

Wikis in Higher Education: Pros, Cons, and How-Tos

Definition

Wiki - A **web site** whose content can be changed and extended by users via their web browsers. The term is also used for **web applications** that facilitate this. Wikis are a useful technique for rapidly assembling and disseminating “collective wisdom” (“wiki wiki” is Hawaiian for “fast” or “quick”).

"wiki" *A Dictionary of Computing*. Ed John Daintith and Edmund Wright. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of Cincinnati. 6 January 2009
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t11.e6514>>

Watch *Wikis in Plain English* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY>) to understand the advantages of this technology.

Characteristics of a Wiki

- Openness and accessibility.
- Use of simplified markup language.
- Anonymity of content. A wiki is owned by its community.
- Focus on content, not format.
- Organization: predominantly by context, by links in and links out, sometimes by category, less frequently chronologically.

Important Characteristics of Wikis as Social Software

- An open environment encourages participation and a strong sense of common purpose.
- A “real-world” tool (as opposed to institutional software like BlackBoard) allows expanding the community beyond an institution and gives students a tool they can use in the future.

Wikis in Higher Education

Use of Wikis in Educational Institutions

- Manage communication for collaborative staff projects.
- Facilitate professional collaboration and document authoring online between staff and other professional colleagues inside and outside of the institution.
- Allow university-associated athletic clubs and student groups to have a user-editable web presence.

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- Propagate community news.
- Allow academic classes to build a group wiki on a topic/idea.
- Allow groups of students to build a wiki for the creation of a shared academic deliverable (i.e. research projects, presentations, reports).
- Manage and maintain documents online that need frequent updating such as SOPs, policy, procedure and orientation manuals.
- Allow front line workers to easily build online FAQs.
- Joint authoring and archiving of committee minutes.
- Collaborative website space for an academic/professional conference or meeting.

Tremblay, Eric A. (2007 March 8). Wiki uses at Universities. *E-learning Acupuncture*. Retrieved July 21, 2010 from Blogspot:
<http://erictremblay.blogspot.com/2007/03/wiki-uses-at-universities.html>)

Examples

- Case Wiki, the official wiki of Case Western Reserve University
http://wiki.case.edu/Main_Page
 The Case Wiki is an encyclopedic reference about Case Western Reserve University and its surroundings. The content can be created by any member of the university community. Login requires university ID #.
- Romantic Audience Project
 A collaborative study of romanticism authored by students enrolled in English 242, Spring 2003, taught by Mark Phillipson at Bowdoin College. This project is described extensively in The Romantic Audience Project - A Wiki Experiment at <http://www.rc.umd.edu/pedagogies/commons/innovations/rap/index.htm>
- University of Calgary Wiki
http://wiki.ucalgary.ca/page/Main_Page
 The purpose of this Wiki is to provide collaborative content management in the context of teaching and learning to the University of Calgary community. The Wiki is hosted by the Teaching & Learning Centre as a service to support innovation in teaching and learning at the University of Calgary.
- University of Cincinnati Second Life Learning Community (UCSLLC)
<http://homepages.uc.edu/secondlife/>
 UC is exploring using wikis and Second Life for distance learning and to enhance courses in the classroom.

Uses in Teaching

- Student journaling.
- Personal portfolios.
- Collaborative knowledge base.
- Research coordination and collaboration.
- Curricular and cross-disciplinary coordination and collaboration.

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Higdon, Jude. (November 15, 2005). Teaching, Learning, and Other Uses for Wikis in Academia: All Users Are Not Necessarily Created Equal. *Campus Technology*. (Online). Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://campustechnology.com/articles/2005/11/teaching-learning-and-other-uses-for-wikis-in-academia.aspx>

Additional Resources

Integrating Wikis into the Curriculum – Wiki Authorship Types. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from the Instructional Design Resource Center, University of Alaska Anchorage - Community and Technical College Web Site:

http://hitchhikers.midsolutions.org/course_design/blackboard/wikis/wikiIndex.php

See links to related pages at the bottom. The pages cover wiki authorship types, planning and integration, using wikis in the curriculum, and sample rubrics.

Plourde, M. Wikis in Higher Education. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from

http://copland.udel.edu/~mathieu/wiki/resources/2008-5-23_Wikis_in_Higher_Education_UD.pdf

This informative exploratory report about the value of wikis in higher education from a faculty perspective includes examples of usages of wikis within the University of Delaware community.

Challenges and Benefits

Benefits for the teacher

- Easy-to-use technology
- Focus and engagement
- Access
- Inspiration
- Variation
- Expansion

Challenges for the Teacher

- Keeping up with postings
- Organization
- Housekeeping

Benefits for Students

- New class identity
- Peer interactivity
- New modes of submission

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- Ownership

Challenges for Students

- Required comfort with computers
- Posting pressure and timing
- Visibility

Phillipson, Mark. Pros and Cons for the Class. *The Romantic Audience Project*. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://ssad.bowdoin.edu:8668/space/Pros+and+Cons+of+Using+a+Wiki>

How to Start a Wiki

- Find Wikis that already exist – you may not need to create a new one!
- Determine the requirements and find the software you need.
 - Talk to peers about the pros and cons of the software they have used.
 - Find out if wiki hosting and support is available at your institution.
 - Go to *Wikimatrix -Compare Them All* (<http://www.wikimatrix.org/>). The site *helps* you choose a wiki that meets your personal needs, compare various wikis in a comprehensive table, and learn more about wikis.
- Establish a mission statement and usage policy.
- Create an FAQ section and/or point to tutorials and other resource.
- Provide a clear navigation structure.
- Provide starter content.
- Utilize permission levels.
- Work with contributors: invite, welcome, recognize.
- Be flexible and patient (see Challenges for students).

Kroski, Elyssa. (2008). Wikis. In *Web 2.0 for Librarians and Information Professionals*. New York: Neal-Shuman.

Additional Resources

Educational wikis. Retrieved July 21, 2010 from <http://educationalwikis.wikispaces.com/>
The site lists articles and resources that describe how to use wikis in education and provide examples of educational wikis that we can learn from.

Starting and Running a Wiki Website. *Wikibooks, the open-content textbooks collection*. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Starting_and_Running_a_Wiki_Website

Hart, O. Wikipedia: Friend or Foe? Retrieved July 21, 2010, from the University of Cincinnati Libraries Web Site

<http://www.libraries.uc.edu/instruction/faculty/aboutwikipedia.html>

Links to selected publications about Wikipedia and ideas for class assignments that may help your students think critically about Wikipedia and become familiar with the pros and cons of Wiki technology. The page includes links for those who intend to start their own Wiki.

Starbuck, E., & Orłowski, M. (March 13, 2008). Blogs & Wikis: New Education Tools? Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://meblog.pbwiki.com/>

A wiki about wikis and blogs.