Report
Wikipedia Public Policy Initiative
Phase I, Planning

prepared by:
Pete Forsyth & Frank Schulenburg
Public Outreach
Wikimedia Foundation

January 29, 2010

1. Overview

The **Wikimedia Public Policy Initiative** is a project designed to increase the quality of Wikipedia's public-policy-related articles, by persuading people who are knowledgeable about public policy to become Wikipedia contributors.

The initiative is divided in two phases. The initial phase ("planning phase") was designed to reach out to institutions with a focus on public policy, to build face-to-face relationships with these institutions and to enter into a two-way dialogue about how to improve the quality of Wikipedia articles on public policy. The objective of the second phase ("quality improvement phase") will be to significantly increase the quality of Wikipedia's articles on U.S. public policy.

This document gives a summary of the results of the planning phase (November/December 2010) and draws first conclusions for the design of the quality improvement phase (February 2010–September 2011).

2.   Report: Results of Phase 1

2.1. Introduction

In November / December 2009 the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) started the planning phase of the Wikipedia Public Policy Initiative by reaching out to selected key institutions in the field of Public Policy and/or related programs. The Wikimedia public outreach team spoke with over 40 professors and other academics at nine major universities. Nearly all of these meetings were in person.

2.2. Awareness of Wikipedia and Wikimedia

All of the professors interviewed were aware of Wikipedia as a resource that is increasingly valuable and influential. Many, but not all, were aware that Wikipedia content is generated by a broad network of unpaid contributors; there were varying levels of awareness about the nature of the collaborative process, the editorial process, the policies and procedures, the level of cultural and linguistic diversity, etc. A few of the professors and students we spoke with had actually worked on Wikipedia, some extensively. Very few had a strong understanding of WMF and its role prior to our meetings.

2.3. Feedback from faculty

We were warmly received everywhere we visited (see **Appendix B** for a list of people we met). Professors were glad for the opportunity to learn about Wikipedia and WMF, and nearly without exception, were interested in moving forward in some capacity. Those with a political or communications focus were generally on board at the outset, after having merely reviewed a few written materials; those meetings became more strategic discussions of *how* to best structure a program, than *whether or not* to pursue it. (Note:

there were a few professors, maybe 5–6, who explicitly declined to meet with us; there were others who never replied to emails. The overall number of professors who responded, however, exceeded expectations.)
The following appealed to faculty:

- Ability of students to gain knowledge relevant to their professional careers (Wikipedia and general wiki literacy).
- General educational opportunities available with Wikipedia. Some professors expressed a desire to do something "exciting," interest in publishing research based on the project, and the notion of longitudinal projects in which a professor's class incrementally improves a topic area over a period of several years. Professors in this category were generally tenured professors approaching retirement, and professors involved in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning[1] programs (a discipline devoted to approaching teaching in a scholarly, evidence-based manner; programs support professors across schools and departments).

In one case, an interviewee published a blog post[2] about the educational use of Wikipedia the day we met. In several cases, professors were so enthusiastic that they wanted to incorporate Wikipedia into their Spring 2010 classes. Although this enthusiasm is positive, we discouraged beginning without a clearly-established plan, out of concern for the long term success of the initiative and maintaining a carefully planned, consistent approach and roll-out.

2.4. Opportunities identified

- One professor spoke of the general opportunity to "multiply the effectiveness of faculty members severalfold."
- Helping students develop an understanding of their discipline's methodology. e.g., Vanderbilt history professor Michael Bess' experience designing a course[3] around a controversial article's talk page discussions, in order to explore how controversy is handled.
- Improve students' writing skills so that they may: distinguish between fact-based and persuasive writing styles; experience accountability to a broad/diverse audience (which is not exclusively academic); engage with controversial or interdisciplinary subjects in a way that satisfies multiple points of view.
- Moving away from "throw-away assignments" (a term used at a recent Scholarship of Teaching and Learning keynote address).
- Continuity/stability of Wikimedia's servers as a publishing platform (sidestepping issues some professors have encountered in sustaining web resources they have developed).
- Opportunity to learn about proper use of Wikipedia in an academic/professional environment.
- Professors wanted to simply learn about Wikipedia themselves.
- Longitudinal projects: a professor's classes develop content in a topic area over a period of years.

