Future Voices in Public Services
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The Future Voices in Public Services column is a forum for students in graduate library and information science programs to discuss key issues they see in academic library public services, to envision what they feel librarians in public service have to offer to academia, to tell us of their visions for the profession, or to tell us of research that is going on in library schools. We hope to provide fresh perspectives from those entering our field, in both the United States and other countries. Interested faculty of graduate library and information science programs, who would like their students' ideas represented in these pages, are invited to contact Nancy H. Dewald at nxd7@psu.edu.

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The School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) at Kent State University has the only American Library Association-accredited Master of Library and Information Science degree program in Ohio, offering courses in Kent and Columbus, Ohio, and through a fully online option. SLIS also offers a Master of Science in Information Architecture and Knowledge Management and participates in an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in the College of Communication and Information. The school is recognized by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the nation's top 20 LIS graduate programs, with a youth librarianship program that is ranked 10th. It is one of the largest library schools in the country, with more than 650 students enrolled. For more information, visit www.kent.edu/slis.

To Use or Not to Use? The Credibility of Wikipedia
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The Internet has fundamentally altered the way we interact with the world. It's been said so often, the words have lost their impact, becoming a cliché. Gone are the days of going to the library to retrieve information from the card catalogue. Today, we have a surplus of information at our fingertips that can be accessed from virtually anywhere at any time. Jones and Fox's (2009) and Rainie, Estabrooke, and Witt's (2007) studies demonstrate that adults are increasingly relying on the Internet as a primary information source. As a result of the Internet's omnipresence, R. David Lankes (2008) argued our society now has an "underlying paradox where users are simultaneously more responsible for information decisions, while also more dependent on the providers of that information and the tools used to manipulate that information" (p. 671). Ideas of credibility and authority are intertwined with this statement. If users are more responsible for their information decisions, they need to be able to judge authority and credibility accurately. Users are also making information decisions by contributing to the participatory nature of Web 2.0, causing a phenomenon known as the 'wisdom of crowds' where authority is decentralized from the experts and majority rules (Abilock, 2012). However, users are also more dependent on the authority and credibility of Internet resources for their information. This paper will investigate these ideas in relationship to Wikipedia, the encyclopedia anyone can edit. Once the bane of every teacher's existence, Wikipedia can play a part in the research process. The fact is our society uses Wikipedia. Instead of denying its value, librarians should change their policies on Wikipedia and teach people how to use it responsibly and appropriately as part of information literacy.

Wikipedia has been described as "represent[ing] the worst of how the Internet has dumbed down the research process, with its easily accessible but unsubstantiated (if not downright false) information on almost any topic" the citation of which, "amounts to a mockery of legitimate inquiry" (Crovitz & Smoot, 2009, p. 91). Since its inception in 2001, Wikipedia has been banned as a source for serious scholarly inquiry because anyone can edit it, opening the site to problems with misinformation and outright vandalism. Serious journalists typically don't use it as a source (Shaw, 2008) and professors don't allow its use in the classroom. One school librarian went so far as to create "Just Say 'No' to Wikipedia" posters for the library to get the point across, and satirist Stephen Colbert encouraged people to put false information on Wikipedia to explore its 'wikiality' (Crovitz & Smoot, 2009). In some ways, the message seems to have come across loud and clear. Kubiszeqski, Noordewier and Costanza (2010) ran a study in which they asked college students and faculty to rate the credibility of different articles in encyclopedias. Users rated entries in both Wikipedia and *Encyclopedia of Earth* as less trustworthy in comparison to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, even when the content of the articles was exactly the same.

Despite these issues, statistics show that people use Wikipedia frequently as an information source. Over one-third of the American public visit annually, making Wikipedia one of the ten most popular sites on the Internet, almost ubiquitously appearing in the top results of any Google search (Miller & Murray, 2010). In their study on college students, Head and Eisenberg (2010) found that 52% of those surveyed used Wikipedia frequently, even if they had

been warned against its use by professors. As Garfinkel (2008) observes, "…if the stuff in Wikipedia didn't seem 'true enough,' to most readers, they wouldn't keep coming back to the website" (p. 84).

