Instruction 2.0: Engaging Students and Faculty Through Course Wikis

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Introduction: A Shifting Curriculum and How We Came to Use Wikis

We began to explore the use of Web 2.0 technologies, including wikis, in our library instruction program in preparation for a new Core Curriculum. The new curriculum embeds information literacy instruction from the foundation courses through the capstone. Information literacy is a significant component of four of the courses students take in their first year, and it is incorporated into courses within the majors. To support this, we sought ways to present similar information without it feeling repetitive to students whether the instruction was provided by librarians or faculty or, more likely, a combination of both. This led to the use of varied pedagogies, media, technologies, and settings for library instruction. Wikis offered one more way to present and reinforce information literacy instruction.

Experimentation: Our Early Days with Wikis

Our first wikis served as highly-specialized subject guides that focused on the assignments and material required for specific classes. These wikis were part of a pilot project for the pending change in the Core Curriculum; the first faculty members we approached were teaching foundation courses. Their response was mixed. Some immediately began to collaborate with librarians to build and revise the wikis. They tied the class wiki to assignments and promoted it in class. Our

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tracking showed that these wikis were used regularly. Other faculty members were receptive to the idea of the wiki but did not feel their own technological skills were adequate (we have faced this challenge several times). A librarian built and promoted the wikis for those classes. While those wikis were used somewhat, the use per student was well below that of the other pilot classes. Another faculty member completely refused the use of a wiki.
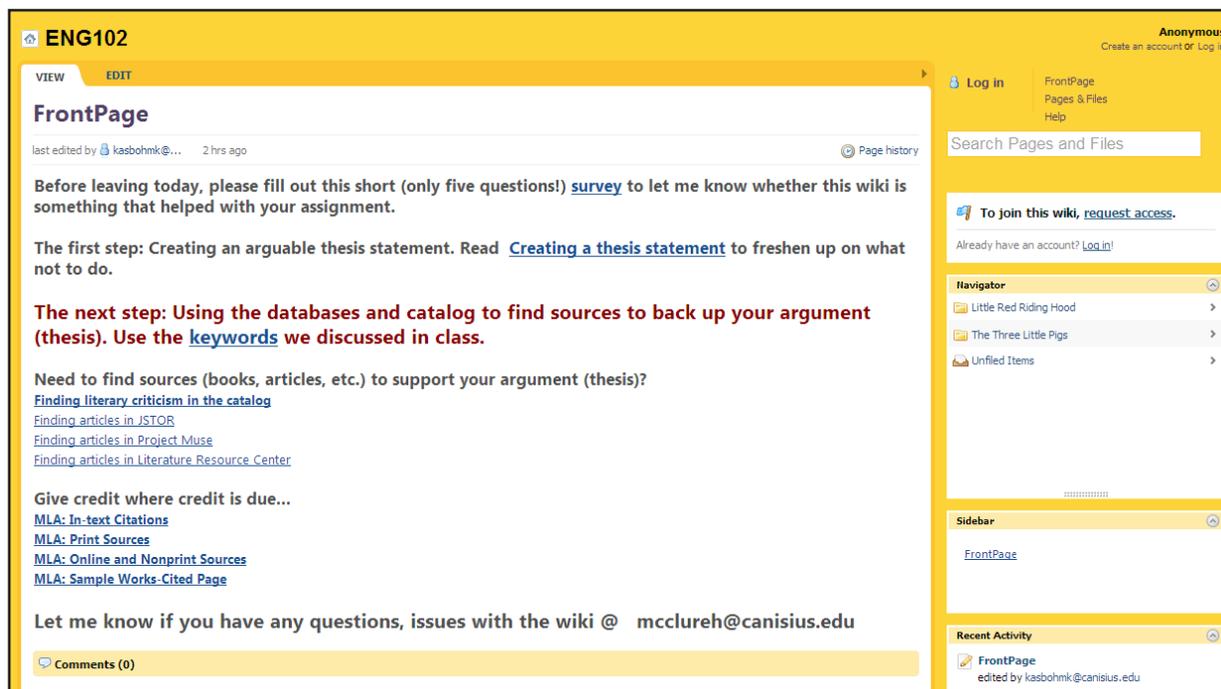
To support these resource-based wikis, librarians have created a 'bank' of wiki components (video tutorials, help guides for databases, citation guides, reference web sites, sample annotations, etc). Once a class is scheduled, a wiki can be developed quickly by pulling content out of that 'bank' based on the specific needs of the class. Any additional material faculty request or create is incorporated into the wiki as needed. This also allows for easy 'on the fly' updates throughout the semester. Content can be shuffled to ensure current resources are prominently placed or additional material is added when requested by faculty or students. Figure 1 shows an example of an early wiki.

