

Letter from the President



Marshall Dozier

Information Services
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, UK
Contact: marshall.dozier@ed.ac.uk

Dear Colleagues,

With this first issue for 2016, I send you wishes for a successful year!

I've written a letter with two parts: first, I'll highlight a few important EAHIL matters for this year; then in a more adventurous spirit, I'd like to tell you about some work we have been doing at my institution with Wikipedia editing.

EAHIL Conference and Elections in 2016

The key event this year will be the conference in Seville in June (www.bvsspa.es/eahil2016/). As a member of the IPC, I visited Seville and the conference hotel – I know it will be an excellent venue in a beautiful city, and that there will be a great variety of presentations and posters on topics relevant to our current and future work. Veronica Juan and Pilar Roque and their teams have been doing an excellent job, and I look forward to seeing you in Seville!

Elections for President and Board will happen in the next few months, and outcomes announced at the General Assembly in Seville. Please see the dedicated pages in this issue for information on nominations and voting. The new terms for newly elected members will begin in January 2017.

Later this year, we will have nominations and voting for Council members for each country where there are vacancies. The outcomes will be announced in late autumn and the new Councillors will begin their term in January 2017.

We hope to receive a nomination form from you!

Wikipedia for information literacy

At the University of Edinburgh, we are currently in the last stages of preparation for our second multi-day Wikipedia “editathon”. An “editathon” is like a marathon, but instead of running for a long time, we are writing and editing Wikipedia articles.

We had our first editathon in February 2015, and it was a great success: over the course of four consecutive afternoons, about 80 people came to join in (some came back on successive days, some only came for one day). We had a great mix of people, from first-year undergraduate students to emeritus professors, and there was a real “buzz” of activity – identifying articles or topics that needed work, finding suitable resources, learning how to write in the preferred Wikipedia style, talking about exciting connections found between topics... On the back of that and subsequent events, we have now also appointed a Wikimedian in Residence who will be with us for a year to help us raise awareness, work on cultural change, and embed activities in curricula.

Why are we engaging with Wikipedia in this way? Here are some of the reasons:

Wikipedia is probably the largest open educational resource currently available. As a matter of principle, we are interested in improving access to information and learning, so engaging with Wikipedia is one way of achieving this broader aim.

Wikipedia is heavily used by students and academic staff as a source of information (even if they don't admit it). So, it is very important to try to ensure that the quality of the information in Wikipedia is high – as good as we can make it.

Most interesting to me, and possibly to you, Wikipedia is a valuable tool for contextualising and improving information literacy. Wikipedia is often criticised for the fact that just about anyone can edit it – so how reliable are its contents? Instead of treating this as a problem to be avoided, though, we can turn this into an opportunity for critical engagement and development of skills in information handling.

Critical engagement: it takes students some time to become knowledgeable enough in a new area to disentangle various perspectives on a particular topic, especially if the topic might be contentious. Students need to become aware that information is never completely neutrally presented in that at a minimum, there is selection of what to present, and there may be degrees of interpretation or framing that influence the presentation of a topic. A quick way of getting students to have some insight into the negotiations of interpretation and representation that go on 'behind the scenes' of a Wikipedia article is to get them to look at the 'Talk' tab for a topic that interests them. There, the authors of the page will discuss, sometimes with a lot of vigour, the way the article is written.

Skills development: good articles in Wikipedia are clearly written in non-technical language, well supported with references, well-illustrated with images, and well-linked with related topics. Writing in this way enhances students' communication skills, and gets them to think about use of appropriate supporting literature – both are directly relevant to good academic practice. In using images in Wikipedia, it is essential to become aware of copyright and learn about Creative Commons licences in particular. Seeing and making links between relevant topics not only helps students to contextualise their learning on a new topic, but it can help them to develop media and digital literacy skills too! Those are just a few ways in which students (and staff?) can develop their skills by working with Wikipedia.

Are you tempted to have a go yourself? Here are some support materials listed below. Do you already have Wikipedia-related activities at your institution? Let's talk!

Tips for organising a Wikipedia editathon: Wikipedia have a very good page of guidance for How to run an edit-a-thon that can be used as a planning tool and checklist of tasks, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_run_an_edit-a-thon.

A few resources that you might find helpful for getting started

- Fletcher N, Cardy J, Gray A, Cummings J, Mabbett A, Byrne J, Wikimedia Belgium. How to work successfully with Wikipedia: A guide for galleries, libraries, archives and museums. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AWMBE-How_to_work_successfully_with_Wikipedia.pdf
- Wikimedia Foundation. Editing Wikipedia: A guide to improving content on the online encyclopedia. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AEditing_Wikipedia_brochure_EN.pdf
- Wikimedia Foundation. Instructor Basics: How to Use Wikipedia as a Teaching Tool https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AInstructor_Basics_How_to_Use_Wikipedia_as_a_Teaching_Tool.pdf

All best wishes,

Marshall