ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Integrating Wikis in Anthropology Courses

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Wikis have great potential for pedagogical use in higher education. According to Wikipedia, the world largest wiki site, a wiki is a type of website that allows users to add, remove or otherwise edit and change most content very quickly and easily. Wikipedia is the most well known wiki, but there are many others, such as the Encyclopedia of Earth, which is edited by a community of scholars (www.eoearth.org). The participatory nature of wikis makes them very suitable for collaborative work.

Last summer I decided to integrate a wiki into my undergraduate course on hunter-gatherers for autumn quarter 2007. I had never used a wiki in a course, but I imagined how it could further my pedagogical goals and engage students more actively. By integrating a wiki into my course I was hoping to improve student's critical literacy of internet and scholarly materials, writing and editing skills and awareness of the complex responsibilities and ethical concerns anthropologists face when writing about other people.

I thought that a wiki would be particularly well-suited to achieve these goals for several reasons:

1) It is public and students are therefore more invested because their work is visible to not just the professor but also anyone who visits the wiki, including the people students write about.

2) It is a collective effort in which an important part of learning is to discuss and work with others.

3) It is a work in process that is never finished and is continuously evolving.

4) It is democratic, collective and cumulative, as is the production of scientific knowledge.

5) It is open and allows students to be creative and make contributions in different forms and formats, and to actively engage with and author course material according to their skills and interests.

Developing the Wiki
My goal was to create a wiki that was a hybrid between Wikipedia (created and edited by potentially everyone) and the Encyclopedia of Earth (created and edited by members who are academics). The intended audience was anthropology majors at universities in the US and abroad. The course was built around Robert Kelly's book *Forager Spectrum* (2007) and John Marshall's film *Death by Myth* (2002) and focused on the goal of "scientifically studying the diversity of forager societies without recreating myths." I wanted students to gain a deeper understanding of the course

material by synthesizing scientific research and ethnographic descriptions of forager societies for the wiki, while avoiding stereotypical descriptions of all forager societies as some version of the Ju/'hoansi.

I designed three assignments for the wiki. The first assignment was to write individually an annotated bibliography of a forager group and then to write collectively an entry for the wiki about foragers in a particular region. The second assignment was to write individually a critical review of a research article on a topic discussed in class (eg, optimal foraging theory) and then to write collectively an entry on that topic for the wiki. The third assignment was to make 10 contributions to the wiki in addition to the other two assignments, such as through creating pages on topics not covered in class, adding audiovisual materials, reorganizing pages or editing other student's contributions.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

The final result after 10 weeks of classes is a rich anthropological wiki with a diversity of materials and perspectives. It integrates humanistic, scientific and activist approaches to the study of forager societies, covers different theoretical perspectives, examines a wide range of diverse populations and includes discussions of scientific debates.

Going Public
On the last day of class I evaluated how beneficial integrating a wiki into the course was, using three measures. Students submitted two-page reflections on their wiki contributions (keeping in mind the course goals and the nature of wiki technology). Kathryn Plank from Ohio State University Faculty and TA Development conducted a formal evaluation using focus groups. I also led a class discussion centered on three questions: Should we make the wiki public? If so, should we allow others to edit the wiki? Should I use the wiki were I to teach the class in the future?

In the discussion a number of important points came up. Students were proud of their work. Although the wiki was password protected during the quarter, they had already shown it to friends and family and were eager to make it publicly accessible. Students also displayed ownership of the wiki and did not want everyone to be able to edit the wiki if it were to become public, although one student argued that the people we wrote about should be able to edit the sections in which they were represented. I proposed a system in which interested people applied for membership and were screened by an administrator (me), which students approved. Students also approved my request to build on the wiki in future classes but wanted to be assured that

their original product continued to exist. Wikis have a history function, which shows all the changes to the wiki and allows members to revert to older versions of a particular page, which means that wiki content is never lost. At the end of the discussion, a student noted that we and visitors of the wiki still need to be critical of the information on our wiki because experts did not closely scrutinize information, which covers diverse areas of knowledge.

Lessons Learned
Using wikidot, neither my students nor I experienced a steep learning curve, though several commented that they were initially intimidated by wiki technology. I was fortunate to have institutional support from a number of "experts," including technical, writing and evaluation support. The wiki is thus a collaborative product in multiple ways.

The workload of keeping track of students' contributions was also less than I expected (or feared). The history function was useful for tracking individual contributions, while the discussion fora associated with each page helped me track student learning and spot problems in group work. Unlike other group projects, I could tell exactly what each student contributed. The focus groups showed that the group work problems were minor compared with other courses and also that virtual collaboration needed to be complemented with face-to-face interaction in class (more than the two half-hour sessions I had allotted during the quarter).

In addition to scheduling more face-to-face time for groups in class, there are a number of other things that I will do differently next time I use a wiki in one of my courses. First, I will ensure that all groups have a minimum of five students as I found that larger groups fostered greater participation and developed higher quality work. Second, I will design a final assignment (at the end of the course) that ensures that students read classmates' contributions. Third, I will pay particular attention to educating students about copyright rules, to help them evaluate copyright-protected text and photographs. In future classes I will devote more time to critical analysis of how web 2.0 technologies affect the representation of contemporary foragers, examining the implications of using tourist, popular media and related resources in scholarly work.

Although the wiki experiment made this class special in a number of ways, wikis are not the panacea for improving student participation. However, overall I am happy with the results of the integration of the wiki in my course. Student feedback suggests that with careful course design using wikis as educational tools affords a more active and participatory form of learning that leads to greater engagement with course material and, potentially, deeper learning.