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Wikipedia: Teaching Metaliteracy in the Digital Landscape

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Introduction

Information literacy is a skill set that "empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational, and educational goals" (UNESCO and IFLA, 2005). In today's rapidly changing information ecosystem, undergraduate students must develop the ability to effectively collaborate, produce, and share content across the increasingly complex digital landscape, becoming savvy knowledge creators as well as consumers. To facilitate and these learning outcomes in the academy, an Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Task Force created the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Figure 1), which was approved in January 2015.
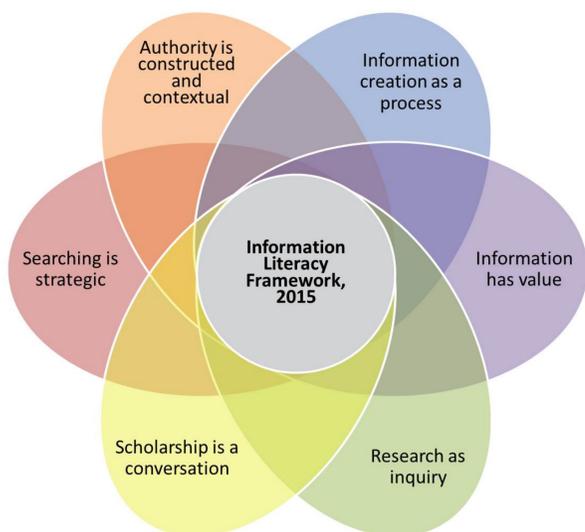

Figure 1. Six concepts form the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (*ACRL, 2015*).

In contrast with the earlier *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2000), which approached information literacy as a linear, process-oriented skill set, the revised *Framework* is a robust, interconnected set of foundational ideas that provides a strong basis for understanding and contributing to the dynamic information ecosystem in which we work and live. As the standards for teaching information literacy skills in the academy have evolved, other kinds of literacy frameworks (e.g., digital, media, visual, etc.) have been developed in response to myriad emerging technologies. In the library and information field, Mackey and Jacobson (2011, 2014) inventory the array of emerging literacies and propose that information literacy be reframed as a metaliteracy that functions as an overarching structure encompassing all of the related literacies.

Liaison librarians at New College of Florida collaborate with faculty in the delivery of quality metaliteracy services, including workshops and embedded librarian services that incorporate the use of digital tools such as Wikipedia.

Wikipedia is a free, web-based, multilingual encyclopedia written by a community of anonymous volunteers using collaborative "wiki" technology. Wikipedia operates under a set of guiding principles called the five pillars (Figure 2; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About).

Five Pillars of Wikipedia

- Encyclopedia
- Neutral
- Free
- Civil conversation
- No firm rules!

Figure 2. Five Pillars of Wikipedia. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Because the principles underlying the five pillars of Wikipedia align closely with the concepts outlined in the *Framework* (Table 1), Wikipedia may be an effective platform with which students can develop a variety of skills and become metaliterate individuals.

Table 1. Comparison of information literacy frames with major principles of Wikipedia editing.

Information Literacy Framework	Tenets of Wikipedia
Scholarship is a conversation	"Wiki" technology; talk pages
Information has value	Respect copyright; no plagiarism
Research as inquiry	Identify information gaps
Searching is strategic	Locate and access credible sources
Authority is constructed and contextual	Evaluate authority and credibility of sources; verifiability is key
Information creation is a process	Synthesize and summarize; Be bold! Revert! Discuss!

Case Studies

Beginning in 2012, librarians have collaborated with faculty to offer workshops and embedded librarian services in courses where students edit and contribute new content to Wikipedia articles as part of their coursework. Students taking humanities and social science courses critically analyze existing Wikipedia articles, assess information gaps, identify and evaluate sources, add new content using WikiCode, and develop a deeper understanding of collaborative authorship and peer review.

During the academic year 2014-2015, three courses and an independent study project included Wikipedia-related assignments or projects (Table 2; Figure 3).

Table 2. Courses requiring Wikipedia-related instruction during 2014-2015.

Discipline	Course Title
Musicology	Music and the Environment
Literature	Twentieth-Century British and American Drama
Sociology	Work Organization and Its Alternatives
Independent Study Project (ISP)	Become a Wikipedian (Figure 3)

For each Wikipedia assignment and ISP (see Figure 3 for ISP syllabus), the Humanities librarian conducted at least one workshop where the intended learning outcomes for students were to:
- Become familiar with the five pillars of Wikipedia
- Communicate with fellow Wikipedians via talk pages
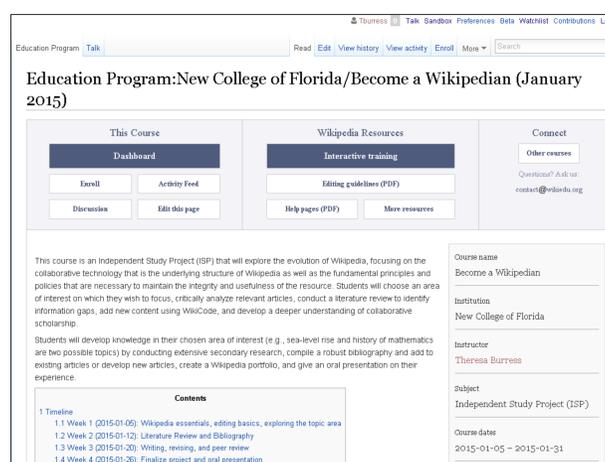- Add content to their sandboxes using basic WikiCode

*Figure 3. Course page excerpt from* Become a Wikipedian *ISP, January 2015.*

Students responded to a general library instruction survey at the conclusion of each workshop and provided general quantitative data regarding the effectiveness of the session. The requested information was not specific to Wikipedia, and therefore is not included here. Students were also asked the following open-ended questions:
- List 3 things you learned in this session.
- List 2 or 3 things you feel you still do not understand from this session.

The resulting comments were transcribed and compiled into word lists, stop words were removed, and word clouds were created using Wordle (http://www.wordle.net/).

Findings

Figures 4a and b provide an visual representation of the most frequent concepts or themes that students felt more comfortable with (Figure 4a) and that they expressed concerns about (Figure 4b) after participating in the workshop.
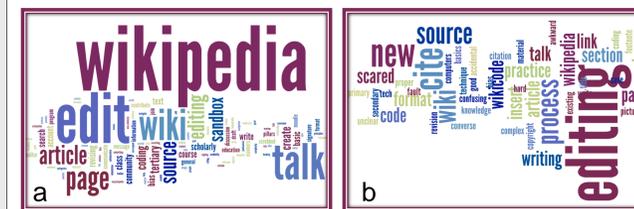
Figures 4a and b. Word clouds resulting from qualitative feedback at the conclusion of each Wikipedia Workshop.

While some words such as variations of "edit" appear in both images, there are some differences in the presence/absence of specific words and concepts that can help guide the development of future workshops. It appears that students became more comfortable with the concepts of secondary and tertiary sources and talk pages (Figure 4a); however, variations of "code" and "wikicode", copyright, citation, and writing appear more prominent in Figure 4b, where students are expressing concerns about concepts that they don't understand.

Next Steps

- Develop and implement post-assignment assessment of student experience and metaliteracy learning outcomes.
- Improve active learning opportunities during workshops.
- Collaborate with Writing Resource Center to strengthen writing and peer review components of assignment.

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