

Write a Wikipedia Article for Law School Credit—Really?

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Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's what we're doing.

—Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia founder¹

Introduction

Consider the fate of the average paper, memo or other written assignment submitted for law school credit. Whether the student has toiled over it through the term or crammed it into a few (one?) all-nighters before the due date, the work is likely to be read by the instructor who assigned it, filed in a cabinet, box, or electronic folder on a computer, assigned a grade (with, perhaps, some feedback given to the student), and then—forgotten. While some instructors prod students to turn their work into publishable pieces for a wider audience, most law school assignments are produced and consumed solely in a dyadic relationship of student-writer and instructor-reader. Now consider a different scenario, one in which the fate of the work is presumptive publication to the world; in which feedback from any interested reader is potentially instantaneous; in which the instructor's role is that of coach or mentor through the writing and publishing process as well as assessor of the work; and in which the student's work, in turn, contributes to providing worldwide access to free legal information. The world we are talking about is that of writing or editing Wikipedia articles for law school credit.

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1. ANDREW LIH, *THE WIKIPEDIA REVOLUTION: HOW A BUNCH OF NOBODIES CREATED THE WORLD'S GREATEST ENCYCLOPEDIA 1* (2008); *Jimmy Wales*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Jimmy_Wales (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

In this Article, we describe that world and the small part we played in it as law professor and law student in editing a Wikipedia article as an optional component of an upper-year Canadian law school course.² In Part I, we set out some of the background to Wikipedia. This includes a discussion of its history, philosophy, and policies; the relationship between Wikipedia and higher education; and the relationship between Wikipedia and law, including its sometimes surprising use by courts and lawyers. We consider the views of Wikipedia's detractors and proponents, and, in answer to both, make a pedagogical case for turning law students from "consumers" to "producers" of Wikipedia's legal content. Furthermore, the pedagogical case has a public service component, similar to initiatives like that of the University of California San Francisco, where fourth-year medical students have been editing Wikipedia to provide higher-quality medical information for the benefit of both the public and the medical profession. In Part II, we talk about what we did as professor and student in the course, focusing on the editing of a specific Wikipedia "stub" article—that is, an article clearly in need of editing and further development. In Part III, we consider the assessment of student contributions to Wikipedia. This includes a discussion of various rubrics and the Wikipedia Education Project Syllabus, which provides a general template for a twelve-week course emphasizing individual and collaborative writing, peer review, and publication of Wikipedia content. Part IV summarizes our reflections on the exercise, including both its limitations and opportunities. Finally, in the Appendix, we provide some links to resources for professors and students who want to experiment with writing or editing Wikipedia articles for law school credit.

Part I: Background

*Wikipedia—History, Philosophy, Policies*³

Wikipedia is an open-access and collaboratively created Internet encyclopedia,

2. In keeping with the Wikipedia spirit, we wrote this Article collaboratively, commenting on and editing our own and each other's work while keeping a revision history of all changes.
3. This section is synopsised chiefly from LIH, *supra* note 1, and information about Wikipedia on the Wikipedia website itself. See, e.g., *Main Page*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); *Wikipedia*, WIKIPEDIA, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (main entry on Wikipedia); *History of Wikipedia*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (tracking Wikipedia's history). See also articles on versions of Wikipedia in other languages and articles about Wikipedia's growth, e.g., *German Wikipedia*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Wikipedia (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); *List of Wikipedias*, WIKIPEDIA, https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipedias (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (showing all of the different languages Wikipedia articles are available in and how many articles per language have been published); *Size of Wikipedia*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Size_of_Wikipedia (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); *Five Pillars*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); *Wikipedia*, WIKIMEDIA, <https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (meta-wiki discussion page).

supported and hosted by the nonprofit Wikimedia Foundation.⁴ Wikipedia ranks among the ten most popular websites in the world⁵ and is the largest and most well-known reference tool. Companion sites include Wikibooks, a collection of open-content textbooks;⁶ Wikimedia Commons, a repository for free photographs, diagrams, maps, videos, animations, music, sounds, spoken texts, and other copyright-compliant media;⁷ Wikidata, a repository for the structured data of various Wikimedia projects;⁸ Wikisource, a library of public-domain texts, including cases and statutes;⁹ Wikispecies, a forum for taxonomic and biological information aimed at scientific users;¹⁰ Wiktionary, a collaborative multilingual dictionary and thesaurus;¹¹ Wikiversity, an open learning community;¹² Wikivoyage, a collaborative travel guide;¹³ and Wikinews, an independent news outlet based on participatory journalism.¹⁴

Wikipedia started with the English-language Wikipedia in January 2001 as the brainchild of Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger,¹⁵ whose original efforts

4. *Main Page*, WIKIMEDIA FOUND., <https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Home> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
5. As of this writing, the benchmarking website Alexa rates Wikipedia as seventh. *Top 500 Sites on the Web*, ALEXA, <http://www.alexa.com/topsites> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
6. *Main Page*, WIKIBOOKS, https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
7. *Main Page*, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
8. *Main Page*, WIKIDATA, https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata:Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
9. *Main Page*, WIKISOURCE, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
10. *Main Page*, WIKISPECIES, https://species.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
11. *Main Page*, WIKTIONARY, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
12. *Main Page*, WIKIVERSITY, https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Wikiversity:Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
13. *Main Page*, WIKIVOYAGE, https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
14. *Main Page*, WIKINEWS, https://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Main_Page (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
15. Although “wiki” is now most famously associated with Wikipedia, the wiki concept and technology were pioneered in 1995 by computer programmer Ward Cunningham. Using Perl code, Cunningham created a site that allowed people to quickly edit the very pages they were reading. In looking for a name for the new technology, he recalled his honeymoon trip to Hawaii, where he had asked how to travel between airport terminals. The airport agent told him to take the wiki wiki—explaining that wiki means “quick” in Hawaiian, and thus wiki wiki means “super quick.” LIH, *supra* note 1, at 56-57. Wales and Sanger adapted this technology to their project, with Sanger coining the portmanteau “Wikipedia” for the project name (Larry Sanger, *The Early History of Nupedia and Wikidia: A Memoir*, SLASHDOT (Apr. 18, 2005, 12:00 PM), <http://features.slashdot.org/story/05/04/18/164213/the-early-history-of-nupedia-and-wikipedia-a-memoir>).

focused on Nupedia, an expert-based encyclopedia.¹⁶ Frustrated by Nupedia's slow growth, they came up with the idea of a version that could be edited freely and quickly (*wiki* means "quick" in Hawaiian), and English Wikipedia took off rapidly. A German edition followed shortly thereafter, and since then, editions have developed in some 280 languages, each with their own content and editorial policies and totaling more than thirty-six million articles. Wikipedia's English-language version is by far the largest, with nearly five million articles as of this writing. By article count alone, this makes English Wikipedia about forty times the estimated size of the prestigious *Encyclopedia Britannica*, first printed in 1768 and now published solely in online form with over 120,000 articles.¹⁷

This staggering growth can largely be attributed to a single Wikipedia feature—by following some basic rules, almost anyone can write or edit most of its articles. This feature is at once Wikipedia's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. "Wikipedia," explains Andrew Lih, "is a human-centered endeavor that invites participation on a massive scale. It usurps top-down authority, empowers individuals, and harnesses previously untapped labor of individuals previously isolated in separate social networks, but brought together by the Internet."¹⁸ Wikipedia, says computer scientist Besiki Stvilia, "changes a traditional positivist approach toward encyclopedia construction, which assumes that there is always one truth and a certain predictable level of quality, to a constructivist, 'grounded' approach, which assumes that there are always multiple truths and quality, and that they change over time."¹⁹

In both theory and practice, though, Wikipedia is far from the freewheeling editing environment that its structure suggests. For one thing, Wikipedia has long adhered to some key principles often called the "five pillars."²⁰ They can be summarized as follows: (i) Wikipedia is an encyclopedia—not a dictionary,²¹ a place to sell one's wares or services, a blogging forum, or a social networking site;²² (ii) articles adopt a neutral point of view, which includes "document[ing] and explain[ing] the major points of view, giving

16. *Id.*; see also LIH, *supra* note 1.

