"Be Bold" and "Let's Change That":
Wikipedia Engagement as a Critical Librarianship Practice

Colette Hayes
Assistant Librarian, University of San Francisco, chayes3@usfca.edu

Gleeson's first Wikipedia edit-a-thon, 2015
Photo credit: Shawn Calhoun

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Why

According to Shafee et al (2017), "Wikipedia is one of the most commonly read online sources of medical information, and is consistently among the top 10 most visited websites in the world (currently fifth)."[1] Yet, studies have shown that information about women is lacking on Wikipedia.[2] For example, a 2011 study found that women make up only about 16% of Wikipedia's editors,[3] and currently only 17.86% of the biographies on English Wikipedia are about women.[4] Wikipedia provides the public with free access to information, but that information may not be representative of its users.
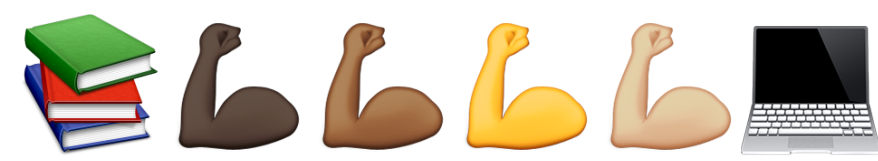
Let's change that.

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"*Other people don't have access to the same research portals and academic articles we do…We don't always think about the things we're afforded through our Library…*"
-Joshua King, postdoctoral fellow, Georgia Tech[6]

"*Wikipedia is incredibly biased and the underrepresentation of women in science is particularly bad…*"
- Jess Wade, British Physicist and Wikipedian [7]

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What

- Since 2015, Gleeson Library | Geschke Center at the University of San Francisco has hosted an annual Wikipedia edit-a-thon during Women's History Month. Our edit-a-thons have focused on editing Wikipedia articles related to women and art as part of the international Art+Feminism campaign, but edit-a-thons focusing on improving the coverage of women in science and medicine on the site are also important and much needed. Events and outreach that encourage and teach women to be Wikipedia editors are also key.
- Wikipedia edit-a-thons, and other Wikipedia-related teaching and outreach activities, allow participants to learn the inner workings of a resource they use on a near-daily basis. Through critical engagement with Wikipedia, participants become information activists equipped with knowledge and tools to break down barriers to information, identify systemic biases in information systems, and improve representation on Wikipedia, and beyond.

"*Editing Wikipedia is easy, free and rewarding. **It's a thing to do with friends or your community…***"
– Wade and Zaringhalam for Nature Magazine [5]

Who

- Find interested and enthusiastic colleagues to help run your event. Meet well before the event to plan out logistics. Divvy up tasks such as marketing, room and tech set up, food and decorations, training materials, etc. Make sure everyone feels comfortable with Wikipedia general guidelines and practices. One or two train-the-trainer sessions for the planning team can be helpful. See the Resources and References section to the right for tutorial suggestions.
- Invite everyone and anyone who is interested and wants to make a difference: students, faculty, staff, other community members, and fellow librarians!
- As people rsvp for the event, send them a short list of things they can do to prepare for the edit-a-thon, such as setting up a Wikipedia account, reading an article about the gender gap on the site, and following a short tutorial.
- Team up with specific classes or cohorts to offer pre edit-a-thon workshops.
- Reach out to experienced faculty or student Wikipedians you might know and invite them, too. They can be great mentors at your event!
- Encourage those who are just curious or might be hesitant to edit to just stop by the edit-a-thon, learn about Wikipedia, and show support.

When

- Be sure to schedule a 4-6 hour block of time for your edit-a-thon. People usually need more than an hour to get settled and contribute.
- Let participants know that it's not necessary to create an entirely new Wikipedia article (which can be a significant time investment); making small additions or edits to an existing article is just fine. Small, incremental improvements are great and a perfect way to get started as an editor!
- Run discussions about Wikipedia issues like the gender gap and Wikipedia editing guidelines, as well as live, in-person demos of editing once every hour or whenever a bigger group, like an entire class, is scheduled to arrive.
- Plan for drop-ins. Provide one-on-one training and self-guided tutorials (in print and online) for those who might join at different times throughout the day.
- Think about scheduling your edit-a-thon near a national celebration that coincides with the articles you will be focusing on, such as Women's History Month or National Nurses Week.
- Editing can be a little intimidating if you've never done it before. Encourage participants to **be bold**, but not reckless. Wikipedia tracks all changes to articles, so it's usually possible to recover past versions of an article, or fix minor aesthetic or grammatical editing mistakes. But remember: edits are public, and many people all over the world can and will read them!

Where

- Hold your edit-a-thon in an accessible space, where a sound system with microphone and a computer and projector are available. If at all possible, plan to provide laptops and/or access to desktop computers for those who may not have their own.
- Set up tables where groups can work together, teach other, and chat, and make sure you have enough space to set out snacks, applicable and credible library resources, print tutorials, and other fun things, like coloring sheets, for those that might be curious about the event but don't have time to edit.
- Also, have at least one whiteboard where you can write down the link to the event website or Libguide, and display reminders about important Wikipedia guidelines. Ask participants to share what articles they are editing on this board, too, so that everyone can see the progress being made during the event!

"*The library edit-a-thon was a nice space to be in, it was a place where everyone was trying to […] help one another other out. There was food, and **everyone was focused on the same goal […] I fed off the energy of others and had a great time doing my edits and contributions alongside others who were doing the exact same.***"
- Jordan, USF Student and edit-a-thon participant[8]

Resources and References

https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/training
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_students
http://www.artandfeminism.org/editing-kit/
https://500womenscientists.org/wikipedia-editathon
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Women_scientists

[1] Shafee, T., Masukume, G., Kipersztok, L., Das, D., Häggström, M., & Heilman, J. (2017). Evolution of Wikipedia's medical content: past, present and future. *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 71(11), 1122–1129. doi:10.1136/jech-2016-208601

[2] Systemic bias. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Systemic_bias

[3] Gender bias on Wikipedia. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_bias_on_Wikipedia

[4] WikiProject Women in Red. (2019, June 10). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 11, 2019 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Women_in_Red

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[6] Bailey, K. (2018, March 1). Wikipedia Editing Event to Focus on Underrepresented Figures in STEM. Retrieved from https://www.news.gatech.edu/2018/03/01/wikipedia-editing-event-focus-underrepresented-figures-stem

[7] Samonite, T. (2018, August 10). Using Artificial Intelligence to Fix Wikipedia's Gender Problem. Retrieved from https://www.wired.com/story/using-artificial-intelligence-to-fix-wikipedias-gender-problem/

[8] Sandoval, Jordan. 2018, March 20, Email interview.