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Get It Right: Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon

Some 42 students volunteered several hours of their time on November 9 to join SU Libraries staff and improve Wikipedia entries. Unlike print encyclopedias, typically written by scholars, the popular online encyclopedia is crowd-sourced, meaning anyone can contribute. While many entries are excellent, others have some issues, such as wrong or missing information.

Technology Librarian Chris Woodall organized the event, which he first established at SU in 2015. He explained: "We have been holding a Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon every year to introduce students to the core concepts behind Wikipedia. As part of the process of identifying errors in articles, they learn why they should not use Wikipedia as a source in their own papers. And not only that, but many of them will actually use the Libraries' resources to fix the errors they find. It's a win-win!"

Students picked diverse entries to edit. Several worked on World War II in the Netherlands and Morocco, while another focused on Germany's 19th-century leader Otto von Bismarck. Two others chose 19th-century physician Jenny Thomann-Koller. Religious topics included Christianity, Hinduism in Guyana and St. Anne Parish in Poznán, Poland. The entertainment business drew ample attention, with one student improving the entry on the recent Slander and Crankdat song, "Kneel Before Me," and others editing entries on music executive DJ Mustard, actor/singer/surfer Greg Cipes, German media artist Benjamin Heldersberger and cartoon character Dipper Pines.

Students rated the event highly. One enjoyed "feeling like I was part of informing the public," while another expressed satisfaction at "improving something someone may read in the future." Another student "learned new things about how Wikipedia is set up and run. It was interesting to learn that the [entries in] other languages aren't actually translations but actually a completely different source write-up altogether."

One of the ways in which the SU Libraries participate in SU's educational mission is in promoting information literacy, that is, the ability to find, evaluate and use information well. We typically do this by providing instruction sessions as part of regular academic classes. The annual Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon is a fun, informal way to encourage our students to be information literate.