17. Compare, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopædia_Britannica (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (citing the 2008 version of the home page of Britannica as giving a 120,000-article count) with *Britannica in the Digital Era*, ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/186618/Encyclopaedia-Britannica/301350/Britannica-in-the-digital-era> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (measuring the size of the Britannica website by words (forty million) instead of by articles).

18. LIH, *supra* note 1, at 111.

19. Besiki Stvilia, Michael B. Twidale, Linda C. Smith, & Less Gasser, *Information Quality Work Organization in Wikipedia*, 59 J. AM. SOC'Y FOR INFO. SCI. & TECH. 983, 998 (2008).

20. *Wikipedia: Five Pillars*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

21. But see the companion project, WIKTIONARY, *supra* note 11.

22. *Wikipedia: What Wikipedia Is Not*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

due weight with respect to their prominence in an impartial tone”;²³ (iii) Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute, and thus anything that smacks of using Wikipedia for commercial gain attracts censure from the Wikipedia community;²⁴ (iv) Wikipedia has a code of conduct, or “Wikiquote,” that requires editors to treat one another with respect and civility;²⁵ and (v) Wikipedia has no firm rules, which means that “principles and spirit matter more than their literal wording, and sometimes improving Wikipedia requires making an exception.”²⁶

These principles are fleshed out in a number of specific policies and practices. For example, for an article to be included in Wikipedia, it should abide by three core content policies: neutral point of view (NPOV), verifiability (V), and no original research (NOR).²⁷ Wikipedia is meant to be an encyclopedia, after all. Thus, Wikipedians are alert to articles or edits that include “facts, allegations, and ideas . . . for which no reliable, published sources exist.”²⁸ It is not uncommon for articles to be peppered with “citation needed” admonitions inserted by watchful Wikipedians, or to see an article prefaced by warnings that it may violate NPOV, V, or NOR and be marked for possible deletion.

Such policies and practices grew out of trial by fire. Consider the Talk page. A Talk page tab, next to the Article tab, accompanies every Wikipedia article, and is one of Wikipedia’s cleverest innovations for promoting article development. Such innovations, says writing instructor James Purdy, “make more visible the complex, rich, messy processes usually kept behind the closed doors of the academy.”²⁹ In the two years following Wikipedia’s creation, many “Talk pages” accused editors of violating NPOV. Verifiability, hardwired in academic thinking but not necessarily in that of the general public, evolved out of this difficult period as a way of increasing article reliability. Verifiability was also seen as helping “to ensure that notable views would be represented, under the assumption that the most notable views were easiest to document

23. *Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

24. *Wikipedia: Copyrights*, WIKIPEDIA, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Copyrights> (last visited Nov. 15, 2015).

25. *Wikipedia: List of Policies: Conduct*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_policies#Conduct (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); see also *Wikipedia: Etiquette*, WIKIPEDIA, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Etiquette> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

26. *Ignore All Rules*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ignore_all_rules (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

27. The acronyms are Wikipedia (WP) shortcuts. Entering “WP:V” into Wikipedia’s search engine, for example, leads to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability>, which explains the verifiability policy in detail.

28. *Wikipedia: Core Content Policies*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Core_content_policies (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

29. James P. Purdy, *When the Tenets of Composition Go Public: A Study of Writing in Wikipedia*, 61 C. COMPOSITION & COMM., 351, 352 (2009).

with sources.”³⁰ In ensuring a degree of notability, Wikipedians do not claim that all views are equal, but “acknowledge that some views are held by more people than others.”³¹

Over time, English Wikipedia and some other Wikipedias have gradually restricted the ease of modifying articles. Wikipedia has always had an important feature—a complete revision history for every article, accessible through the article’s “View history” tab. It allows for any previous version of an article to be restored if, for instance, it is vandalized. The feature thus restricts anyone from doing long-term damage to Wikipedia articles. Another restriction that has emerged in English Wikipedia and some other language editions is that only registered users can create new articles.³² The restriction is not an onerous one, since it is easy to register a Wikipedia account. But registering an account and having one’s username forever linked to one’s edits through the revision history is likely to induce a level of accountability and credibility that does not exist for the purely anonymous editor who can edit, but not write, Wikipedia articles. Registered users are also able to maintain “watchlists” so that they are notified when edits occur to articles that interest them; this, too, allows for informal monitoring of changes to Wikipedia’s content.

Registered users can also become “administrators,” who, despite the connotations, are not paid staff of Wikimedia Foundation, but those who, through a record of contributing to Wikipedia’s development, receive certain privileges. These privileges include the ability to block and unblock user accounts and IP addresses from editing, to protect and unprotect pages from editing, to delete and undelete pages, to rename pages without restriction, and to use certain other tools.³³ English Wikipedia currently has about 1330 administrators who fulfill these important monitoring roles.³⁴ Thus, in English Wikipedia and some others, certain sensitive or vandalism-prone pages are now protected to some degree and, in some cases, review is required before edits are finalized.³⁵ For example, the article on U.S. President Barack Obama is both a featured article—indicating a high level of quality as determined by the Wikipedia community—and “semi-protected,”³⁶ meaning that it can be

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

32. Wikipedia identifies an unregistered user by the user’s computer’s IP (Internet protocol) address, which becomes public when edits are made. A registered user is identified with the person’s username.

33. See *Wikipedia: Administrators*, WIKIPEDIA, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

34. *Id.*

35. *Wikipedia: Protection Policy*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

36. *Barack Obama*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama (last visited Nov. 18, 2015). The “featured article” status is indicated in the title line by a star icon, the “semi-protected” status, by a padlock icon.

edited only by registered users who have already edited a certain number of Wikipedia articles. In a similar but more rigorous vein, German Wikipedia maintains “stable versions” of articles that have passed certain reviews.³⁷ Apart from this, Wikipedia has been working since 2004 toward having a stable offline version, called Wikipedia 1.0, comprising a subset of high-quality articles that are ranked using a detailed assessment rubric, discussed below.

