need of revision and addition. Proposals will outline article "gaps" and suggested developments. Article development should be equivalent to a short research paper and employ effective outside research in line with Wikipedia conventions.

Key Concepts: Research, Fact-Checking, Critical Analysis, Style, Collaboration, Communities of Practice, Source Legitimacy.

4. Final Reflection

An opportunity to reflect on the work you've done in this course: what you've learned about writing, identity, and rhetoric. *Key Concepts: Identity Politics, Discourse, Public Knowledge, Wikipedia, Writing Skills/Knowledge.*

Learning Outcomes and Goals

- Gain an understanding of texts and writing as tools that mediate social realities (identities, stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes), especially texts/media that contribute to our experience with and understanding of the region and culture of Appalachia/Southeast Ohio.
- Understand and practice genre analysis to learn about textual forms and conventions in Wikipedia, and how those forms and conventions reflect community values. Understand genre awareness as useful writing knowledge that can be applied to other writing tasks.
- Work with a team of peers to create and successfully execute an oral presentation with visual aids.
- Practice writing in digital, collaborative environments (wikis, discussion board forums, cloudshares).
- Recognize writing and research as (ongoing) social-collaborative processes within communities of practice.

- Learn to critique and analyze texts in order to find “gaps” – opportunities for further revision or development.
- Recognize your own ability to contribute to ongoing research and writing projects and to add to public knowledge via Wikipedia.
- Practice and understand the process of integrating research for different types of writing (persuasive/factual).
- Recognize the important of social knowledge (community values, conventions, and goals) in writing by contributing to Wikipedia and interacting and engaging with a specific community of practice surrounding a topic area.
- Practice writing for different audiences (peers, self, instructor, Wikipedia public) and rhetorical situations.
- Read and write in in diverse genres (encyclopedia article, analytical essay, reflection, presentation) and writing styles (persuasive, analytical, fact-based, etc.).
- Understand the capacity of writing in digital media for changing public awareness/knowledge.
- Learn to recognize effective design principles for both print and digital documents.
- Gain an awareness of issues of authorship, legitimacy and reliability raised by different forms of digital publishing.
- Reflect on the significance of contributing to a public knowledge project like Wikipedia in order to improve its representation and treatment of Appalachia;

reflect and begin to understand the politics of access and representation as they manifest in Wikipedia and other media.

APPENDIX H: PROJECT 3 ASSIGNMENT (WIKIPEDIA EDIT)

Project 3: Proposal and Wikipedia Article Edit

Overview

In the first project, we focused on the rhetorical process whereby mainstream media promotes and circulates negative stereotypes about the people and culture of Appalachia. In this, the major research project of the course, you will work to improve public knowledge and public representation of Appalachia by contributing to one of the most visited websites on the web: Wikipedia. I want you to take this work seriously. Your writing will be public and you are taking on a task that can benefit the encyclopedia as well as battle negative stereotypes commonly attributed to the region where you have lived for (at least) the last 3 years. In addition to these goals, our work in Wikipedia is also meant to help you better understand writing and rhetoric. We've already talked a lot about genre knowledge, process knowledge, and social knowledge. We'll continue this dialogue in Project 3 as you become more familiar with the ways in which Wikipedia, as a social community, expects certain genres, conventions, and processes of writing, and how those expectations reflect community values and goals.

Process and Format

As the major project of the course, we're going to spend more time on your Wikipedia articles and allow for more process (in and out of class) to make sure you're successful. This process will also include numerous steps where you produce the following documents and revisions:

- 1) A Proposal for the Instructor in which you discuss a specific article you've targeted for development, why you've chosen that article, and what "gaps" you've found, article omissions that require revision or further development. 300 words. Posted to Box.
- 2) A Revised Proposal for your assigned Online Ambassador. This proposal will include an Annotated Bibliography and will be posted to your Ambassador's talk page. 300 words plus 5 sources in Annotated Bibliography, 50-100 word annotations.
- 3) A "Source Sheet" that includes bibliographic information for each of your sources as well as quotes, summary, and paraphrase from those sources that you plan to use in your article. Posted to Box. 400-600 words.
- 4) A draft of your revised and developed article for peer review (published in your Sandbox). You will also send a message to your Ambassador to review this draft. 1200-1500 words (new contributions).
- 5) A final article draft with revisions based on your peer's and ambassador's feedback (Wikipedia mainspace). 1200-1500 words (new contributions).

Sources

Writing in Wikipedia, as we learned in the Training modules, requires careful consideration of sources. Avoid plagiarism by always using in-text citations for quotes, paraphrase, and summary. Never copy/paste directly from a source. Never rely too much on quotes. Sources should be from reputable publishers (established and notable news

outlets, published books, scholarly articles, etc.) Your final article should include at least 5 outside sources, more if necessary.

Project Criteria Proposals

- Proposals outline specific issues and omissions for development, identifying “gaps” or places that need revision, expansion and improvement.
- Separate proposals consider the audience (Instructor, Online Ambassador). Be sure to thank your Ambassador for his/her help (which is strictly volunteered).
- Ambassador Proposal contains an Annotated Bibliography of sources useful for your article development, with short summaries of the source and how they might be used in your edit.

Project Criteria Source Sheet

- Source sheets are similar to Annotated Bibliographies in that they include citations to each source you plan to use. However, they should contain less summary and planning of how you use the source and more specific quotes, summary and paraphrase that you will include in your article.

Project Criteria Article Edits

- Edits to your Wikipedia article should demonstrate an understanding of (and follow) the following Wikipedia writing conventions:
- Articles use a consistently neutral point of view,

- Articles are written as clearly and concisely as possible. Be plain, direct, unambiguous, and specific.
- Articles should avoid redundancy and maintain scope. Do not bring in content that should be covered in other articles.
- Articles should demonstrate careful and thorough research and source use.
- Sources should be secondary, from reputable publishers (academic research, notable news and media outlets, etc.).
- Sources should be carefully documented using Wikipedia conventions for References.

Project Criteria Article Edits

- Quotes, summary, and paraphrase should be documented according to Wikipedia conventions (in-text citations).
- Articles should contain no original research. Do not include your own opinions or interpretations of the topic.
- Articles should be organized in a way that is consistent with the genre of the Wikipedia article, using heading and subheadings and sidebars if needed.
- Articles should follow the basic article structure common to Wikipedia: lead, body, appendices (references, external links).
- Article edits should meet the required length (1200-1500 words of original contributions).

Important Dates

7/14: Assign Project; Watch Videos on Wikipedia

7/16: Explore Wikipedia Articles on Appalachian Topics; Groups make lists of articles that need work and begin identifying “gaps”; Individual Students Draft Proposals; Instructor shares “Stub and Start” Articles List

7/18: Proposals for Instructor due by 6pm

7/21: Editing Basics Review; Documentation Review and Practice in Sandboxes

7/23: Internet and Database Research on Appalachian Topics; Drafting Annotated Bibliographies; In-class Proposal Conferences

7/25: Leave a message on your Ambassador’s Talk page with revised proposal and annotated bibliography

7/28: “Source sheet” due to Box before class; in-class review of wiki markup; in-class editing

7/30: Move a full draft with citations to Sandbox; Students peer review article drafts; Leave a message on Ambassador’s Talk page to review article on Sandbox

8/11: Project 3 due: Review Online Ambassador’s Feedback and Make Final Edits to Articles; Brief Presentations on your Articles

Additional Resources

Wikipedia Policies and Guidelines:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Policies_and_guidelines

Wikipedia Education Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_students/Resources

Chat and Help boards can be linked to from the Course Page.



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