Technology and Wikis

Let us clarify that we have defined wiki to mean any web site that allows users to make changes, additions, and/or comments. From the start of our experimentation with wikis, we have used a variety of software programs (all free). We are currently exploring fee-based programs to see if they would better meet our needs. We have determined that the technology is of far less importance than the content and pedagogy. Students have accepted various wiki formats because of the way that librarians and faculty promoted them, because the content was useful, or because they felt they had something valuable to contribute and not because of the software behind the wiki.

Figure 1: Example of an Early "Wiki as Resource Guide"

ENG102

Anonymous
Create an account or Log in

VIEW   EDIT

FrontPage

last edited by kasbohmk@...   2 hrs ago   Page history

Before leaving today, please fill out this short (only five questions!) survey to let me know whether this wiki is something that helped with your assignment.

The first step: Creating an arguable thesis statement. Read Creating a thesis statement to freshen up on what not to do.

The next step: Using the databases and catalog to find sources to back up your argument (thesis). Use the keywords we discussed in class.

Need to find sources (books, articles, etc.) to support your argument (thesis)?
Finding literary criticism in the catalog
Finding articles in JSTOR
Finding articles in Project Muse
Finding articles in Literature Resource Center

Give credit where credit is due...
MLA: In-text Citations
MLA: Print Sources
MLA: Online and Nonprint Sources
MLA: Sample Works-Cited Page

Let me know if you have any questions, issues with the wiki @   mcclureh@canisius.edu

Comments (0)

Log in   FrontPage
Pages & Files
Help

Search Pages and Files

To join this wiki, request access.
Already have an account? Log in!

Navigator
Little Red Riding Hood
The Three Little Pigs
Unfiled Items

Sidebar
FrontPage

Recent Activity
FrontPage
edited by kasbohmk@canisius.edu

The software is a means to an end but we have guarded against it becoming the end. An important role of librarians has been to keep the technology from interfering with the usefulness and collaborative aspects of wikis.

The first program we used was the free version of PBwiki, which claims to make creating a wiki as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich. PBwiki does make it fairly simple to build a wiki, though the editing options are not always obvious or intuitive. Getting students to create accounts caused some initial difficulties. We also had some issues with our video tutorials in PBwiki. Overall, we found PBwiki useful for resource-based wikis and will continue to use it. However, the limitations lead us to look for other options to better facilitate collaboration.

We approached a colleague in the Information Technology department about the wiki feature in ANGEL, our classroom management system. He indicated that the wiki feature was disabled and suggested that we look at Google Sites. It proved to be exactly what we were looking for because it allowed for either shared ownership of the site (which would allow for changes to the style, layout, and content of the site), or collaboration (which would allow selected users to edit the content of and comment on the site). It seemed to offer all of the features we were looking for in a familiar and user-friendly environment. We found that putting together a Google site was easy and the final product offered a better way to collaborate with students and faculty.

USE OF THE WIKI WITHIN CLASSES

We've used wikis in a variety of classes, including several required English composition and English literature classes; an introductory Religious Studies course, which is also required; a 100 level science course which is an elective taken primarily by juniors and seniors; and an upper level English course, taken mostly by English majors.

In some of these courses, the wiki was intended as a resource or subject guide as mentioned earlier. We hoped it would not only reinforce the material covered in class but would support the information literacy learning objectives of the course as well. For example, each of these wikis has a section about how to access and use the library catalog as a reminder of information that was covered in the library session. They also have resources for class assignments such as help in writing thesis statements or citing sources. The wikis were presented briefly during the library class and we encouraged students to consult them as needed. As a follow up, we have posted links to wikis on the course management page for classes and sent links by email.

The wikis that were created as a resource guide were well used but received very little input from students, which was to be expected. However, we did have some examples where a resource wiki received comments and questions. This illustrates how the "wiki as resource guide" can be more helpful than a subject guide that does not allow for student input. It also indicates that the wiki comment function is one that some students feel comfortable using as a point of contact with a librarian, which is always valuable to us.

