Wikipedia in curriculum for World Christianity MSc

Wikipedia literature review assignment developing research skills, writing for different audiences and digital literacy.

Date Added: January, 2017

What was done

Wikimedian in Residence, Ewan McAndrew, supported Dr. Alexander Chow (Course Manager) integrate a Wikipedia literature review assignment into the postgraduate module: Selected Themes in the Study of World Christianity (WRCH11018) curriculum and the outcome was six new Wikipedia articles of previously unpublished terms from the study of Christianity and one further article, comparative theology, was improved.

The cohort of seven postgraduate students were supported over the course of the semester with weekly targets.

Weekly tasks

In Week 1, the students given reading to reinforce their understanding of how to edit Wikipedia and video tutorials to watch of Wikipedia's main policies and guidelines. Students were to create a Wikipedia account and enroll their new username on the Wikipedia course page.
In Week 2, the students were encouraged to self-select a topic to research from the course handbook and read Wikipedia's guidance on choosing an article to work on. Once selected, the topic was submitted to the course tutor for approval.

Wikipedia Training (Week 3)

The two hour training session was an introduction to Wikipedia given by Ewan McAndrew, the university's Wikimedian in Residence. This involved a presentation outlining Wikipedia's main policies and guidelines and then practical guidance on how to format a Wikipedia page using Wikipedia's new Visual Editor. The students were encouraged to ask questions to ensure their comprehension of the technical skills and their understanding of Wikipedia policy were equally assured.

Overview

Summary

World Christianity MSc students researched, synthesised and developed one existing article and six new Wikipedia articles of previously unpublished terms related to the study of Christianity. Integrating Wikipedia into coursework allows students and staff to explore the affordances of virtual (online) spaces for public engagement whilst building upon digital literacies training and application. Simultaneously, students develop research skills for academic outcomes and life-long learning, whilst demonstrating online, collaborative writing for a different audience.

Context

- **Level**: Postgraduate
- **Discipline/Subjects**: School of Divinity: World Christianity MSc
- **Supported by**: Learning, Teaching & Web Services.

Contact Details

- Dr. Alexander Chow, (Course Manager, World Christianity MSc)

- Ewan McAndrew, The University of Edinburgh's Wikimedian-in-Residence.

Themes

- Curriculum Development
- Learning Communities

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The core aspect of this assignment was that it was an individual literature review assignment. Once their topic had been approved, students were encouraged from Week 3 onwards to use the Wikipedia Talk page to create a bibliography of research related to their chosen topic. Thereupon, the students were to use their own personal draft space on Wikipedia, the sandbox, to draft the first three to four paragraphs of the article. Once the first paragraphs had been successfully drafted, the students were then further encouraged to expand their articles up to one thousand words backed up by at least 3 references, with the course tutor, Dr. Alex Chow, able to monitor their progress quickly & easily through the links to the students' sandboxes via the Wikipedia course page. As the assignment progressed through the semester, students were encouraged to avail themselves of the Wikipedia handouts relating to how to cite sources on Wikipedia and how to avoid plagiarism.

After searching for satisfactory definitions and peer-reviewed literature, students worked to critically analyse and synthesise the literature to create an article aligned with *Wikipedia Manual of Style guidelines* specifically to ensure a structure that demonstrates completeness and readability; avoiding jargon as much as possible and using the highest-quality sources available. As the semester concluded, the students were supported to move their draft text from their sandbox area to the Wikipedia live space, adding final touches like inserting a template on the new article's Talk page which indicated that the article had been created by a student as part of a Wikipedia course assignment (with a link back to the specific course assignment page for World Christianity MSc).

Motivation and aims

There were several areas of interest: integrating digital literacies training and application into curriculum to support skills for academic outcomes and life-long learning; and, developing students as online, collaborative writers, and building research & communication skills. The project allowed students and staff to explore the affordances of virtual (online) spaces for public engagement. Through publishing collaboratively via Open Education repositories like Wikipedia, students and staff alike can contribute to the University's knowledge exchange and educational impact agenda.

Successes and lessons learnt

Over the course of a semester, a cohort of 7 postgraduate students were able to collect enough material on a hitherto unrepresented topic through diligent use of literature searching to allow for a detailed, researched article to be created, sharing their scholarship with the world. This demonstrated that providing a variety of topics to research would offer enough personalization & stimulus for students with varied interests to participate in & complete a research assignment.

Scalability and transferability

The success of this project indicates how this type of project, with a public engagement message, lends itself to incorporation into the curriculum across all disciplines and can be scaled up to provide a successful learning experience for larger cohorts.

Requirements for staffing include a Librarian to support research skills and a Wikimedian to provide Wikipedia publishing training.

Venues should be equipped with learning technology for training purposes and should support students with personal computers.

This type of coursework can be applied to all subjects interested in public engagement and knowledge transaction. Wikipedia has a particular need for discipline specific communication (i.e. theology) to explore complex theory and concepts through accessible language.

Assessment

The module is at credit level SCQF Level 11 (Postgraduate) and accounts for 20 SCQF credits. The successful production of the 1000 word article accounted for 10% of this module's award.