Wikipedians can make their mark with one of two editing systems: the classic markup system or the newer “VisualEditor.” The classic wiki markup, also known as “wikicode” and perhaps most commonly as “wikitext,” is a simplified version of HyperText Markup Language (HTML), the language used to create web pages.³⁸ When someone creates or edits an article with wikitext, the information is turned into HTML by MediaWiki and becomes a Wikipedia page.³⁹ Wikitext provides countless commands that allow contributors to apply anything from bold text (`bold text`) to flag icons (`{{flagicon|CountryName}}`) to an article. The “Edit” page on a Wikipedia article allows for many of the basic commands to be entered with the click of a button.⁴⁰ A drawback of wikitext is its unfamiliarity—for many, using an HTML-like language to create a Wikipedia article may seem daunting. For newcomers or those new to wikitext, Wikipedia has developed the VisualEditor. Wikipedians can now bypass the markup language and see their work as it would appear publicly while adding or editing content.⁴¹ Wikimedia Foundation has expressed hope that this option will encourage more participation on Wikipedia by making editing more accessible to new users.⁴²

Editors are also supposed to craft citations pursuant to Wikipedia’s verifiability policy, but are not directed to use a particular citation format. Instead, Wikipedians may choose from several citation styles, as long as they use a consistent style throughout an article. English Wikipedia suggests

37. See *German Wikipedia*, *supra* note 3. For an attempt at doing something similar on English Wikipedia, see *Flagged Revisions*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagged_revisions (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
38. *Wikipedia: Version 1.0 Editorial Team*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Version_1.0_Editorial_Team (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
39. *Help: Wiki Markup*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Wiki_markup (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
40. To experience Wikipedia’s wikitext editing platform first-hand, see *Wikipedia: Sandbox*, WIKIPEDIA, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sandbox> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015), and click the “Edit” link near the top right-hand corner of the page.
41. *Wikipedia: VisualEditor/User Guide*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:VisualEditor/User_guide (last visited Nov. 18, 2015). To test VisualEditor without having to actually edit a Wikipedia article, see *VisualEditor “Project Sandbox”*, WIKIPEDIA, <http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Project:Sandbox?veaction=edit> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
42. *Wikipedia: VisualEditor*, WIKIPEDIA, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:VisualEditor> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

using a variation of APA style outlined in a “how-to” guide,⁴³ and lists APA, ASA, MLA, Chicago, Author-Date referencing, Vancouver, and Bluebook as examples of acceptable citation styles.⁴⁴

Any change to a Wikipedia article, no matter how small, should be explained in the “Edit summary” box at the bottom of the page.⁴⁵ This information is displayed to other editors on the page history to ensure a common understanding of why the changes were made and to hold editors accountable for their edits, thereby preserving the collaborative nature of Wikipedia in the process.

Wikipedia and Higher Education

Wikipedia has played two primary roles in higher education, serving as both a learning tool and a source of information. As a public platform that anyone can edit, Wikipedia gives students the opportunity to learn through their contributions. Like a double-edged sword, however, the ability for anyone to contribute to Wikipedia articles has caused concern in academia regarding the accuracy, thoroughness, and objectivity of Wikipedia’s contributions and has led to debate over Wikipedia’s usefulness in higher education.

Instructors and academic institutions have responded to the rise of Wikipedia in diverse ways. Some, such as Middlebury College’s history department, have banned the citation of Wikipedia in academic projects.⁴⁶ Others allow the use of Wikipedia with some restrictions. Meghan Sweeney, who taught a research-focused English composition course using Wikipedia, notes the hypocrisy of banning Wikipedia as a resource tool when many academics use it for their own preliminary research.⁴⁷ She suggests that instructors instead use Wikipedia exercises to improve students’ information literacy, which can in turn help them understand the sources of information available on Wikipedia and make more critical decisions about the information they are consuming.⁴⁸ Similarly, reference librarian and fiction writer Jeff Maehre suggests that instructors should let students cite Wikipedia and assess the value of their citations based on the validity of the content rather than the validity of the

43. *Wikipedia: Citing Sources/Example Style*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources/Example_style (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

44. *Id.*; see also *Wikipedia: Citing Sources; Citation Style*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources#Citation_style (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

45. *Help: Edit Summary*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Edit_summary (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

46. Noam Cohen, *A History Department Bans Citing Wikipedia as a Research Source*, N.Y. TIMES B8 (May 10, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/21/education/21wikipedia.html>.

47. Meghan Sweeney, *The Wikipedia Project: Changing Students from Consumers to Producers*, 39 TEACHING ENG. TWO-YEAR C. 256, 257 (2012).

48. *Id.* at 257.

source.⁴⁹ After all, in many disciplines students are trained not only on how to understand information but also on how to seek it out and determine whether some sources are more or less compelling than others.⁵⁰ As this debate plays out, educators like Sweeney and Machre argue that when teachers embrace Wikipedia as a place for their students to contribute their knowledge, students can become more critical consumers of information and learn to use Wikipedia more effectively.

Though some instructors have independently adopted Wikipedia as a platform for developing class assignments,⁵¹ Wikimedia Foundation began promoting the idea in 2010 by introducing the Wikipedia Education Project (WEP).⁵² It seeks to encourage student contributions to Wikipedia by fostering Wikipedia's use in coursework.⁵³ The WEP has had a marked impact on the quality of the information available on Wikipedia: A 2012 Wikipedia study suggested that eighty-eight percent of the articles reviewed were improved to some extent by student edits.⁵⁴

The WEP offers resources to help instructors implement the program, including campus ambassadors who can provide hands-on Wikipedia training for instructors and students⁵⁵ and a sample syllabus for a Wikipedia assignment.⁵⁶ The program has gained a fan base: In four years, over 10,000

49. Jeff Machre, *What it Means to Ban Wikipedia: An Exploration of the Pedagogical Principles at Stake*, 57 C. TEACHING 229, 230 (2009).
50. Law school places significant emphasis on learning the weight that should be afforded to sources in a precedent-based system. For a brief discussion of legal research training and the value of information literacy in law school curriculum, see Ellie Margolis & Kristen E. Murray, *Say Goodbye to the Books: Information Literacy as the New Legal Research Paradigm* (Temple Univ. Research Paper No. 2012-34, online: Social Science Research Network, Aug. 6, 2012), <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2125278>.
51. See, e.g., Cheryl L. Moy, Jonas R. Locke, Brian P. Coppola, & Anne J. McNeil, *Improving Science Education and Understanding Through Editing Wikipedia*, 87 J. CHEMICAL EDUC. 1159 (2010) (describing collaborative Wikipedia assignments in graduate-level chemistry courses in 2008 and 2009, before implementation of the Wikipedia Education Program (WEP)).
52. *Wikipedia Education Program*, WIKIPEDIA, https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Wikipedia_Education_Program (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
53. *Id.*
54. LiAnna Davis, *Education Program Students Improve Wikipedia Article Quality*, WIKIMEDIA BLOG (Oct. 4, 2012), <https://blog.wikimedia.org/2012/10/04/spring-2012-wikipedia-education-program-quality>. For a more in-depth article on the studies, methodology, data sets and results, see *Wikipedia: Education Ambassadors/Research/Article Quality/Results*, WIKIPEDIA https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ambassadors/Research/Article_quality/Results (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
55. *Wikipedia: Education Program/Ambassadors*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Education_program/Ambassadors (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
56. See *Education/Syllabi*, WIKIMEDIA, <http://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education/Syllabi> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); *The Syllabus: A 12-Week Assignment to Write a Wikipedia Article*, WIKIPEDIA EDUC. PROGRAM, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ef/Sample_Syllabus_for_Wikipedia_assignment.pdf (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (hereinafter *WEP Syllabus*).

students have participated in the WEP by contributing to more than 10,000 Wikipedia articles in multiple languages.⁵⁷

While Wikipedia benefits from student contributions, it may be that the students receive the greater benefit of developing useful research and writing skills. Today's students rely heavily on electronic sources, and many are inclined to use Wikipedia at least for preliminary research. For instance, a 2012 study on student perceptions of Wikipedia found that 92% of respondents in a freshman course and 72% of respondents in an upper-year course at a large public university used Wikipedia as a research tool when writing academic papers.⁵⁸ Furthermore, only 33% of respondents from the upper-year course said they would never cite to Wikipedia in an academic paper.⁵⁹ After completing Wikipedia assignments in their courses, however, students' perceptions of Wikipedia as a valid resource decreased.⁶⁰ Based on the respondents' feedback, the researchers found "that the experience of creating a Wikipedia topic entry opened [the students'] eyes to the processes continuously operating behind Wikipedia entries and . . . they realized that the quality of Web-based resources depends on the efforts of authors and editors."⁶¹

