

Rhetoric and Composition



Digital Revolution and Convergence Culture

Composing for Wikipedia



When exploring Wikipedia, the browser stumbles across all sorts of intriguing gems from the obscure to the infamous. Here visitors can find everything

from Ukawsaw Gronniosaw to "complex marriage" in what has been called the twenty-first century's "collective intelligence." Here visitors can also find entries researched, written, and posted by members of the Digital Revolution and Convergence Culture graduate seminar taught by Dr. Kathleen Blake Yancey.

A required course in the PhD program's five-part core, Digital Revolution examines technology's impact on literacy and rhetoric. In Dr. Yancey's incarnation of this course, a common assignment that engages her students with these issues consists of an examination of and a contribution to Wikipedia.

As she explains, this project helps students grapple with the phenomenon of circulation and with the "common perception that canonical encyclopedias present info that is credible, but the information on wikipedia is not." As Dr. Yancey notes, this perception is changing, and taking a role in that change are her students.

The Wikipedia project involves two parts. First, students study an encyclopedia entry (the conventional) and a wikipedia entry (the innovative) to interrogate the differences and similarities of the entries. They are asked to address questions like "What did you look up? What did you find? And what are the differences?" The classes have mapped a few trends: 1) Wikipedia often has more information, 2) users know who some of the experts are on Wikipedia, and 3) users often don't

know who the experts are in the canonical texts.

Second, students create their own entry on Wikipedia. Although the entries that students compose are not required to be "in field," many students chose to focus on composition-related issues, especially in the Fall of 2013. For instance, second-year PhD student Heather Lang created the entry "[headless fatty](#)," a term she uses in her work connecting composition with Fat Studies. She explains, "I know it sounds made up, but it's not; it is a term that surfaces in my research interests of Fat Studies."



To compose her entry, Heather and her classmates had to do more than research. They also had to recognize that the language style of Wikipedia is not the language style of the academic prose. Wikipedia's public audience lacks the specialized knowledge and vocabulary accepted as common within the academic community. To help with the challenges of writing for and posting to Wikipedia, Jacob Craig developed a workshop for his

classmates in conjunction with writing his own Wikipedia entry on [Digital Rhetoric](#).

In the workshop, Jacob helped fellow composers understand the policies and procedures they needed to follow in order to publish their entry to the site. In addition, he helped them understand the

importance of paying attention, especially to audience. Dr. Yancey reinforces this necessity. "There are also censors," she points out, "so they zap you." Heather concurs, gesturing to her own experiences as illustration. "The entry is still there, but it has been challenged for issues of neutrality. They weren't wrong to challenge that," she confesses with a laugh.

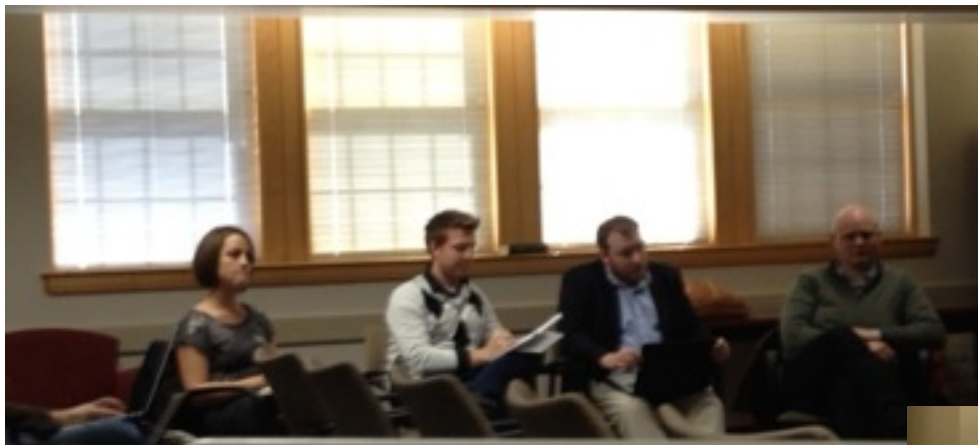
Delighted with the results of the assignment, Dr. Yancey notes the numerous intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of the assignment. For instance, the nature of writing for Wikipedia positions it as something to be revised; it is a dialogue that is meant to be rewritten. "So it is a remix model," she asserts. "As much as we like the theory of remix, we often don't actually like it in practice."