Feedback at the conclusion of the project included:

"When I first started I was a bit anxious but then as I got into it (and also attending the Women in Red Wikipedia editathon event really helped with this) I got a sense of ownership, and also pride, in what I was producing."

"An exciting moment for me was when I began to do all of my references because it is a really slick way that the Wikipedia back end does let you do that. It was wonderful to think that, on the one hand, I'm using these really relevant news articles and, on the other hand, these books and then drawing them together because they were all really important in conveying this idea. So that was very exciting for me; being able to draw on so many different resources."

"As a feminist, that kind of stuff is really important to me; making sure women's contributions to history don't go unacknowledged, don't go forgotten or ignored."

"When you hand in an essay the only people that generally read it are you and your lecturer. And then once they both read it, it kind of disappears and you don't look at it again. No one really benefits from it. With a Wikipedia assignment, other people contribute to it, you put it out there for everyone to read, you can keep coming back to it, keep adding to it, other people can do as well. It becomes more of a community project that everyone can read and access. I really enjoyed it."

"With this assignment, I still learned everything in terms of the coursework that I needed to learn.for the assignment. But, partly because of some of the different challenges the Wikipedia medium presented, and ,partly as well because of the different audience I was thinking about, I had to think about my assignment a different way than I would have otherwise."

Dr. Alex Chow felt that "The idea of using Wikipedia as an assignment became a very intriguing idea because (1) it would producer an end product which would have a life beyond the class. It wouldn't die after the end of the class but would continue on. Secondly, the types of scrutiny and editorial work that is done throughout the world on that particular article really challenges students to think academically, to think of how to nuance, how to properly cite and research material for the article. So I saw these benefits not only in terms of the research being taught to the students but also the possibility for the students to have something that lasts beyond the class."

Reflections on the assignment from a student on the course, Lucy Schouten:

The massive online encyclopaedia grows at an average rate of 800 articles per day, but in 2016, at least 25 of those began here in New College, Edinburgh. A new but growing field, World Christianity thrives upon the continuous challenge of disseminating scholarship from small to

growing institutions from Beijing to Botswana. Through a series of Wikipedia projects conducted during Fall 2016, the Centre for the Study of World Christianity and the School of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh have experimented with a new platform for disseminating information quickly in a rapidly changing field.

Women-and-Religion-Edit-a-thon at New College. Photo by Dr Alexander Chow.

The Autumn 2016 semester marked the first foray into Wikipedia. As masters and PhD students moving into a new chapter of scholarship in the field of World Christianity, we were asked to move our work online. Each student selected a topic central to the field and created not only an in-class presentation, but also an online article that could be published on the Wikipedia platform. Most of us viewed the assignment with trepidation. For many, this would be the first time our work was published online for worldwide viewing. Even for those of us with previous online publishing experience, it was the first time our work would be submitted to a platform with live, real-time editing capabilities from anyone with a web connection.

Women-and-Religion-Edit-a-thon at New College. Photo by Dr Alexander Chow.

Within the course of the semester, however, faculty, PhD candidates, and masters students improved the realm of Wikipedia knowledge with posts on Multiple Religious Belonging, Comparative Theology, and Medical Missions. They also developed new posts for key theologies relevant to the field of World Christianity, including Asian Feminist Theology, Reconciliation Theology, and the political theologies of the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Through connections with the Wikimedian-in-resident at the University of Edinburgh Ewan McAndrew, students monitored the progress of their posts throughout the semester. Many posts have already benefited from updates by other Wikipedia editors, improved by links to existing pages

within Wikipedia, and received thousands of views from internet users around the world. The shareable links became a way to share our scholarship with strangers and friends alike, and it provided a simple means to explain our work to interested friends in a recognizable platform.

Women-and-Religion-Edit-a-thon at New College. Photo by Dr Alexander Chow.

The skills gained and connections forged from this assignment did not end at the classroom door. Dr Alexander Chow and Dr Naomi Appleton invited long-time Wikipedia pundits into New College on 2 November 2016, for a Wikipedia edit-a-thon that welcomed students and faculty from across the university. After galvanizing instruction from Dr Lesley Orr and Wikipedian Roger Bamkin, and with books and journals in hand or at keyboard-tip, students returned to the web for one of Wikipedia's Women in Red events. Students zeroed in on some significant women in religion whose contributions had been missed by the online encyclopedia. These included Annie H. Small and M. Hasna Maznavi and even New College's own female pioneers Ruth Page and Elizabeth G. K. Hewat.

In a single afternoon, our studies moved from the New College archives to the web, and the lives and work of some of the brightest women in religion – including some who had once studied and taught in our own classrooms – had been shared to anyone with a question and access to Google.

Links:

- Wikipedia:Five_pillars
- World Christianity MSc – Wikipedia assignment

Articles created

- Multiple Religious Belonging
- Reconciliation Theology
- Political Theology (Sub-Saharan Africa)
- Political Theology (Middle East)
- Medical Missions
- Asian Feminist Theology

Articles improved

- Comparative Theology