The 2012 study demonstrates how contributing to Wikipedia can develop students' information literacy. Similarly, Sweeney found in her project that student contributions to Wikipedia "[were] successful in getting students to answer their own questions . . . [and gave] students an opportunity to compose in a multimedia environment, which 'enhances notions of audience, purpose, genre, form, and context.'"⁶² Most students simply use the information they find online. However, when they are turned into producers of information by editing Wikipedia articles, they must take a critical eye to their sources and learn how to use online information effectively in order to avoid having their work flagged or deleted by Wikipedia's online community. In essence, the exercise helps students develop their information literacy for the purposes of completing a successful project and, in turn, they become better consumers of information because they learn how to better evaluate the legitimacy of online sources.⁶³

57. *Education/About*, WIKIMEDIA OUTREACH, <http://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education/About> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

58. Tomoko Traphagan John Traphagan, Linda Neavel Dickens, & Paul Resta, *Changes in College Students' Perceptions of Use of Web-Based Resources for Academic Tasks with Wikipedia Projects: A Preliminary Exploration*, 22 INTERACTIVE LEARNING ENV'TS 253, 258 (2012).

59. *Id.* at 259.

60. *Id.* at 261-62.

61. *Id.* at 268.

62. Sweeney, *supra* note 47, at 256.

63. *Id.* at 257.

Students may also develop a heightened awareness of audience and purpose as a benefit of completing Wikipedia projects.⁶⁴ Students participating in one project became aware of the need to not only write for their audience but also to provide information that enriches articles and avoids unnecessary or redundant information.⁶⁵ As Wikipedia articles appear in an encyclopedic context, unlike many university writing assignments that are created for one course, Wikipedia editors have an added responsibility of evaluating whether the information they wish to present on a page could better fit on another page or has already been covered by another editor. Furthermore, the exercise of editing a Wikipedia article often requires that editors balance and synthesize different voices,⁶⁶ creating learning challenges and opportunities when striving for consistency in one's writing.

Perhaps most important, completing Wikipedia projects can empower students with the confidence to believe in and deem their work sufficiently rigorous for publication. James Purdy notes that Wikipedia and wikis ask us to “reexamine our expectations for the stability of research materials and who should participate in public knowledge making.”⁶⁷ Sweeney also notes the value of placing students in an expert role: By perceiving themselves as “experts” on their selected topic (in her course, an aspect of youth subculture), students have the confidence to present their material to the public and potentially to engage in online discussions with other Wikipedia participants.⁶⁸

In more specialized fields, instructors have explored the benefit of training students to explain technical concepts in straightforward language.⁶⁹ This exercise, in and of itself, appears to encourage more rigorous study of the material; because the project is publicly available, the information becomes more accessible.⁷⁰ Perhaps the most ambitious endeavor in this regard is the Wiki Project Med Foundation, a nonprofit corporation whose goal is “to provide the sum of all medical knowledge to all people in their own language.”⁷¹ Headed by Wikipedia enthusiast and University of British Columbia clinical professor James Heilman,⁷² Wiki Project Med is working to this goal by collaborating with various partners. These include Translators

64. *Id.* at 262.

65. *Id.* at 262.

66. Purdy, *supra* note 29, at 352.

67. *Id.* at 352.

68. Sweeney, *supra* note 47, at 257-58.

69. See Moy et al., *supra* note 51, at 1160.

70. *Id.* at 1161.

71. *Wiki Project Med*, WIKIMEDIA FOUND., https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wiki_Project_Med (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

72. *Id.* See also Rosie Lombardi, *Canadian Doctor Leads Wiki Project Med Foundation*, TECH. FOR DOCTORS, <http://www.canhealth.com/tfdnews1073.html> (July 31, 2014).

Without Borders⁷³ and University of California San Francisco, where fourth-year medical students have edited Wikipedia for credit in a one-month elective course over three academic cycles.⁷⁴ Amin Azzam, associate clinical professor at the UCSF School of Medicine and course instructor, notes that “Wikipedia generates more than 53 million page views just for articles about medications each month, and is second to Google as the most frequently used source by junior physicians.”⁷⁵ However, Azzam found that “there is a clear need to bring medicine articles up to par,”⁷⁶ and so has focused on articles that are frequently visited but are of low quality for one reason or another.⁷⁷ So far, Azzam’s students have edited twenty-eight such articles, resulting in improvements to most of them and significant improvements to several, as measured by Wikipedia’s own quality metrics.⁷⁸

Another such project is the Association for Psychological Science’s APS Wikipedia Initiative. Over 3,300 psychological scientists and students have edited and rated Wikipedia articles to ensure that Wikipedia’s psychology articles are complete and accurate. As noted by the APS Wikipedia Initiative website, “When the general public searches for information about psychology, the top results are Wikipedia articles. . . . As psychological scientists, it’s your responsibility to ensure the psychology information on Wikipedia is reliable.”⁷⁹

How does this translate to law and legal education? There is relatively little academic discussion of using Wikipedia as a learning tool in legal education.

73. TRANSLATORS WITHOUT BORDERS, <http://translatorswithoutborders.org> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
74. *Wikipedia: WikiProject Medicine/UCSF*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Medicine/UCSF (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
75. Juliana Bunim, *UCSF First U.S. Medical School to Offer Credit For Wikipedia Articles*, UNIV. CAL. S. F. NEWS (Sept. 26, 2013), <http://www.ucsf.edu/news/2013/09/109201/ucsf-first-us-medical-school-offer-credit-wikipedia-articles>.
76. *Id.*
77. *Id.* See also *WikiProject Medicine/UCSF*, *supra* note 74. Wiki Project Med., *Editing Wikipedia for a Med Student Rotation-Dr. Azzam*, YOUTUBE (Mar. 5, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOXDol3jl14> (interviewing Dr. Amin Azzam, Associate Professor at University of California San Francisco School of Medicine).
78. See Mihir Joshi, Evans Whitaker & Amin Azzam, *The Implementation of a Wikipedia Elective to Provide Writing[-] and Research[-]Based Learning to Fourth-Year Medical School Students and to Develop Free-Access Medical Knowledge*, W. GRP. ON EDUC. AFFAIRS, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e1/Wiki_medicine_presentation_-_UCSF_medical_education_-_spring_2015_WGEA_conference_-_poster.pdf (2015) (Poster for WGEA Conference). Articles that went from “start class” or “C-class” to “B-class” (see discussion of Wikipedia’s quality classes, *infra*) can be considered to have improved significantly. According to the cited study, the following articles would qualify as such: “Hepatitis,” “Diabetes,” “Amyloidosis,” “Cholecystitis,” “Toxic epidermal necrolysis,” “Placental abruption,” “Therapeutic hypothermia,” “Premature rupture of membranes,” “Umbilical cord prolapse” and “Omphalitis of newborn.”
79. *APS Wikipedia Initiative*, ASS’N FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SCI., <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/members/aps-wikipedia-initiative> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

However, some insight is provided by Brian Carver, who assigned Wikipedia projects in two graduate-level law courses at University of California, Berkeley. In these courses—Cyberlaw and Intellectual Property Law for the Information Industries—Carver’s students reported a “higher degree of engagement with a Wikipedia assignment as compared with traditional writing assignments,”⁸⁰ which contributed to earnest development of collaboration and information literacy skills that are invaluable for successful law practice. As the following section suggests, however, the legal community is ambivalent about Wikipedia as a citation-worthy resource. That ambivalence presents a hurdle to its acceptance in the law school curriculum. Let us turn, then, to consider Wikipedia’s role in law and its potential role in legal education.