The accuracy and credibility of Wikipedia in our society is being reevaluated. In 2005, *Nature* published Giles' often-cited study comparing Wikipedia to *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Rather shockingly, and much to *Encyclopedia Britannica'*s dismay, Wikipedia's reliability was found to be on par with *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The average science entry in Wikipedia was found to have four errors, while *Encyclopedia Britannica* was found to have three (Giles, 2005). Crovitz and Smoot (2009), both educators, describe Wikipedia as the equivalent of "the encyclopedias of yore" when it comes to basic information (p. 93) and detail numerous ways Wikipedia can be used in classrooms. Shaw (2008) notes that while the mainstream media generally do not cite Wikipedia, its use is becoming more common as a tool for gathering background information within the field. Head and Eisenberg's (2010) study also found that students use Wikipedia for basic facts and background information, but recognize its limitations as a source. Seventy percent of students used Wikipedia at the beginning of the research process. Only 2% used it toward the end. Biddix, Chung and Park's (2011) study substantiated these findings when they discovered college students use Wikipedia to be a pre-research tool. Clearly, students don't see Wikipedia as the be-all-and-end-all of their research process the way teachers once feared. Even our legal system is reassessing Wikipedia's reliability (Miller & Murray, 2010). If we allow Wikipedia in our courts, we cannot deny its use elsewhere.

Miller and Murray (2010) set an important precedent by laying out clear and convincing rules for establishing credibility when citing Wikipedia, or the 'wisdom of crowds,' in court cases. Wikipedia is found to be reliable when "consensus itself is at issue, the information is generally known, or the content is easily verifiable" (p. 644). On the other hand, Wikipedia is found unreliable when it comes to topics requiring an expert for explanation or that are controversial in nature, like the issue of climate change. They note biographies are at a higher risk for bias than other topics and that facts that are difficult to verify are also suspect. These rules can be applied to using Wikipedia in general.

The main danger with allowing the use of Wikipedia as part of the research process is that people will get their information wrong. However, the best way to deal with this problem is not to disallow the use of Wikipedia. People are in the habit of utilizing Wikipedia, whether they are 'allowed to' or not. Instead, information literacy classes should include lessons on Wikipedia so people know how to use it appropriately and responsibly. This can be achieved, in part, by following Miller and Murray's rules. Allowing Wikipedia to be used for basic facts, general knowledge, and easily verifiable content makes sense. Information gained can be checked for accuracy by triangulation with other reliable sources. Subjects that require an expert or facts that are not generally known, biographical details, and controversial subjects are best investigated through traditional scholarly sources. Moreover, Wikipedia offers other benefits to the user. Sometimes, it really is the best source. It can be published in real time and it often covers topics conventional encyclopedias leave out. One journalist recounted the time he used Wikipedia for the definition of 'turducken' a dish consisting of a turkey stuffed with a duck that has been stuffed with a chicken, rightly noting, "Britannica doesn't cover that nonsense" (Shaw, 2008, p. 42). Miller and Murray (2010) note Wikipedia's usefulness for defining slang in court.

Although Wikipedia warns information seekers against using it as a primary source, it has instituted policies on the writing and editing of articles in an attempt to assure users of credibility (Miller & Murray, 2010). As of 2003, Wikipedia has had three main policies: verifiability, in that Wikipedia articles should cite reliable sources, no original research, and neutral point of view (Garfinkel, 2008). In addition, Wikipedia documents every edit and makes them available to users. Changes can be viewed by clicking the 'view history' tab at the top of the page. Under the 'talk' tab, users and editors can discuss the article and see its grade on the Wikipedia quality scale. These measures can assist the user in determining credibility. If an article is vandalized too many times, only approved editors can modify content, another way Wikipedia attempts to maintain authority (Miller & Murray, 2010). Since Wikipedia articles also cite their sources, an article can be used to find traditional scholarly resources for further research.

Wikipedia does have its downfalls. A major drawback mentioned in the Giles' (2005) *Nature* study is the site's readability. Reviewers agreed their assigned Wikipedia article often suffered from poor writing quality and lack of structure, resulting in confusing entries (Giles, 2005). These complaints are valid. In surveying articles relating to my own expertise, modern and contemporary art history, I found some articles to be lacking in quality when it came to writing. I also found that important content was missing. Another legitimate complaint against Wikipedia is made by Garfinkel when he states, "What makes a fact or statement fit for inclusion [in Wikipedia] is that it appeared in some other publication—ideally, one that is in English and is available for free online" (p. 85). In my experience, the site is too heavy handed in its citation of the *New York Times* in artists' articles at the expense of other resources. There is also a sharp contrast in quality between articles. An article on one artist might be exceptionally detailed and authoritative while another lacks information. Users should be aware of these deficiencies.

