WGSS Wikipedia Edit-a-thon: Tackling the Gender Gap

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Introduction

Wikipedia has a diversity problem: an overwhelming majority of editors and subjects of pages are men (Bates 2016). Erasure of knowledge by and about minoritized peoples is a systemic issue; it bleeds into Wikipedia because of the power of the white male majority, which creates knowledge that is held to be common and representative.

The Edit-a-thon provides a platform for minoritized people to collectively create and share knowledge and disrupt that power. Inspired by theory and literature on consciousness-raising from feminists like bell hooks, I sought to “clarify our collective understanding of the nature of male domination” in seemingly minute and everyday places like Wikipedia (hooks 8). Overall, this Edit-a-thon combats both the Wikipedia gender gap and hegemonic system of knowledge creation.

Collaboration & PR

As a student in the WGSS department, I already had close connections with faculty. Professors supported in a variety of ways: writing the Edit-a-thon into their syllabi and requiring participation, offering participation as extra credit or an alternative to an assignment, or simply allowing me to speak in class about the event and sharing flyers.

Beyond the WGSS department, I collaborated with library colleagues and student clubs that I had worked with in the past to share and promote the event.

To prepare participants, we created a Wikipedia Meetup page that contained all essential information (see Meetup contents box, to the right).

I created the Meetup page two months in advance to provide a home base for all participants and welcome everyone, regardless of their skill level with editing.

Many of our suggestions for pages to edit or create came from Modern HERstory. This book, along with others from our Leisure Reading collection, served us practically and theoretically, offering a carefully curated list that served the purpose of our Edit-a-thon. Using these books provided novice editors with a framework that centered knowledge creation, as it focused on mostly people or color and queer people.

Resources & Preparation

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Timeline for hosting an Edit-a-thon

3 months out

- Secure collaborators inside & outside the library
- Create informational handout
- Confirm logistics & event details

2 months out

- Create meetup page, with pages to be edited or created
- Provide instruction & informational sessions to collaborators

1 month out

- Finalize pages to edit or create during the edit-a-thon
- Heavily market the event to campus community

Your edit-a-thon!

- Use the Dashboard to track progress
- Encourage participants and celebrate successful edits!

The Event

The Edit-a-thon ran from 9am to 5pm in a multipurpose room in the library. The two classes that required participation book-ended the day, with the larger class attending at the end of the day. This timing worked in our favor, as we learned about Wikipedia throughout the day and were able to apply the skills in assisting the large class. The event was a success, with 75 participants coming from a variety of backgrounds, including undergraduate and graduate students, professors, and library staff.

Best Practices

A successful Edit-a-thon relies on strong collaborators. When planning your own Edit-a-thon, set goals early, which will influence your framing of the event, and the collaborators you seek out. Remember your network will help make these collaborations successful, but you shouldn’t forget about reaching out to those outside your immediate network.

Other best practices include:

- Make a meetup page and utilize the dashboard to support and keep track of participants.
- Provide levels of “getting involved” for participants: from a simple page edit to citation hunt, or full page creation.
- It’s okay to not know everything about editing Wikipedia; Wikipedia can be HARD (and remind participants of that, too!)

References


