



Wikipedia Canada Education Program

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Background and purpose of this document

In 2010, the Wikimedia Foundation launched a pilot project to explore the potential of formally using Wikipedia as a teaching tool in higher education. Professors at colleges and universities in the United States (including Harvard University, UC Berkeley, and Georgetown University) are participating in this pilot project by asking their students to improve articles on the English-language Wikipedia as part of class. The Wikimedia Foundation is providing professors support in the form of lesson plans, video tutorials and Wikipedia Ambassadors, who are serving as mentors for the first-time contributors to Wikipedia.

Students and professors across disciplines and universities have increasingly expressed interest in using Wikipedia as a teaching tool. These early successes, in addition to the impact potential of universities, encourage us to expand our university-based program activities globally – also to Canada.

This document outlines the basic elements and benefits of this innovative new learning model and serves as a basis for in-person discussions about possible cooperation.

The **Wikimedia Foundation** is a non-profit charitable organization based in San Francisco, California. Its mission is to empower people around the world to collect and develop free educational content, and to disseminate it effectively and globally.



The flagship project operated by the Wikimedia Foundation is **Wikipedia**, the free online encyclopedia written by volunteers. With more than 18.2 million articles in 270 languages and 10 million freely licensed multimedia files, it is used by more than 400 million unique visitors every month, making it the fifth most popular web property worldwide.

Wikipedia's reputation has been growing over the last years in academic communities. A notable early study (in 2005) in the journal *Nature* suggested that Wikipedia scientific articles came close to the level of accuracy in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. By 2010 reviewers in a variety of scientific fields comparing Wikipedia with professional and peer-reviewed sources found that Wikipedia's depth and coverage were of a very high standard, often comparable in coverage to scientific databases and considerably better than well known reputable print media. Wikipedia articles have been cited as references in journals and as evidence in trademark and higher court rulings.

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The Wikipedia Canada Education Program

This year, Wikimedia Foundation is launching the Wikipedia Canada Education Program. Our goal is to encourage professors in Canada to join a growing global community of educators who use Wikipedia as a teaching tool in their classes. As a first step, we decided to run pilots at select universities. Universities and colleges chosen for the pilot will have the opportunity to embark on a new teaching and learning model that enables students to participate in the world's largest online encyclopedia and to improve their media literacy skills.

Robert Cummings, University of Mississippi
Author of "Teaching Writing in the Age of Wikipedia"

"Students contributing to Wikipedia is an exciting new education model that has been tremendously successful at increasing student engagement and learning in the United States. I'm excited to see how we can work with professors around the world to form a global community of educators using Wikipedia in the higher education classroom."



At its core, we propose replacing or augmenting reports and papers that students are required to prepare with Wikipedia articles. To this end, we will work with professors and teachers (through Campus Ambassadors) to identify potential articles that can be created or improved on Wikipedia that are part of the syllabus for that particular semester. Campus Ambassadors will train students on how to edit (i.e., write) articles on Wikipedia. Campus Ambassadors will support students and teachers during the course of the semester and deliver presentations on Wikipedia's culture and policies.

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The Wikipedia Canada Education Program (continued)

As the internet has gained a larger and larger role in education, civic life, and everyday life, digital media literacy has become a core skill for students in the 21st century. Participants in the Wikipedia Canada Education Program will learn how to access, analyse, evaluate and create articles on the world's biggest information site. Both teachers and students will receive guidance and support from trained Wikipedia experts as well as free educational materials developed by Wikimedia Foundation and tested at first-class universities in the United States.

Benefits of participating in the program

1. Better research, critical thinking, and writing skills for students

We know that the use of Wikipedia as a teaching tool in university courses offers a number of opportunities for students. They will sharpen their research and critical thinking abilities, improve their writing skills, learn how to work collaboratively amongst themselves and by interacting with readers and writers around the world in real-time. These factors make it very attractive for education institutions to explore using Wikipedia as a teaching tool.

2. Students who are more motivated and engaged

Universities and colleges participating in this program will foster an increase in student motivation and drive in the classroom. Professors who have participated in the program have reported that students tend to be more motivated to do Wikipedia-editing assignments than “throw-away assignments” (as a few U.S. professors call traditional paper writing assignments) - because the former allows them to reach a massive global audience rather than just an audience of one (their professor) and gives them a greater sense of accomplishment since the writing will outlast the class. Wikimedia staff have also conducted qualitative focus-group studies in which students themselves expressed the same sentiment.

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Benefits of participating (continued)

3. Collaboration with educators in Canada and across the world

By participating in the program you will be able to share your experiences with educators nationally and globally. We will work towards fostering a community for professors and teachers to collaborate on this program as well as other education initiatives.

4. Support for teachers and students

Wikipedia experts will provide in-person support (as Wikipedia Campus Ambassadors) to faculty and students throughout the academic year. An intensive two-day training is mandatory for the Wikipedia Campus Ambassadors, to ensure that the support you receive is of an adequately high quality. It will also be our endeavor to start student clubs on campuses to provide additional support to students and staff.

5. Opportunity to show-case excellence with other institutions

We are planning to facilitate a friendly competitive spirit among participating universities and colleges. We will create a leaderboard that shows how much content was added to Wikipedia by individual students and how that adds up for the participating institutions. By taking part in the program you will have the opportunity to measure, show and recognize how much your students are able to achieve.

6. Free educational materials

Printed materials (e.g. sample lesson plans, learning activities, Wikipedia editing guides), online, and video materials will support current educational activities, and will be available for reuse, with or without modification, in future classes. The Wikimedia Foundation will provide all these materials free of charge.

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Benefits of participating (continued)

7. Recognition and media coverage

In the U.S., various national, state, local, and campus press - including newspapers, radio, and magazines - have covered Wikipedia in classrooms. We expect the same to happen in Canada. That means that your institution could gain recognition through media coverage if you participate in the program.

Contact

If you are interested in participating in our program, please contact **Jonathan Obar**, the Wikipedia Education Program Advisor Canada, at obar@msu.edu. Jonathan will set up a meeting with you to discuss the next steps.