The Wheel of Wikipedia Collaborating at Boston University Libraries

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Librarians at Boston University Libraries cultivated their curiosity and enthusiasm for Wikipedia into a community for campus-wide collaboration at Boston University (BU). The librarians' first experiences learning to edit Wikipedia at local events inspired them to later host their own events at BU Libraries. These events led to the libraries' instrumental support for implementing the Wikipedia Student Program at BU through a collaborative undertaking between faculty and librarians. As a result of building these new collaborations, the libraries became a point of contact for faculty and students interested in Wikipedia, found a new medium with which to explore shared pedagogical goals between the libraries and different departments, and gained visibility by being formally acknowledged in the publications and awards of colleagues at BU who are leading Wikipedia initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Boston University (BU) Libraries (the Libraries), is a network of multiple locations serving Boston University (the University) and located in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. The University community includes more than 33,000 students, 10,000 employers, and 4,000 faculty (Office of the President, 2021). Boston University is a private, not-for-profit university, classified as an R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2019).

BU Libraries are physically and administratively part of Boston University's Charles River Campus. However, BU Libraries shares resources and collaborates with other campus libraries that are admin-

istratively part of their respective schools. These libraries are Boston University's School of Theology Library; the Samuel M. Fineman Law Library and the Pappas Law Library; and the Alumni Medical Library, located on the School of Medicine campus. The Libraries is a member of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the Boston Library Consortium (BLC). The consortium's 21 members collaborate on initiatives which include resource sharing and professional development (Boston Library Consortium, 2021).

Wikipedia is among the top twenty most viewed websites in the world, according to various sources and rankings (Alexa, 2021; *Most Visited Websites - Top Websites Ranking for December 2021*, 2021). Wikipedia is unique among top ranking websites in that it is operated by a nonprofit organization, the Wikimedia Foundation (*Wikimedia Foundation*, n.d.). Wikipedia contains millions of pages and is written in over 300 languages by volunteer editors ("Wikipedia," n.d.).

This chapter will focus specifically on Boston University Libraries role as the central hub for Wikipedia collaboration throughout Boston University. Like the hub on a wheel, BU Libraries has become the center of a larger tool for the Wikipedia movement where all the spokes of partners travel on the same wheel. By sharing our process of combining multiple outreach methods, working with partners across internal and external institutions, and simply being open to the possibilities of informal and formal collaboration and learning, we hope to provide inspiration and direction for other academic libraries who seek to begin using Wikipedia in an intentional way but have wondered, "Where do I begin?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

While there is a significant amount of literature on Wikipedia and other Wikimedia Foundation projects, we will touch briefly on literature specifically applicable to effective collaborations in academic libraries. The 2018 publication of the edited book, *Leveraging Wikipedia: Connecting Communities of Knowledge* (Proffitt, 2018) marks an important moment in the history of libraries: libraries had embraced Wikipedia, a crowd-sourced born-digital reference work, to such an extent that the collaboration had resulted in an edited book published from the American Library Association specifically on the topic of libraries and Wikipedia as a form of collaboration. No longer forbidden fruit, Wikipedia was now recognized as a valuable information tool, sharing "common interest around a culture that valued reference skills, information literacy, and access to information" (Orlowitz, 2020).

From the earliest days of the Wikipedia Education Program, librarians have been involved in supporting Wikipedia in higher education (Davis, 2018). This may be partially because librarians found that their profession shared values with Wikipedia on issues of free and open access to information, and both Wikipedia and the library were destination points for information-seekers (Soito, 2017).

In addition to serving as a campus destination point for information-seekers, another reason academic libraries have served as a hub for Wikipedia collaboration is their advantageous position as a physical and virtual campus hub designed to serve all members of a university (and often the general public) (Wegner & Zemesky, 2006). Librarians exist as simultaneous insiders and outsiders in academic departments, occupying an interdisciplinary space that helps them facilitate connections amongst various groups at the university (Simmons, 2005). Similarly, Wikipedia, as a crowd-sourced encyclopedia, is already a community of sorts, that requires no prerequisites for participation and includes built-in virtual spaces to allow sharing and collaboration (Soito, 2017). The combination of these two complementary roles of the academic library and Wikipedia as spaces open to all disciplines may be part of the reason

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