



**Come Here or Go
Away?:**


**Identifying Challenges
to Editing Wikipedia
for the CCCC
Wikipedia Initiative**



Hello!

**I am Jennifer K. Johnson
from the UCSB Writing Program
I am here to talk with you about editing
Wikipedia as a member of the CCC
Wikipedia Initiative.**





**Recipient of the
Charles Bazerman Faculty
Fellowship for
Professional Development
in Writing
(2021-2022)**

<https://www.writing.ucsb.edu/resources/bazerman>



**My fellowship
proposal
claimed I
would:**

- **Participate significantly in the CCCC Wikipedia Initiative by editing existing articles and creating new articles**
- **Mentor my colleagues and invite them to participate in the Initiative as well**





**I felt prepared
to do this work
based on:**

Completion of two Wiki Scholars program courses through the Wiki Education Foundation. Wikipedia experts provide training and guidance through both structured group settings and personalized one-on-one communication. Course completion requires making substantial improvements to at least two articles.





The Five Pillars

- 1. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia*
- 2. Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view*
- 3. Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, distribute*
- 4. Wikipedia's editors should treat each other with respect and civility*
- 5. Wikipedia has no firm rules*


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars





CCCC Wikipedia Initiative

Purpose: to increase the public presence and widely circulated knowledge of rhetoric, composition, and writing on Wikipedia by increasing the number of entries pertaining to Writing Studies' terms and ensuring that Wikipedia reflects Writing Studies scholars' expertise.



WikiProject: Writing



“In addition to improving and expanding coverage of writing research and pedagogy as they encompass broad and evolving definitions of literacy, communication, rhetoric, and writing (including multimodal discourse, digital communication, and diverse language practices), this project seeks to represent the full scope of these fields’ engagement with diversity, inclusion, access, and equity. We will draw from and cite canonical terms, concepts, and research, as well as scholarship and activism composed by marginalized teacher-scholars, when creating and improving Wikipedia articles.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Writing





Wikipedia exhorts new editors to

“BE BOLD”

In other words, they should

“Go for it!”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Be bold](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Be_bold)





**What I thought I'd be doing
as a Bazerman Faculty
Fellowship recipient:**

75% Editing Wikipedia

**25% Mentoring fellow C's
Initiative participants,
specifically at UCSB**



**What I wound up doing as a
Bazerman Faculty
Fellowship recipient:**



25% Editing Wikipedia

25% Mentoring fellow C's Initiative
participants at UCSB

25% Trying to understand Wikipedian culture
and values



25% Developing research projects to explore
the conflict between being both invited in
and restricted from participating



According to McDowell and Vetter's Wikipedia and the Representation of Reality (2021),

"Writing on Wikipedia as a new user can be incredibly frustrating for a variety of reasons and often results in turning would-be editors away" (xi).





WHY?





**At first I
thought I might
be due to
competing
goals:**

*Newcomer editors
want to contribute
successfully via
making accepted
revisions and
creating new
articles.*

*Veteran Wikipedia
editors have a vested
interest in
maintaining the
encyclopedia's quality
and credibility, hence
the rejections.*





But that didn't explain the push and pull I was feeling from Wikipedia both inviting me in and then rejecting my contributions.

What does the literature say?



Key Moments in Wikipedia History

- 2001: Wikipedia was founded
- 2005: Article in *Nature* found that Wikipedia was as accurate as Encyclopedia Britannica
- 2005: Seigenthaler affair, which according to a *NY Times* article, “triggered extensive debate on the internet over the value and reliability of Wikipedia, and more broadly, over the nature of online information” (Seelye).

Key Moments in Wikipedia History (cont.)

- 2007: Wikipedia was ranked as being among the top ten most popular websites in the world
- 2007: Essay scandal when “A prolific editor turned out to be fraud”
- 2008: *NY Times* published a eulogy for print encyclopedias and called for the need to understand the “epistemology of Wikipedia” (Cohen, Noam).