Wikipedia and Law

As it does in the academic community generally, Wikipedia has both proponents and detractors in law and legal scholarship. Most commentators have focused on the propriety of citing Wikipedia in court opinions, litigation briefs, and law review articles.⁸¹ Some of the literature adopts a fervent tone, even advocating a ban on all citations to Wikipedia articles, like that imposed by Middlebury College’s history department. Other responses have been more measured, concluding that it may be inappropriate to cite Wikipedia in some situations, such as for key issues of fact or law, yet appropriate in others, such as for referencing uncontested facts, supporting judicial quips or tangential points, or addressing issues where there is a comparatively large “wealth of knowledge and passion among netizens.”⁸²

Two U.S. appeal cases from 2008, and commentary on them, illustrate the divergence in views. In *Badasa v. Mukasey*,⁸³ the Eighth Circuit remanded an immigration decision in which the Department of Homeland Security had successfully relied on a Wikipedia article on *laissez-passer* to argue that such a non-passport document—often issued for one-way travel for humanitarian reasons—could not be used to establish an asylum-seeker’s identity. The court’s

80. Brian W. Carver, Rochelle Davis, Robin T. Kelley, Jonathan A. Obar, & Lianna L. Davis, *Assigning Students to Edit Wikipedia: Four Case Studies*, 9 E-LEARNING & DIGITAL MEDIA 273, 275 (2012). The case studies contributed by the co-authors were from courses in political science, women’s health and human rights, and media and communications policy.

81. See, e.g., Diane Murley, *In Defense of Wikipedia*, 100 L. LIBR. J. 593 (2008); Lee Peoples, *The Citation of Wikipedia in Judicial Opinions*, 12 YALE J.L. & TECH. 1 (2009); Joseph Gerken, *How Courts Use Wikipedia*, 11 J. APP. PRAC. & PROCESS 191 (2010); Jason C. Miller & Hannah B. Murray, *Wikipedia in Court: When and How Citing Wikipedia and Other Consensus Websites is Appropriate*, 84 ST. JOHN’S L. REV. 633 (2010); Daniel J. Baker, *A Jester’s Promenade: Citations to Wikipedia in Law Reviews, 2002-2008*, 7 I/S: J.L. & POL’Y 361 (2012); Brittany McIntosh, *Gamecocks Spur Trouble in Jury Deliberations*, 64 S.C. L. REV. 1157 (2013); Rex Shoyama, *Citations to Wikipedia in Canadian Law Journal and Law Review Articles*, 39 CAN. L. LIBR. REV. 12 (2014).

82. Miller & Murray, *supra* note 81, at 642 (quoting Anupam Chander, *Judge Posner and Other Federal Judges Cite Wikipedia in Decisions*, CHANDER.COM, (Jan. 30, 2007) http://www.chander.com/2007/01/judge_posner_an.html (original link no longer directs to article)).

83. 540 F.3d 909 (8th Cir. 2008).

opinion included a critique of Wikipedia's reliability generally and said that the immigration judge and Board of Immigration Appeals had erred by not independently determining that the asylum-seeker had failed to establish her identity. In contrast, in *Rickher v. Home Depot, Inc.*,⁸⁴ the Seventh Circuit had no problem in citing the Wikipedia article "Wear and tear" when interpreting Home Depot's damage waiver for rented equipment. The allegations in that class action were that the waiver violated trade practices legislation because Home Depot's rental contract already protected customers from liability for "wear and tear." The appellant cited a dictionary definition of the phrase to argue that it was equivalent to "damage." The Court, pointing to the Wikipedia entry, concluded that "wear and tear" is a more specific (and more common) phrase "that connotes the expected, often gradual, depreciation of an item."⁸⁵

Wikipedia detractors object to such use of Wikipedia in the courts—that is, to address the very points in issue.⁸⁶ However, blaming Wikipedia may not only be misplaced but may also fail to differentiate the contexts in which it is used. In *Badasa*, for example, the Wikipedia article was a stub with the warning: "This article does not cite any references or sources. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed."⁸⁷ Given that caveat, and given the specialized nature of the term *laissez-passer*, the lower courts' reliance on the article was misplaced. But even if the same issue were to arise now with an improved version of "Laissez-passer,"⁸⁸ it would hardly be appropriate to rely solely on Wikipedia where a forced return to one's homeland could mean imprisonment or worse. In contrast, the Seventh Circuit's reference to competing definitions of "wear and tear" was only an introductory reference to a well-known expression in an otherwise extended analysis of a commercial matter. The court went on to consider the language of the damage waiver and rental agreement, maxims of contract construction, and other case law dealing with the phrase "wear and tear," including a 2007 Southern District of Florida decision dealing with the same waiver.⁸⁹ Wikipedia supported, but hardly determined, the legal issue in the case. The basic notion is that in both cases, and thousands of others, good practice dictates responsible research and reliance on appropriate authorities.

84. 535 F.3d 661 (7th Cir. 2008).

85. *Id.* at 666.

86. See, e.g., Peoples, *supra* note 81, at 7-8 (addressing *Badasa* and noting Eugene Volokh's comment on the "troubling" aspect of the case); *id.* at 11-12 (addressing *Rickher*); *id.* at 51 (concluding that "judges should be careful before relying on the wisdom of the crowds who create and edit Wikipedia content.").

87. *Laissez-Passer*, WIKIPEDIA (June 1, 2008) <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Laissez-passer&oldid=216352972> (permanent link—more on which below—to the article).

88. The article now redirects into a section of a more general article on travel documents. See Wikipedia, *Travel Document*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travel_document (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

89. *Rickher*, 535 F.3d at 667 (citing *Jeff Enters. v. Home Depot U.S.A., Inc.*, No. 07-60302-CIV-ALTONAGA/Turnoff, 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 97505 (S.D. Fla., July 27, 2007)).

Wikipedia may be a good starting point for such research and reliance; it is rarely a good ending point. But that is also true for a miscellany of other secondary sources, including print encyclopedias, dictionaries, treatises, and news articles.

Even those who generally shun citing to Wikipedia recognize that some of us will do so anyway, leading to the question of *how* to cite an entry when we do. These commentators have argued for requiring a permanent link to the entry as viewed by the author citing it.⁹⁰ Take, for example, the Wikipedia article “Supreme Court of Canada,” with the URL:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_Canada.

Authors should provide at least the article title and URL in a citation; typically, it is also good practice to provide a date of last access. But because the entry may change significantly by the time the author’s work is published, it may be important to be able to see the entry as the author did. Fortunately, Wikipedia provides an easy way to do just that. By selecting “Permanent link” from the Tools menus on the left-hand side of the Wikipedia page for the article, one gets a different URL, which, at the time of writing, was:

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Supreme_Court_of_Canada&oldid=659078268.

A Wikipedia template explains:

This is the current revision of this page, as edited by 209.29.54.87 (talk) at 02:06, 25 April 2015 (→ Current members). The present address (URL) is a permanent link to this version.

