EDIT-A-THONS AS OUTREACH

THE STORY

In Spring 2014, the FSU Arts Librarian was approached by an Art faculty member to incorporate a Wikipedia editing event for an Art & Technology course. The Arts Librarian included the Outreach Librarian to assist with the event. The library café was chosen as a relaxed yet academic venue for an Art+Feminism edit-a-thon so that FSU students could participate in the national contribution of new and improved entries on women artists while getting direct research assistance from librarians. The Arts Librarian pulled relevant books and created a handout with suggested electronic resources to aid in the research. We also invited a Wikipedia expert from the School to help students understand how to post to Wikipedia.

This first event was successful in exposing many students to new and improved entries on women artists while getting pages started to move up to writing entirely new articles.

“WHEN YOU THINK OF RESEARCH YOU THINK OF OLD BOOKS, YOU DON’T THINK OF MODERN TECHNOLOGIES.”

- FSU STUDENT

EDITING AND RESEARCH

In order to improve the quality of the articles and edits, we reached out to the English Department’s Digital Studio for training in editing Wikipedia and to get tips on what Wikipedia looks for in a successful post. Understanding how to edit on the back end, how the articles are expected to be formatted, and the best way to cite research within the articles was crucial to helping students during the event. In our 2016 event, we used the first 30 minutes to explain what Wikipedia looks for in a viable subject, the basic tools for editing, and how to get started on a smaller scale before moving up to writing entirely new articles.

OUTCOMES

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STUDENTS

To make our events successful, we needed students to be excited and interested in contributing to Wikipedia. Our first event was assisted by a student leader in our Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP), which then led to later partnerships with our Honors Division and the Student Council of Undergraduate Research and Creativity (SCURC). It became clear that our most motivated group was conducting high-level research of their own, so we made it a point to continuously target honors-related groups, such as these and even the Undergraduate Art History Association to participate in our edit-a-thons.

FACULTY

Since faculty provided the catalyst for our first event, it was apparent that a shift in attitudes toward Wikipedia had occurred. Faculty were now using Wikipedia as a tool for teaching and learning, and the library was the best partner for reinforcing lessons regarding the evaluation of sources, affirming the authority of academic literature, and promoting critical thinking skills. Some faculty attended in an effort to learn more about getting pages started to highlight both their own and their colleagues’ artistic contributions.

Between Spring 2014 and Spring 2016, FSU Arts Librarians hosted four edit-a-thons, with three focused on Art+Feminism and one for LGBTQ entries. All of these events involved topics related to art and offered opportunities for continued improvement. While each event averaged 20 participants, the range of attendance varied with each edit-a-thon, with some being dominated by classes, others by student organizations, and one by faculty participants as more people learned about the events. These events also led to advanced research consultations with students, referrals by students who had attended to their peers, and stronger relationships with individual faculty in liaison areas.

• Don’t try to conduct research, write articles, and learn how to edit Wikipedia at the same time.
• Train the hosts in editing and Wikipedia rules so they can explain this to participants.
• Emphasize existing partnerships and seek out new ones through student groups and discussions with your departments to determine which faculty might have Wikipedia assignments.
• Highlight the chance to hone research skills.
• Encourage students to participate in alternative knowledge creation.
• Capitalize on social media and word-of-mouth advertising.

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