Key Moments in Wikipedia History (cont.)

- 2010: Wiki Education is founded
- 2010: A United Nations University study found that only 12.64% of Wikipedia editors were women (of the survey respondents)
- 2011: *NY Times* runs a series of articles asking “Where Are the Women of Wikipedia?” and pointing to the site’s gender imbalance



So there were clearly some growing pains that needed resolution.





*As Tom Simonite has noted in “The Decline of Wikipedia” (2013):
“As is typical with Wikipedians, a response emerged from a mixture
of cordial discussions, tedious arguments, and online wrestling
matches [...] The project’s most active volunteers introduced a raft of
new editing tools and bureaucratic procedures intended to combat
the bad edits. The tough new measures worked. Vandalism was
brought under control, and hoaxes and scandals became less
common”*

(<https://www.technologyreview.com/2013/10/22/175674/the-decline-of-wikipedia/>).





But, Simonite goes on to say,

“Those tougher rules and the more suspicious atmosphere that came along with them had an unintended consequence. Newcomers to Wikipedia making their first, tentative edits—and the inevitable mistakes—became less likely to stick around. Being steamrolled by the newly efficient, impersonal editing machine was no fun”

(<https://www.technologyreview.com/2013/10/22/175674/the-decline-of-wikipedia/>).





Ian Ramjohn and LiAnna Davis make a similar point in “Five Journeys from Wiki Education” (2020):

“Over time we developed policies designed to codify quality standards. But in our single-minded pursuit of quality, we ended up creating a labyrinth of rules and guidelines that keep all but the most dedicated newcomers out” (298).





**But there was
still more to the
story:**

**Inclusionists who
argue that
“Wikipedia is not
paper.”**

**Deletionists whose
motto is
“Wikipedia is not a
junkyard.”**

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2009/aug/12/wikipedia-deletionist-inclusionist>





In “Wikipedia Approaches its Limits,” Bobbie Johnson (2009) points to two competing factions among Wikipedia’s editors: the Inclusionists and the Deletionists:

“Deletionists argue for a tightly controlled and well-written encyclopedia that provides valuable information on topics of widespread interest. Why should editors waste time on articles about fly-by-night celebrities or willfully obscure topics? Inclusionists, on the other hand, believe that the more articles the site has, the better: if they are poorly referenced or badly written, they can be improved—and any article is better than nothing”

(<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2009/aug/12/wikipedia-deletionist-inclusionist>).





A study conducted by the Palo Alto Research Center in 2008 found that elite editors consistently have their edits reverted around 1% of the time, while editors who make 2-9 edits a month have their edits reverted 15% of the time, and people who make an average of one edit a month have their edits reverted 25% of the time.





According to Omer Benjakob and Stephen Harrison’s “Press Coverage of Wikipedia’s first Two Decades” (2020), “Over the span of nearly two decades, Wikipedia went from being heralded as the original fake news, a symbol of all that was wrong with the internet, to being the ‘grown up’ of the web and the best medicine against the scourge of disinformation” (34).



So clearly the strategies worked, but new issues arose.



Possible Solutions

- **Wiki Education and its programs**
- **Wiki Projects (Writing, Women in Red etc.)**
- **Initiatives like the C's Wikipedia Initiative**
- **Sheer tenacity!**



Wiki Education offers:

- **Wikipedia experts**
- **Dashboard for teaching / your courses**
- **Training modules with materials for course adoption**
- **“Scholars and Scientists” classes**
- **Blog posts about editing / teaching with Wikipedia**

○



Ramjohn and Davis (2020) point to Wiki Education’s successful programs for students and “Scholars and Scientists”:

“We have managed to enable tens of thousands of new editors to effectively contribute content to Wikipedia, especially in content areas previously undercovered due to systemic bias issues” (306).

“To survive, Wikipedia needs to nurture the existing community while simultaneously offering programs at scale to attract more equitable content and contributors” (307).