If we deem Wikipedia an acceptable source under certain circumstances, the responsible use of Wikipedia must be taught to students as part of information literacy. Wikipedia instruction goes beyond teaching Miller and Murray's rules for when it is acceptable to use Wikipedia, Wikipedia instruction supports students' information literacy skills. According to Maehre (2009), the question of whether or not Wikipedia should be an acceptable source boils down to two dichotomies, "students learning by engaging in a process versus students producing a product, and students thinking individually and evaluating versus students as following rules" (p. 229). Not only can Wikipedia be a valid source but the determination of whether or not Wikipedia is a valid source in a given circumstance encourages critical thinking skills, critical reading skills, and information literacy skills that will benefit students far beyond the classroom (Maehre, 2009). By allowing for the option of Wikipedia after proper instruction, students learn how to determine the best source for a given situation. Moreover, students learn how to determine credibility (Maehre, 2009). The 'talk' tab is also of great interest to Maehre, who notes the content, which details the discussions surrounding the article, is valuable for showing students how knowledge is created.

Crovitz and Smoot (2009) also place emphasis on Wikipedia as a tool to teach students how to determine credibility and engage with a text critically. They argue that wikis change the reader/writer relationship by taking away some of the writer's privilege and authority.

"Readers (who may also be writers) are expected to act critically by evaluating assumptions, evidence, and context in order to measure worth and (possibly) respond. Writers (who are likewise readers) must in return expect to justify, support, and document their statements, as well as to engage with the questions and critique of readers" (p. 95).

The use of Wikipedia can teach students to engage with texts and information on a critical level absent from traditional print encyclopedias (Crovitz & Smoot, 2009). Denying students the use of Wikipedia, however, does not teach them anything.

So, how can a librarian begin to use Wikipedia to teach information literacy? The first step is to become acquainted with the site's tools (Crovitz & Smoot, 2009; Jennings, 2008; Lamb & Johnson, 2013). These tools should be taught to students and can be exploited for assignments (Crovitz & Smoot, 2009; Jennings, 2008; Lamb & Johnson, 2013). As mentioned, the 'talk' tab and the 'view history' tab can be used to determine credibility. The 'Wikipedia:About' page details how articles can be edited or contributed to the site and the 'Wikipedia:Community Portal' names specific articles that need improvement. These pages will prove valuable for planning student assignments and exercises (Crovitz & Smoot, 2009; Jennings, 2008; Lamb & Johnson, 2013).

Lamb and Johnson (2013) elucidate twelve possible ways Wikipedia can be employed by instructors to further students' information literacy skills: use Wikipedia, where students learn about the parts of Wikipedia and its function as an encyclopedia; evaluate and rate an article, where students determine an article's validity; cross reference, where students look up articles with missing links to other Wikipedia articles; add citations, where students can improve an article by adding sources; adopt an article, where students expand upon a Wikipedia entry; create an article, where students suggest new articles to Wikipedia; create video content, where students film article content; join a WikiProjects program, where students can work with others across the globe editing content; seek assistance, where students are paired with experienced Wikipedia contributors; use Wikimedia sister projects, where students learn about Wikimedia Commons, Wikiversity, and Wikibooks; become a Wikipedian, where students author their own article; and get connected, where students subscribe to the Wikimedia blog to keep abreast of current Wikimedia happenings. These suggestions are flexible, can easily be applied to any subject, and can be done singularly or in conjunction with one another for a larger project. More importantly, they teach students valuable information literacy skills like determining credibility.

Wikipedia is here to stay and the reality is that people use it regularly. Instead of vilifying the site as symptomatic of the degeneration of society, we should realize that Wikipedia is indeed 'good enough' when it comes to basic facts and information as described by Miller and Murray. As such, the proper use of Wikipedia should be taught as part of information literacy. In addition to its legitimacy as a source, Wikipedia makes an excellent tool for teaching information literacy. Since the dawn of time, humans have been forced to decide whether information is credible or not. Wikipedia is no different. By bringing Wikipedia into the classroom as both a respectable source and a teaching tool, instructors prepare their students to be smart consumers of information.

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