In addition, students gain a publication with the inclusion of their entry in Wikipedia. Rory Lee, a fifth-year PhD candidate and a member of Dr. Yancey's 2008 Digital Revolution course, highlights this. As he explains, "My entry, [CCCC Chair's Address](#), has gotten a lot of interest in my job market interviews. I put it on my CV, and people have noticed it." While a graduate on the job market will want more than a Wikipedia entry, it is a good addition to a job hunter's profile, Dr. Yancey adds.

Finally, the Wikipedia assignment promotes a desirable sense of agency. "People felt a remarkable amount of agency," Dr. Yancey recalls, "even though there was no name on it."

Ultimately, this project invited graduate students to have a conversation in a public space while also making a contribution to the field. After all, Dr. Yancey reminds us, "There's no reason that graduate students can't contribute to the field," and Wikipedia is richer for their participation.

"By working on the Wikipedia project on both of those levels, I had the opportunity to see Wikipedia's policies and procedures from two vantage points: as a contributor and as a Studio consultant. Those two vantage points helped me think about what makes a large-scale and long-term collaborative project possible." Jacob Craig



Richard Miller, professor of English at Rutgers University, participated in a Q&A session with moderators from the FSU Rhetoric and Composition program: Christine Martorana, Logan Bearden, David Bedsole, and Jacob Craig. One point he made during the session was when he asserted, "There's only one way to learn how to read. You re-read. That's it. And your education never ever provides you a chance to re-read."

Student Spotlights



Jeff Naftzinger is a second year MA student Student in Rhetoric and Composition, who received his BA in English (Editing, Writing, and Media concentration) from Florida State. When Jeff is on campus, he can probably be found teaching his ENC1145 class (which focuses on comic books and graphic novels), tutoring in the Johnston Digital Studio, or writing his thesis. When he's not at school, Jeff might be spending more time working on his thesis, but he's most

likely at home trying to make the perfect cup of coffee (a process that involves a specialized kettle, a scale, fresh roasted whole coffee beans, a grinder, a thermometer, a brewing apparatus called a Chemex, and a bit of time and dedication), binge watching TV shows, or—if it's Friday—playing disc golf at one of Tallahassee's two courses. In the future, Jeff hopes to pursue his PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, and, eventually, grow up to be just like Larry David.



UP-COMING EVENTS:

- March 19-22: CCCCs in Indianapolis, IN
- March 20: FSU CCCCs Party at Cafe Patachou on the Park from 7:30-9:30 PM (in Indianapolis, IN)
- March 25: Dr. Yancey's Presentation: at 3:30 PM in the Common Room w/ reception following
- April 16-18: Dr. Keith Miller's visit with his talk: "Rethinking the Civil Rights Movement: Why the National Memory Is Wrong" on April 17 (look for sign-up sheets for the Potluck and one-on-one time soon)

Kendall Parris is a first-year doctoral student in Rhetoric and Composition. She is interested in studying visual rhetoric and literacy, multimodality, composition theory, conceptions of virtue, justice and social responsibility, and the functions of comedy in composition studies. She is already an alum of Florida State University, having earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in literature studies here in Tallahassee; she also has a BA in studio art from FSU. Teaching is one of the great joys of her life; she is currently engaged in a composition course focused on fictional heroes and villains. When she is not studying or teaching, she enjoys doing yoga, making art, messing around in her kitchen, writing her own fiction, reading, playing with animals, geeking out over certain TV shows (mostly *Downton Abbey* and *Sherlock* these days), surfing Reddit, planning and going on adventures, and generally finding new things to be amazed by.



Don't forget to check out and use the hashtag #4CI4 on Twitter while at CCCC to follow the action from the conference or here at FSU!