Thus on 25 April 2015 at 2:06 UTC,⁹¹ an anonymous user with IP address 209.29.54.87 edited the article, and this is the version viewed by the author who is citing it. Below this information, one can cycle through an article’s previous and subsequent revisions:

(diff) ← Previous revision | Latest revision (diff) | Newer revision → (diff)

Going back a couple of revisions, one finds this statement:

This is an old revision of this page, as edited by Tzvecl (talk | contribs) at 16:16, 24 April 2015 (→ Current members: Noted Rothstein’s announced retirement date.). The present address (URL) is a permanent link to this revision, which may differ significantly from the current revision.

90. See Peoples, *supra* note 81; Baker, *supra* note 81.

91. Wikipedia reports the times of all edits in Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), an international standard (with an international acronym) that, for practical purposes, is equivalent to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). *Coordinated Universal Time*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coordinated_Universal_Time (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

Here, a registered user (Tzvecl—a whimsical reference to an eye chart line?) has explained the change, in accordance with good Wikipedia editing practice. In the section of the article on the court's current members, Tzvecl added a note regarding the announcement of Justice Rothstein's then-pending retirement, effective 31 August 2015.

Citing to a permanent link may be apropos if the chief purpose of referencing a Wikipedia entry is to fulfill the documentary function of citation—that is, to support a factual statement on which the author is relying. But if the chief function is bibliographic—to help the reader find the entry and perhaps learn more about the subject being cited—that purpose may be served just as well, if not better, by citing to the basic URL that terminates with the name of the entry. It might be pedantic to insist on a permanent link in all cases; indeed, we have not done so in the citations in this Article. Judge Paciocco, previously a well-known professor on the law of evidence and now a justice of the Ontario Superior Court, feels “liberated enough” to rely on Wikipedia for “basic matters such as the functioning of telephones,” and in doing so is content to cite to the Wikipedia article “Telephone” without worrying about presenting a particular version of it.⁹²

What is the scope and quality of Wikipedia's contribution to legal knowledge? This is an important question in its own right, and especially important for anyone contemplating a Wikipedia project for law school credit.

A measure of scope can be found in Wikipedia's “Index of law articles,” which, at this writing, alphabetically lists about 4000 articles on a wide range of subjects, from abandonment to zoning.⁹³ This is an approximation, as development of the index is ongoing, and users are invited to continue updating it. Apart from this, Wikipedia also has a general outline of law; although needing work, it provides a good starting point for understanding Wikipedia's coverage of different areas of law.⁹⁴ An important category in this outline is that of “list articles.”⁹⁵ The list article is a particularly useful navigation and overview tool in Wikipedia: It compiles a list of topics, with each list topic hyperlinked to the relevant Wikipedia article and, in some cases, accompanied by an annotation or summary. There are list articles on case law in varying states of completion or sophistication, including cases involving

92. David Paciocco, *Proof and Progress: Coping with the Law of Evidence in a Technological Age*, 11 CAN. J.L. & TECH. 181, 190 n33, 191 n35 (2013) (citing to *Telephone*, WIKIPEDIA, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telephone> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015) (a semi-protected article).

93. *Index of Law Articles*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index_of_law_articles (last visited Nov. 18, 2015). The count was generated by pasting the list from the Edit page into a spreadsheet. A comparable count is available from Table 1, *infra*. Totaling all law articles from “C-class” to “Featured article” in that table yields a count of 4075 articles.

94. *Outline of Law*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_law (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

95. *Outline of Law Lists*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_law#Lists (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

Lord Denning,⁹⁶ class actions,⁹⁷ and trademarks.⁹⁸ There are lists of legislatures by country,⁹⁹ of legislation,¹⁰⁰ of U.S. Supreme Court Justices,¹⁰¹ and many other topics. An important related project, Wikisource, is compiling primary law associated with some of these topics. For instance, about 24,000 U.S. Supreme Court decisions have been imported into Wikisource by a “bot”—software that can be automated to perform various tasks, particularly text-based tasks—and subsequently proofread by human editors and organized by volume, chronologically and alphabetically.¹⁰² An ongoing Wikipedia project, “WikiProject Law,” is also devoted to improving consistency in law-related articles, to categorizing and organizing legal knowledge, and to providing tools for assessing article quality and importance.¹⁰³

Table 1, downloaded from the WikiProject Law page, depicts the overall assessment of Wikipedia law articles in tabular form. Vertically, the table attempts to measure article quality, starting with the highest-quality levels—“feature article” (FA) and “feature list” (FL)—and moving from there to “good article” (GA), B-class and C-class articles, “starts,” “stubs” and so on. Quality levels are determined by applying detailed criteria. For example, a “good article” is well-written, verifiable by inline citations to reliable sources, broad in coverage, neutral, stable, and, if possible, illustrated by copyright-compliant images.¹⁰⁴ Even a B-class article is of a high standard, being “mostly complete and without major problems, [though requiring] some further work to reach good article standards.”¹⁰⁵ Horizontally, the table attempts to

96. *List of Cases Involving Lord Denning*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cases_involving_Lord_Denning (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

97. *List of Class-Action Lawsuits*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_class-action_lawsuits (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

98. *List of Trademark Case Law*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_trademark_case_law (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

99. *List of Legislatures by Country*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_legislatures_by_country (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

100. *Lists of Legislation*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_legislation (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

101. *Lists of Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Justices_of_the_Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

102. *Category: United States Supreme Court Decisions*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Category:United_States_Supreme_Court_decisions (last visited Nov. 18, 2015); *Portal: Supreme Court of the United States*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Portal:Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

103. *See WikiProject Law*, WIKISOURCE, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Wikisource:WikiProject_Law (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

104. *See WikiProject Law/Assessment Quality Scale*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Law/Assessment#Quality_scale (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

105. *Id.*

measure an article's status or importance, ranging from "top" to "low," with a "???" category indicating that the status remains to be assessed. Criteria for importance are not meant to be "absolute or canonical" but try to gauge the likelihood that an average reader will need to look up the topic.¹⁰⁶

Each of the table's cells contains the number of articles corresponding to the dual quality-importance ranking as assessed by Wikipedia's scheme. These numbers are hyperlinked to lists of the articles themselves. For example, clicking on the "1" in the "List" quality and "Top" importance cell leads to the single article, "List of landmark United Kingdom House of Lords cases."¹⁰⁷ Clicking on the "7" in the "Featured article" quality and "High" importance cell links to seven articles: "Antonin Scalia,"¹⁰⁸ "Learned Hand,"¹⁰⁹ "Regents of the University of California v. Bakke,"¹¹⁰ "Report of 1800,"¹¹¹ "Royal Assent,"¹¹² "Same-sex marriage in Spain,"¹¹³ and "Voting Rights Act of 1965."¹¹⁴

This table suggests a useful starting point for picking articles to work on for a law school Wikipedia project. Many of the articles falling between "stub" and B-class quality would be good candidates for improvement. We have provided a list of law stub articles in the Appendix as a potential resource for North American law schools. Even articles classified as "Low" importance may, on further investigation, turn out to be worthy of attention. For instance, one of the articles rated "start class" in quality and "low" in importance is "Access Copyright."¹¹⁵ Given the controversy over Access Copyright's arrangements with Canadian post-secondary schools in recent years, the topic likely warrants

106. See *WikiProject Law/Assessment Importance Assessment*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Law/Assessment#Importance_assessment (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
107. *List of Landmark United Kingdom House of Lords Cases*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_landmark_United_Kingdom_House_of_Lords_cases (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
108. *Antonin Scalia*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonin_Scalia (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
109. *Learned Hand*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learned_Hand (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
110. *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regents_of_the_University_of_California_v._Bakke (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
111. *Report of 1800*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Report_of_1800 (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
112. *Royal Assent*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Assent (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
113. *Same-Sex Marriage in Spain*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_Spain (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
114. *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_Rights_Act_of_1965 (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).
115. *Access Copyright*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Access_Copyright (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

a higher designation than “low” importance, and improving the article with more relevant content would likely have the effect of increasing its status.