Our first attempt to move beyond the static "wiki as subject guide" was an effort to expand the one-shot session in an English literature course by engaging students before the library class. We posted short essays on a wiki and asked students to read one before coming to the library. At the start

of the library session, students were shown several 'bad' thesis statements for the essays they read. We asked them to work in groups to develop better thesis statements. The use of the wiki ensured that most students came into the library prepared and were immediately engaged in the task.

STUDENT COLLABORATION

After a favorable response (from students and faculty) to the initial PBwiki-based wikis, we began to look for ways to capitalize on the collaborative aspects of wikis. There was a specialized, course-based, subject guide (in the sciences) on our web site for several years. While the professor and librarians felt it was well-constructed and useful, students did not seem to agree as use counts were low. It seemed like a good place to expand our use of wikis. We took the resources from the existing guide and rearranged them into a Google sites-based wiki. We made the descriptions of resources softer (using less text, removing jargon, adding images, etc.) and organized it by type of resource. We showed the wiki during a library session, emailed students a link to the wiki, and linked it through the course management system. Then we waited for an onslaught that never came. Students basically ignored the wiki. We sent out emails inviting participation and made announcements in class but there was very little activity. The professor reported that students continued to struggle to find appropriate resources as they had in the past. So why were they ignoring what we thought was a valuable resource? We surveyed students about the wiki but received little useful information. Most respondents made comments like "it looks nice" or "great for someone who doesn't know what they are doing." However, one student wrote that the wiki had too much information. That was the comment that clued us in to the fact that in our attempt to tell them everything they needed to know, we had left little room for collaboration.

This most recent semester we have used a wiki with that same class. However, we put just a few examples on the wiki, with very little commentary, and once again invited the *students* to participate. We also built one page of the wiki during the library session. To do this, we gave students examples of sources (print, electronic, scholarly, popular, etc.) and then worked as a group to create a page titled, "How Can You Tell if a Source is 'Good'?" Hits on the course pages spiked in the days after the library session and have continued through the semester. Students have commented on posted resources and added resources they have found. Most of the web sites that were on the first incarnation of this wiki are there again, but this time most were posted by *students* rather than the librarian.

The students in this class have readily chimed in with their opinions about the resources that we pointed out to them. One student proclaimed that a subscription database we suggested "sucked". Another student followed up on that to express frustration about the lack of full text articles in that database. This was clearly valuable to us on several levels. We learned where students struggled to find resources. We also learned about our users' needs, not only as instructors, but as reference librarians and selectors of materials. This was also a key turning point in our work with wikis; it was a point where we discovered that

through the wikis, students felt free to express their real opinions in a relaxed environment (unlike the traditional classroom where we would stand in front of the group demonstrating a database). The use of wikis not only extended our presence in the sense that we could offer help finding resources; it also transformed us into collaborators in the fullest sense – we could take their criticism.

Although the class mentioned above was a 100 level course, students tend to take it as an elective later in their careers (there are no first-year students and only three second-year students out of 23 students this semester). It seemed that the collaborative aspect of wikis worked best with upper level students. In another example, we used a wiki with an upper level class that came to the library for instruction on finding resources on early America in literature and film. We built a wiki with very little content and showed it during the library session. Students and the instructor have used it to share resources, ask questions, discuss items, and stay in touch with the librarian throughout the semester. A section of that wiki is shown in Figure 2.

One example where collaboration has not gone as well as hoped is an English course in which collaboration on the wiki was required by the instructor. While we were initially glad that the instructor was supporting our wiki project to that level, the result has been disappointing. The students' input has been rather perfunctory, which leads us to wonder if the course requirement actually stifles the collaborative impulse. The participation of the faculty member in itself might inhibit student participation because the wiki that received the most input from students received no input from the faculty member. The Film and Literature example discussed above includes comments from the faculty member and students but has an informal tone (it resembles a discussion board) that might be eliminated if participation were required rather than voluntary. There are other factors to be considered, including whether the course was required by the Core Curriculum, in the students' major or an elective. We will need to continue to examine how faculty participation best supports the use of wikis in information literacy instruction.

CHALLENGES WE'VE ENCOUNTERED

The initial investment in time to create wikis posed a challenge. We had library school interns to help build our wiki resource bank but librarians spent a fair amount of time designing wikis, learning programs, and promoting wikis to faculty. Once the wikis are up and running, librarians have to monitor them to ensure comments are addressed and that posted information is accurate. We decided not to remove an item posted by a student unless it was offensive (which has not happened yet). If incorrect information is posted, we mark or highlight it and correct the information in a subsequent post.