[1]http://www.issotl.org/tutorial/sotltutorial/u1a/u1a1.html
[2]http://www.peterlevine.ws/mt/archives/2009/11/wikipedia-entri.html
[3]http://blogs.vanderbilt.edu/cftpodcast/?p=4

- Wikipedia as a useful aid in helping students develop the ability to outline a topic area.
- Students could perform reviews within Wikipedia (general peer reviews, reviews for Featured or Good Article status); this is a good learning opportunity for those pursuing a career in academics, who will later conduct peer reviews for journals.
- Developing effective visual aids: charts, tables, etc.
- Adding sources or sourcing content.
- A form of service to the Wikipedia community: doing research that requires access to proprietary sources such as databases, journals etc. through libraries, university accounts.
- Contributing a standard element to each of a group of similar articles (e.g., adding a section on "holdings" to articles on certain court cases).
- Organize a topic area: Develop info boxes, navigation templates, succession boxes…(encyclopedic formatting).
- Students developing skills in both wiki editing and effective collaboration; teaching and learning from one another.

2.5. Services and support from the Wikimedia Foundation

There was excellent feedback about the type of support, from WMF, that would be necessary in order to make a program like this successful. The principal concern of many professors was that the initiative would demand a lot of their time, both in learning about Wikipedia and in working with students.

The following kinds of support from WMF were discussed:

- Establish student organization/club
- Identify and train local volunteers to support them as facilitators
- Printed and online resources (Bookshelf)
- Explanation of the evolution of an article, from stub to featured article
- Student in work-study position to support implementation
- Workshop-day that brings several schools together to learn about Wikipedia editing, which might also serve to establish a regional/local community of academic Wikipedia contributors
- Online chat help for resolving technical and cultural issues
- Facilitate communication among various disciplines (e.g. a cluster of economics students and law students working on the same article; developing writing and communications skills)

2.6. Where to focus resources?

The following concerns were raised during our interviews, and will be considered when designing the initiative:

- time and amount of work
- challenge of evaluating student work
- difficult timing -- fitting an effective program into a 13 week semester

- professors lack knowledge of Wikipedia
- dealing with unexpected conflict with Wikipedians/trolls
- concern that WMF may have a hidden agenda

2.7. Organizations and institutions

There are a number of institutions whose missions overlap with parts of this initiative. We have had recommendations and/or contact with the groups listed below. With policy-oriented organizations, the chief benefit is increasing our project's initial appearance of credibility to our target audience of scholars. Other organizations may be sources of media/web publicity; advisors; and connections with other professors or organizations. We recognize the importance of developing partnerships that are wholly aligned with Wikimedia's objectives and mission; and also the complexity and resources needed to manage multiple partnerships.

- Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management[4] (APPAM)
- National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration[5] (NASPAA)
- Policy Studies Organization[6]
- American Political Science Association[7] (APSA)
- Sunlight Foundation[8]
- Smith Richardson Foundation[9]
- Creative Commons[10]

2.8. Future meetings

As we continue to develop the project plan, we are sustaining the relationships we established through regular communications; and we are also following up on some of the more promising leads that have emerged. Thus, we will have additional information before the plan is complete. Significant ongoing work includes planning a workshop at Harvard's Kennedy School in early February (at the invitation of the Shorenstein Center, which will be funding half of the trip); outreach to organizations of retired faculty; and outreach to policy organizations that are outside of major universities.

2.9. Larger themes

2.9.1. Interdisciplinary field

Political science is a "massively interdisciplinary" field, which (e.g.) economists, law scholars, and sociologists approach in different but overlapping ways. The need to accommodate and reconcile these different approaches is a great focus in the field, as is the need for scholars and practitioners to develop skills and resources for communicating

---

[4]http://appam.org/
[5]http://www.naspaa.org/
[6]http://ipsonet.org/
[7]http://www.apsanet.org/
[8]http://www.sunlightfoundation.com/
[9]http://srf.org/
[10]http://creativecommons.org/

across disciplines. In this way, there appears to be a strong synergy with the way Wikipedia aims to function, by drawing out technical knowledge in accessible, jargon-free language; and by presenting a broad array of knowledge in a neutral manner that serves to inform rather than to persuade.