Law articles by quality and importance							
Quality	Importance						Total
	Top	High	Mid	Low	NA	???	
FA		7	14	47		1	69
FL		1	3	7			11
GA	6	16	78	205		7	312
B	37	108	266	434	3	231	1,079
C	27	109	313	1,645	3	507	2,604
Start	76	387	1,324	7,136	35	1,882	10,840
Stub	4	86	762	6,293	33	1,930	9,108
List	1	14	21	1,118	20	281	1,455
Book			1		8		9
Category		2	1	1	4,015		4,019
Disambig			2	15	86		103
File					8		8
Portal				1	15		16
Project				1	13		14
Redirect		3	1	10	158	3	175
Template			1	13	366		380
NA			1		1		2
Other				31		63	94
Assessed	151	733	2,788	16,957	4,764	4,905	30,298
Unassessed						31	31
Total	151	733	2,788	16,957	4,764	4,936	30,329
WikiWork factors (?)	$\omega = 121,028$			$\Omega = 5.13$			

Table 1: Number of Wikipedia law articles, ranked by quality and importance.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Law (18 October 2015).

An alternative approach to choosing articles for assignments would be to review the list of “requested articles” on legal topics. This requires explaining

another Wikipedia innovation. Any editor can link to another Wikipedia article for a term or phrase simply by enclosing double square brackets around a term, like this: [[Journal of Legal Education]]. If the linked article already exists in Wikipedia, the edit, once saved, will show in blue text, commonly used for indicating hyperlinks. Clicking on the term or phrase will take the reader to that article. But if no article by that name exists, the text will appear in red, signifying a request that an article be created on it. Wikipedia has “tens of thousands of redlinked suggestions,”¹¹⁶ many of which relate to law and are grouped rather idiosyncratically on a Wikipedia page.¹¹⁷ For the student who already has some editing experience and wants to write a new article, this grouping may be a good starting point.

Part II: What We Did

Incorporating Wikipedia into a course assignment was an experiment for both of us. Although we had some experience with editing or writing Wikipedia articles, we had none in the context of a course. Thus while we refer to ourselves as “instructor” and “student” here, the assignment was very much a learning experience for each of us.

The course chosen for the experiment was an upper-year seminar titled *Art of the Judgment*. It focuses on “the history, development, reporting and practice of the judgment . . . from the earliest recorded judgments to the present.”¹¹⁸ Students judge a first-year moot and are typically assessed through a written judgment on that moot, submitted about halfway through the course. This counts for 30% of the grade. In-class activities and participation count for a further 30%. At the end of the course, students typically submit papers for 40% of the grade. In the 2014-2015 version of the course, the instructor gave students the option of editing or writing a Wikipedia article or series of articles as a way of fulfilling the paper requirement. Students received a list of hyperlinks to Wikipedia stub articles related to judging, judgments, or the judiciary, and could select one of the articles listed or choose their own article and have it approved for credit.

One student—co-author of this Article—opted for the “wiki” mode of assessment and picked “Judgment (law)” as the article to edit.¹¹⁹ She got to work by first creating a Wikipedia user account, a course requirement for this mode of assessment. She focused first on becoming more familiar with the Wikipedia editing process. For that, Wikipedia’s tutorial was especially helpful

116. *Wikipedia: WikiProject Requested Articles*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Requested_articles (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

117. *Wikipedia: Requested Articles/Applied Arts and Sciences/Law*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requested_articles/Applied_arts_and_sciences/Law (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

118. John C. Kleefeld, *Art of the Judgment* (course outline on file with the author, 2015).

119. The article can be viewed at: *Judgment (Law)*, WIKIPEDIA, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_\(law\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_(law)) (last visited Nov. 18, 2015). Given the open nature of Wikipedia’s editing process, the article may not wholly reflect the student’s work at the time of this reading.

on editing, formatting, and citing sources; it is probably the best starting point for anyone venturing to edit Wikipedia.¹²⁰ The student also added the article to her “watchlist” so she would know if other users changed it. After the student became comfortable with the process but before beginning editing, she copied the article, as it appeared on Wikipedia, into a Microsoft Word document for later reference and comparison.¹²¹

After completing these preliminary steps, the real fun (and learning) began! The student reviewed the article and determined what needed to be added or changed. A previous Wikipedian had marked the article for “globalization,” meaning that it did not adequately reflect a worldwide view of the topic in question. Furthermore, the article had very little information given the breadth of the subject, and its subsections were not cohesively connected. Finally, the article referenced a number of dubious sources, including inactive links and sources that did not seem to support the statements that the article claimed they supported. These issues were noted in the first meeting between student and instructor.

After the initial discussions regarding the current state of the article, the student worked on the assignment independently over the course of the semester while meeting occasionally with the instructor and seeking advice when required. When she completed a draft, the student and instructor reviewed it together and discussed any remaining technical and substantive issues that needed to be addressed. After saving the edited version of the article in Wikipedia, the student “submitted” her work by saving the Web page as it appeared after making the final edits. Subsequently, both the student and instructor made some further minor edits—readers should be forewarned that getting involved in a Wikipedia article is rather addictive!

Part III: Assessing Student Contributions to Wikipedia

Assessment in our case was a matter of first impression and, admittedly, somewhat ad hoc. Much of the work that was done on the chosen article involved rewriting definitions, adding extensive references, and adding hyperlinks to related articles. The topic was broad enough to merit examples from various legal systems; accordingly, the student provided examples from common law, civil law, and religious law. Both student and instructor were

120. *Wikipedia: Tutorial*, WIKIPEDIA, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Tutorial> (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

121. We had initially intended to copy the final product into a Microsoft Word document as well and run a “Compare Document” analysis to determine the changes that had been made. However, we found that saving the Web page of the final product and comparing it with the original Microsoft Word document was sufficient. In theory, such steps may not be needed because Wikipedia keeps a complete revision history. However, both of us preferred the comfort of having our own before-and-after copies.

happy with the improvements, while recognizing that more work could be done on the article.

As with the expansiveness of Wikipedia itself, there are many ways to assess student Wikipedia projects. An obvious choice would be to use Wikipedia's own indicators of a solid article by considering how students' work—edits or new articles—compares with Wikipedia's requirements for good articles and feature articles. This is one of the indicators used in the UCSF study, where seven of the twenty-eight medical articles edited went from "start" or "C-class" to "B-class," indicating significant improvement.¹²²

Some instructors have developed their own grading rubrics for Wikipedia articles. Sweeney, for instance, opted to evaluate how much the article contributed to conversation, awareness of audience, validity, and integration of sources, and "online ethics."¹²³ Purdy, by contrast, used what could be described as a more technical rubric. He considered what information had been added or removed, what content was edited, how the content was organized, and how the students used hyperlinks.¹²⁴ The WEP Syllabus,¹²⁵ which outlines a twelve-week course with exercises of increasing sophistication and peer review by classmates, suggests a grading structure weighted as follows: (i) 20% for four early Wikipedia exercises (5% each), such as playing in Wikipedia's "sandbox";¹²⁶ (ii) 10% for participating in class blogs or discussions; (iii) 10% for peer reviews and collaboration with classmates, typically through an article's Talk page; (iv) 50% for the main Wikipedia article contributions; and (v) 10% for a reflective essay.¹²⁷ A recent study on visual representation of Wikipedia collaborations, and early development of open-source software called Vis-à-Wik, also suggest new means of assessing information on Wikipedia, such as the use of visual analytics to map an article's structural connection to other articles.¹²⁸ Vis-à-Wik, though currently only in "alpha" stage, could help in visualizing how a student has edited or linked the article to other Wikipedia articles.¹²⁹

122. See Joshi, Whitaker, & Azzam, *supra* note 78.

123. Sweeney, *supra* note 47, at 264-65.

124. Purdy, *supra* note 29, at 367.

125. See *supra* note 56 and accompanying text.

126. The sandbox is a place to experiment with editing Wikipedia informally. See *Wikipedia: Sandbox*, *supra* note 40; *About the Sandbox*, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About_the_Sandbox (last visited Nov. 18, 2015).