Another challenge has been preventing the technical aspects from interfering with usability of wikis. Students have generally been willing to wade in regardless of whether they know the program we are using. However, the faculty response has been mixed in this regard. We have also had technical issues with regard to access to wikis. Some of these were caused by users having limited technology skills and some were the result

Figure 2: Interaction on the Historical Film and Literature Wiki

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Historical Film and Literature   [   ] [Search Site]

Navigation
Home
Sitemap
Edit sidebar

Home

This is what we looked at in the library session:

(use your email user name and password to login to these if you are off campus)
MLA International bibliography
Project Muse

We also looked at images from The Library of Congress American Memory Collection

Please feel free to add titles, sites, links, or any other information about sources you find for these projects. If you have ideas, questions, suggestions, or need help, please let me know.
(kasbohmk@canisus.edu)

Someone showed us a list of films about America, where is that link? Could you put it up?

I showed that. It was Lehigh University, and this is the url (I don't know how to link it here so if someone else could, please do) VN
http://www.lehigh.edu/~ejg1/SEA/EAL-FeatureFilmComprehensive.html

There is some great TRial of Tears info in American History and Life!

That is the America: History and Life database (KEK)

If anyone has the movie the Patriot, can you bring it to class? And, why doesn't the library own this film? (Brian)

I will see if we can buy it for the library. (KEK)

How cna we get the films on the Lehigh site above if library the does not have them?
I got from blockbuster and from the public library. (Polvi) Maybe try netflix too?

What does anyone think of this site: http://www.earlyamerica.com/ It looks good to me does anyone see why I should NOT sue it? (*Chelsea*)
This page seems okay to me...the guy is a journalist not a prof but the documents he posts must be real so that is good. (Kevin)

How do I find reviews of films? (Matt B)
I used Pro Quest because the guy at the library desk told me to and he was right.
You should be finding discussion of your work of literature and then academic discussion of the film. Popular film reviews may help you to interpret the film but to relate the film to the literature, you should be relying on academic sources. So use the databases we looked at in the library. (VN)

I need help with siting things. I don't have the book. How do you do a web site? (Ashley)
Here is a citation for a web site:
Electronic Poetry Collection. 2009. University at Buffalo. 25 Feb. 2009. <put url in here>.
You should put the web address between the <>. If I put it in there, google makes it into a link and takes out the <>
(Word did that to me too, I had to click undo each time to get the link out and the <>'s back) *KT*
Try MLA Style it has an example of how to cite a web page (among others)
    And, Duke has an example on their web site too. (KEK)

We talked about writing a thesis statement but I'm having a hard time writing a good one. Ive written some of my paper and now want to change the thesis. Is that happening to anyone else? It almost seems like I should write the thesis last.
(KT) I made mine smaller when I started writing.
I think your thesis will change as you research and begin writing but it should help to focus your paper so you need to have a set idea as you write. You will likely tweak it as you go, or revise it as you write your conclusions but not throw it out completely. Let's talk about this more in class. (VN)

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of program issues (participants having to register, create accounts, not receiving the email invitation, etc.).

Assessment has also posed a challenge. We have used subjective assessment (surveys) and are able to look at items posted to the wikis. We also have anecdotal evidence from faculty saying that wikis are improving student participation, engagement, and research. However, we need to do pre/post testing and to compare groups that used wikis with those that did not to see if wikis are improving students' information literacy skills.

CONCLUSION

We began using wikis to support embedded information literacy instruction in foundation courses for the Core Curriculum.

Wikis offer an effective way to build highly specialized resource guides to support introductory classes. They also provided a way to bring together information literacy skills (by including sections on writing thesis statements, finding information, evaluating information, citing sources, etc.) and thereby serve as a support for information literacy instruction provided by both librarians and faculty. However, we quickly found additional uses for wikis. The collaborative aspect of wikis made it possible to expand one-shot library sessions by engaging students before and after the session. Wikis also offered a way to engage students in a discussion of the research process. Our initial assessment shows that students, faculty, and librarians like using wikis. As we work to find better ways to assess the use of wikis, we will continue to use them as one more way to reinforce information literacy skills across the curriculum.