2.9.2. Aligning distinct but compatible interests

The Public Policy Initiative will require the buy-in and active engagement of a number of parties, which will differ along several axes. Young/old, academic/professional, scientific/political, education-oriented/publication-oriented, non-profit/government/corporate/academic, wiki-educated/non-technical, etc. As this project develops, it is crucial that Wikimedia continually improve its understanding of each party's interests and the factors that will motivate them the most strongly. This is the key to designing a program in which people will not merely participate willingly, but engage creatively and passionately.

Conclusion: Recommendations for Phase 2

2.10. Timeline

The preliminary timeline below is planned in accordance with the Academic Year. We anticipate that the project will start in February 2010 and will end in September 2011. The high level timeline is as follows:

- Phase A: 02/2010–08/2010 (resourcing, training, set-up of online framework)
- Phase B1: 09/2010–12/2010 (execution of class projects pilot, 3–5 universities)
- Phase B2: 01/2011–05/2011 (execution of class projects, 7–10 universities)
- Phase C: 06/2011–09/2011 (evaluation and documentation)

2.11. Stakeholders/participants

- Students
- Faculty members
- Retired professors
- Wikipedian volunteers
- Wikimedia staff
- Members of partnership organizations

Also, see **Appendix A**: "Target groups, their motivation and their prospective roles"

2.12. Measures of success

Pre-proposal development, we are considering that the basic measures of success will be as follow:

2.12.1. Improvement of content

- Number of new / improved / good / featured public policy articles
- Organization of a sub-topic area

2.12.2. Amount of participation

- Number of contributors active in a specific topic area within a given time frame

2.12.3. Success of educational effort

- Evaluation of teacher behavior and student learning (note: negotiation with outside institution underway)
- Participants' comfort level with Wikipedia (before / after workshops; before/after school semester)

2.12.4. Establishment of partnerships

- Creation of partnerships with public policy, educational and service institutions

Appendix A: Target groups, their motivation and their prospective roles

A1: Students

Students have always been "the fuel of Wikipedia". We regard them as our main target group for our author recruitment initiatives in Phase 2. The students group is extremely diverse. Depending on their year of study and on the degree they are pursuing, students will play different roles in Phase 2.

We heard from many sources that students would be motivated to do work that is for a broader audience than just their professor, and that is not thrown away after evaluation. As a result of writing to a broader audience, they will gain experience and respond to feedback that is expected to increase their skills in writing, collaborating, and general communications in several ways. In some cases, classes will work as a team on an article of broad relevance to the subject matter they are studying; in others, students will work in small groups or on their own to improve Wikipedia articles, and will be evaluated by their instructors on the results of their work. Specific activities: a. improving the text of existing articles, b. writing new articles, c. creating charts and other visual aids and d. performing research and adding sources to existing articles. (As part of the curriculum, Wikimedia will produce techniques for using the Mediawiki software in evaluating an individual's contributions.) Students will also be encouraged to contribute as an elective activity; our feedback strongly suggests that many students will be eager to do so, if given some instruction and support.

We will explore incorporating a work-study positions for a student at each school, to facilitate integrating the Public Policy Initiative into the school's various programs and classes. We also may want to explore designing and disseminating certificates for "graduates" of the program.

Many Masters and PhD students are focused on preparing for a career where success will be measured by their ability to publish in peer-reviewed journals. Students of this group will have less time for writing Wikipedia articles than undergraduates; however, their need to develop skills for peer-review goes hand-in-hand with Wikipedia's need for knowledegable reviewers. We will develop a curriculum in which graduate students play the following roles in Phase 2: a. identify under-represented policy topic areas and assess the quality of existing Wikipedia articles in a systematic way; b. acting as reviewers in Wikipedia's internal peer-review processes. Furthermore, graduate students who are involved in teaching undergraduates will be among our target groups for recruiting Wikipedia trainers.

A2: Faculty

The amount of time faculty members will need to invest is perhaps our biggest concern; we must design activities that minimize a professor's need to spend time learning the intricacies of Mediawiki software, or of Wikipedia's norms, culture, and processes. Because

of their time constraints and lack of incentive to invest time in writing, faculty members are not a target for *writing* articles.

We see the role of faculty members as supporters of our initiative, who are driven by the idea that Wikipedia is a teaching tool to improve their student's writing and communication skills, and to help their students engage meaningfully with the substance of the discipline they are studying. By participating in Wikipedia, students get a better understanding for what purposes Wikipedia's content can and *cannot* be used. Professors teaching in more practice oriented domains, such as a Masters of Public Administration, might also see an additional benefit in teaching their students how to use wikis as a tool for collaborative working and data sharing (as in [Intellipedia](11), the online system for collaborative data sharing used by the United States intelligence community).