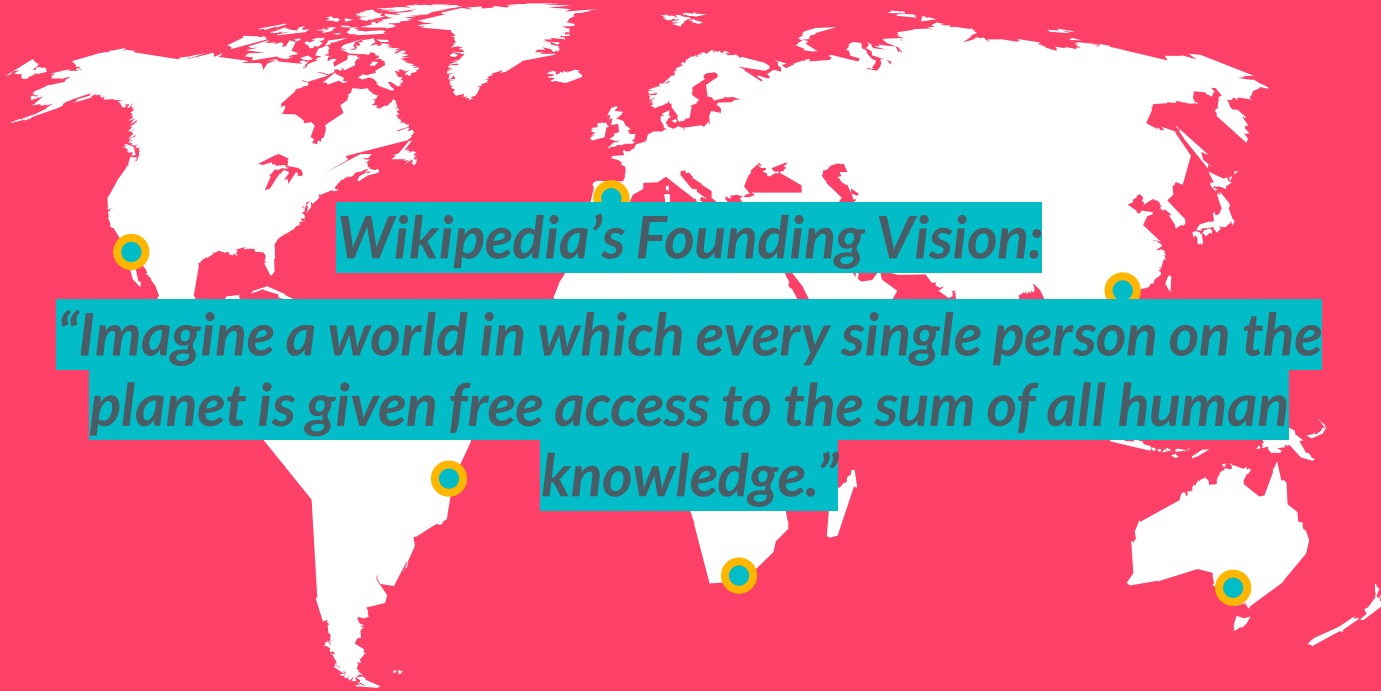


What kinds of research is still needed to learn how scholars can overcome the barriers to contributing meaningfully to Wikipedia?



- Surveying CCCC Wikipedia Initiative members to examine their satisfaction levels with editing Wikipedia and identifying where they have experienced either bottlenecks or breakthroughs as they engaged in this work
- Interviewing Wiki Education staff members to identify strategies C's Initiative participants can adopt from the "Scholars and Scientists" program
- Interviewing James Heilman, President of Wiki ProjectMed Foundation, to learn how medical professionals translate their knowledge to Wikipedia





Wikipedia's Founding Vision:

"Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge."



A white line-art icon of a lit lightbulb is centered within a red circular background. This circle is part of a decorative cluster of overlapping circles in red, orange, and teal colors in the top-left corner of the slide.

Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at jkjohnson@ucsb.edu



Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Presentation template by [SlidesCarnival](#)