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Adding Voices to Scholarship: Wikipedia Editing

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Adding Voices to Scholarship: Wikipedia Editing

□ March 2, 2016 March 2, 2016 □ Ariella Rotramel

I developed my Fall 2015 Feminist Theory course with metaliteracy as a learning objective (<https://metaliteracy.org/learning-objectives/>) to assist students in studying theory in context. Metaliteracy is a framework that promotes critical thinking and collaboration in a digital age (Mackey & Jacobson (<http://crl.acrl.org/content/72/1/62.full.pdf+html>)). The focus on metaliteracy helped challenge students' common understandings of theory as distanced from empirical research and everyday life, and reinforced an understanding of research and academic writing as an iterative process.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for "Sister Outsider". The title "Sister Outsider" is at the top. Below it is the text "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main body of text describes the book as a collection of essays and speeches by Audre Lorde, a Black lesbian poet and feminist writer. It mentions that the book is considered a classic and explores intersectional identity, drawing from her personal experiences with oppression, including sexism, heterosexism, racism, homophobia, classism, and ageism. A "Contents" table is visible on the left side of the page, listing sections like Themes, Publication, Content, Impact, References, and Further reading. On the right side, there is a book cover image for "Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches" by Audre Lorde, with a "Print edition cover" label below it.

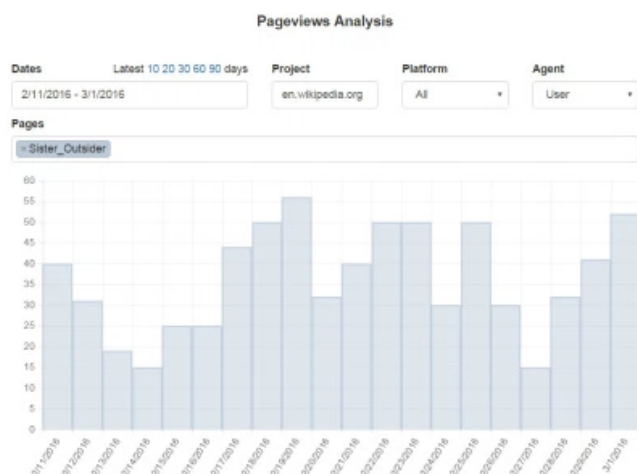
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sister_Outsider)

The Wikipedia assignment that I used for the first two months of class provided a means of working with students to translate theoretical insights into accessible knowledge. Each student created a new entry for Wikipedia on a topic related to gender and women's studies. Students' firsthand experience with creating knowledge for a general audience provided an opportunity to struggle with questions of representation that otherwise they would have engaged largely as spectators rather than participants. The project developed out of my interest in connecting with ongoing projects that seek to address the problem of gender and racial inequality in Wikipedia as there continues to be a significant imbalance in participation and content (see Gender bias on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_bias_on_Wikipedia)). Moreover, the 2015 National Women's Studies Association Wikipedia Initiative (<http://www.nwsa.org/wikiedu>) that connects Gender and Women's Studies classes with Wiki Education Foundation (<https://wikiedu.org/teach-with-wikipedia/>) staff provided further materials and support to carry out this assignment.

I took a scaffolded approach to the assignment. Students started reading about Wikipedia through a critical perspective, including issues such as trolling and bias. We took a paced approach in completing the wiki training and beginning to add content (the class Wiki Dashboard ([https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/courses/Connecticut_College/Advanced_Readings_in_Feminist_Theory_\(Fall_2015\)/overview](https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/courses/Connecticut_College/Advanced_Readings_in_Feminist_Theory_(Fall_2015)/overview)) shows how the training was scaffolded and organized). Next time, I plan to integrate the discussion of bias with an in-class editing session to break the ice more efficiently. We also connected with our Wiki Education Foundation content expert, Adam Hyland, via Google Hangouts midway through the assignment, and next time we will introduce collaborators earlier to help students put a face to the person and become more comfortable reaching out about specific questions they have around their Wikipedia work. Students appreciated having the scaffolded approach to the assignment that allowed them to pace themselves and revise their work. Finally, they gained much from presenting their work in a poster session supported by the Academic Resource Center as they received direct feedback from visitors and saw firsthand interest in their work, adding an face-to-face interaction that is missing from online work itself.

“it is one thing to be looking at all this information for one’s own personal benefit and use... it is a completely different thing to be able to not only use this information for one’s own personal sake, but also share it with other individuals that are seeking information.” – student reflection

Students’ reflection essays included many claims that the project did indeed help them understand theory as part of feminist knowledge production. One student reported that the project was “a direct way to overcome the lack of connection between theory and praxis” as they created information for a general audience. In addition, students appreciated and found a sense of empowerment by creating content that will be widely shared and used. Students sharpened their research skills, and in some cases contacted individuals involved in the topics they wrote about such as [The Kilroys](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Kilroys%27_List) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Kilroys%27_List), a theater gender parity group and the activists behind the [#ShoutYourAbortion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shout_Your_Abortion) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shout_Your_Abortion) hashtag. This shift from consumption to synthesis and distribution of information helped demystify one key source of information online for students.



<https://teachtechconncoll.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/sisteroutsiderstats.jpg> Some entries have received quite a bit of traffic. The entry for *Sister Outsider* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sister_Outsider), Audre Lorde’s well-cited essay collection, has received 2,293 visits (25/day) over the past 90 days (see graph to left). Previously, there had not been an entry for the national [Green Dot Bystander Intervention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Dot_Bystander_Intervention) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Dot_Bystander_Intervention) program that is a core component of [Connecticut College’s violence prevention work](https://www.conncoll.edu/campus-life/sexual-assault-prevention-and-advocacy/green-dot/) (<https://www.conncoll.edu/campus-life/sexual-assault-prevention-and-advocacy/green-dot/>). A student created an entry and the site has received 285 visits (3/day) over the past 90 days, and basic information about the program is now accessible to Wikipedia users. In conclusion, while there are always some glitches and complications in carrying out an assignment like this one, it is evident from the semester and teaching evaluations that it was worth the effort. Across the board, students gained a deeper understanding of knowledge creation and representation through this hands on experience.

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