Some professors will be highly motivated by the prospect of publishing research about our program. Thus, we must structure the initiative in a way that will be compatible with their needs, and meet the standards of academic rigor.

Based on our interviews in Phase 1 we believe we will attract both professors and students from areas where writing and communication outside their discipline, including journalistic or public-focused writing, are emphasized.

A3: Retired faculty

Retired faculty members have the same (or perhaps a higher) level of knowledge in their field as active faculty members, but they have something that the latter are missing: time. The biggest incentives for retired faculty members to participate in our initiative might be, a. to donate their time to something valuable and lasting, and b. that they may continue to make relevant contributions as experts in their field.

Retired faculty members can play the following roles; a. facilitating and improving the work of the graduate students (e.g. helping with outlining policy areas or writing peer-reviews), b. networking and generating local enthusiasm for the initiative or for specific events, c. writing Wikipedia articles, and d. participating in Wikipedia's internal peer-review process as experts.

A4: Partnership organizations

Finally, we will seek an opportunity to partner with an organization known and trusted in the academic public policy community. This will increase the initiative's visibility and acceptance among our target audiences.

Appendix B: List of people we met (by institution)

Oregon State University, Department of Economics
 • Patrick Emerson, Associate Professor

---

[11]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/en:Intellipedia

Portland State University, Hatfield School of Government
- Peter Noordijk, graduate student
- Larry Wallack, dean of the College of Urban & Public Affairs

University of Georgia, School of Public and International Affairs
- J. Edward Kellough, professor & department head
- Barry Bozeman, Professor of Public Policy
- Andy Whitford, Associate Professor

Syracuse University, Maxwell School
- Stuart Bretschneider, MPA professor and Director of Center for Technology and Information Policy
- Peter J. Wilcoxen, Associate Professor of Economics and Public Administration
- Leonard M. Lopoo, Associate Professor of Public Administration
- Bill Coplin, Professor of Public Affairs and the Director of the Public Affairs Program
- Carol Dwyer, Director of the Community Benchmarks Program
- Michael Pasqualoni, Librarian for Communications, Public Administration, Political Science & International Relations

Syracuse University, School of Law
- William Banks, Professor of Law, Public Administration; Director, Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism

American University School of Law
- Mike Carroll, Professor of Law; Director, Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property
- Dan Rosenthal, law student and Wikipedian

The George Washington University, Institute for Politics Democracy and the Internet
- Julie Germany, Director
- Charles Cushman, Associate Dean & Director, The Graduate School of Political Management
- Grant Schneider, graduate student
- Chris Brooks, graduate student

The George Washington University, Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration
- Joseph Cordes, Professor of Economics, Public Policy and Public Administration, and International Affairs; Associate Director, Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration
- Lori Brainard, Associate Professor of Public Policy & Public Admin; director of MPA program
- Donna Lind Infeld, Professor of Public Policy, Director of MPP program
- Daniel Ramsey, graduate student, MPP program

Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government
- Alex Jones, Director of the Shorenstein Center
- Nicco Mele, Adjunct Professor

- Nolan Bowie, Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy
- Steve Kelman, Professor of Public Management
- Tom Sander, director of the Saguaro Seminar
- Archon Fung, Professor of Democracy and Citizenship
- Mary Graham, Co-Director, Transparency Policy Project and Research Fellow, Kennedy School

Tufts University
- Peter Levine, Research Director of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service
- Greg Crane, Chair, Classics Department

Indiana University, School of Public and Environmental Affairs
- John Graham, Dean
- Barry Rubin, Professor
- Michael McGuire, Associate Professor
- Kenneth Richards, Associate Professor
- Leslie Lenkowsky, Clinical Professor and Director, Graduate Programs, Center on Philanthropy

Indiana University, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning program
- David Pace, Professor of History
- Leah Shopkow, Associate Professor of History
- Joan Middendorf, Associate Director, Campus Instructional Consulting

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- (phone) Bobbie Lubker, Past President, Retired Faculty Association

Others
- (phone) Keith Melville, Professor, Fielding Graduate University
- Heather Joseph, director of SPARC
- Gabriela Schneider, Communications Director, Sunlight Foundation