127. See *WEP Syllabus*, *supra* note 56 (section entitled "Grading").

128. See Stefano de Sabbata, Kathryn Eccles, Scott Hale, & Ralph Straumann, *Collaborative Visualizations for Wikipedia Critique and Activism*, PROCEEDINGS OF INT'L CONF. ON WEB & SOC. MEDIA, ASS'N FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (forthcoming 2015), <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2592528> (current (alpha) version of Vis-à-Wik, <http://sdesabbata.github.io/vis-a-wik>).

129. Vis-à-Wik was developed to visualize the connections among Wikipedia articles in different language editions as a network diagram; however, by setting both the search and comparison languages to English, a network diagram can be rendered that shows how one English

Additional questions for assessment could include asking whether the student used the “major/minor change feature” and sufficiently explained edits, and the extent to which the student successfully “globalized” the article, where appropriate. Ultimately, each project will have its own learning goals, so instructors will want to consider their own most relevant factors when assessing how closely their students’ work has met those goals.

IV: Reflections, Limitations and Opportunities

This project stood out among other law school assignments by allowing a student to study and explain a legal concept to an unknown audience. Generally, a student writing a legal memo writes for a law professor, a lawyer, or perhaps a fellow law student. Even where the reader is not included in one of those audiences, the instructor usually describes the audience (for instance, a particular kind of imaginary client). But when editing Wikipedia, students do not know who will ultimately use the information presented. Wikipedia “removes students’ work from the ivory tower and puts it squarely in the real (virtual) world,”¹³⁰ where the audience is an amorphous “public” with varying backgrounds and levels of reading comprehension or legal knowledge. Therefore, students must not only ensure that they understand the material that they are presenting; they must also strive to make it comprehensive and readable. Student writer-editors must also avoid assumptions about their readers’ level of legal understanding and, at times, may find it necessary to unpack legal concepts.

Furthermore, while a legal memo is generally written to convey legal information to a person who needs to make a decision about legal rights and responsibilities, a Wikipedia law article may be used for any number of purposes, including legal research, comparing one’s understanding of one legal concept to others, or even for curiosity’s sake. Therefore, presenting the information that is most relevant to the public may often be challenging. When viewers from all over the world can potentially review your article, how are you to decide what the most important information will be? In the case presented, the student tried to use examples and refer to countries that were easily recognized, and to use sources that could be easily accessed online to make the information as useful and accessible to a worldwide audience as possible.

Having such a broad audience creates limitations on the effectiveness of using Wikipedia as a resource. The website, in many ways, is shaped by the perceptions of its contributors, and articles often require many different contributors to provide a well-rounded picture of the topic in question. Subsequent revisions and contributions can potentially have detrimental effects when the meaning of the original contributor’s work is lost, or as correct

article is connected to other English articles. (Email from Stefano de Sabbata, Research Assoc., Oxford Internet Instit., to first author (May 19, 2015) (on file with the first author).

130. Alana Cattapan, *(Re)Writing ‘Feminism in Canada’: Wikipedia in the Feminist Classroom*, 22 FEMINIST TEACHER 125, 139 (2012).

information is potentially replaced by incorrect information. Ultimately, however, the Wikipedia vision is that the benefits of worldwide collaboration exceed any potential problems relating to the loss of original information.

Another potential limitation to assigning Wikipedia articles, and one that relates to assessment, comes from the lack of original analysis allowed by Wikipedia. Wikipedia's core content policies of neutrality and no original research may seem antithetical to the role of law students and lawyers. If students simply describe the law or a legal concept, rather than evaluate the law or determine a course of action based on the state of the law, are they engaging in useful legal work? We would argue that they are. Jeff Maehre challenges accusations of Wikipedia's "pedestrian" nature by observing that "Wikipedia's entries, all of which contain some hypertext links to subheadings and inclusive concepts, span a wide range . . . many being in line, in terms of thoroughness, with entries in subject-specific reference books. Some far exceed this level of thoroughness, particularly if we tally the hyperlinked sub-topics or related topics to which a reader can hop."¹³¹

Furthermore, despite the lack of ability to make an argument in a Wikipedia article, participating in such a legal education project refines certain skills required for future lawyers. After all, there is a long tradition of expository writing in law, by both academics and practitioners, and editing a Wikipedia article fits well with that tradition. Law students are already expected to summarize and describe cases to aid in their own understanding of the material. Editing or writing Wikipedia articles can help develop these skills by requiring students to assess an audience's informational needs and to write for that audience. Even some of Wikipedia's requirements nod to future skills that law students may need in practice—the convention of explaining every edit made to an article in detail (sometimes to the point of excess!) can teach students to be accountable and arguably tracks the process of timekeeping followed in many law firms, where lawyers are expected to document their time in small increments for costing and billing purposes.

A challenge, but perhaps also a benefit, of Wikipedia-based projects is that students never know when their work is done. For expansive articles in particular, a student could write indefinitely without including everything about the topic. Thus students (either on their own or in consultation with their instructors) must engage with the material critically and prioritize information. They must ask not only what information is available but also what is most useful. Otherwise, they risk hitting a point of diminishing returns by flooding the article with information and, potentially, having the article flagged by another Wikipedian for reworking. This prioritization process, in and of itself, can be useful for students accustomed to writing to a particular word count rather than to a particular level of quality.

Contrary to what one might expect, there was no great moment of relief when the article in this case was completed, likely because of the student's

131. Maehre, *supra* note 49, at 230.

enjoyment of the project. Instead, both the instructor and student view the article as an ongoing project that they will check in on and edit as necessary and as they have the time to do so. The sense of ownership that students obtain by seeing their edits “go live” is a great satisfaction that they can carry throughout the project, whether that means changing the placement of a comma, adding a new section or further references to the article, or using the article as a spur to write a new related Wikipedia entry.

To conclude, we enthusiastically endorse the idea of writing a Wikipedia article for law school credit and hope that others take up the concept and improve on it.

Appendix: Useful Wikipedia Links

Below is a starting list of general and law-related Wikipedia links for those interested in the topic of contributing to Wikipedia for law school credit.

Education Program: https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Wikipedia_Education_Program

Education/Syllabi: <http://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education/Syllabi>

Index of Law Articles: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index_of_law_articles

List Articles: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_law#Lists

List of Requested Law Articles: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requested_articles/Applied_arts_and_sciences/Law

Lists of Landmark Court Decisions: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_landmark_court_decisions

Sandbox: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sandbox>

Stub Articles (by Category of Law): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Law_stubs

Stub Articles (Canadian Law): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Canadian_law_stubs

Stub Articles (US Law): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:United_States_law_stubs

Tutorial: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Tutorial>

Visual Editor: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:VisualEditor>

WikiProject Law: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Law