

The Wikipedia Assignment

Dr. Mustafa: HIST-201 Historiography

1. Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is for students to learn how Wikipedia can be improved by serious historians doing legitimate research. Students will work in teams of 4-6 people, researching, fact-checking, and re-writing existing Wikipedia articles.

2. Choosing a Team and an Article

Dr. Mustafa will convene the class to take volunteers to work on various Wikipedia articles that he will make available to students beforehand, so that they can decide. There are six possible teams.

3. Choosing Your Role

Each Wikipedia article has different problems. Some need a lot more research. Some need to be fact-checked. All of them need some degree of re-writing. Each article has a certain number of roles of each of the three types:

- a. Source-Checker
- b. Researcher
- c. Writer

On the first day they meet with their teams, students should agree to divide-up these roles. Bear in mind that even though each student has one role, on a good team all your work will overlap to one degree or another.

4. What do the Roles Do?

Source-Checker: This student will find the sources claimed by the authors of the Wikipedia article, and make sure that they have been cited correctly. Some articles will need more than one source-checker.

Researcher: This student will use traditional methods of searching (bibliographies, databases, Library of Congress website, online catalogs) to find other materials on this topic, not cited by the Wikipedia article.

Writer: This student will make sure s/he understands how to use Wikipedia to do the revisions, including uploading any new pictures, adding links, references, and citations.

5. How You Will be Graded

Each student will submit a report (@1000 words), explaining what s/he did to fulfill his/her role on the team. (For instance, if you were a source-checker, where and how did you check them? What did you find? If you were a researcher, what sources did you use? How did you find them? If you were a writer, how did you decide to include the information you did? What did you leave out, and why?)

Finally, your grade is affected by the final Wiki page that you created. I will go over the page and assess its overall value as a tertiary source: the quality of your writing, the use of your references, the citation, the completeness, the use of linked materials, illustrations, etc. I will give the final project one of three Group Grades. The group grade will affect your personal grade in this way:

- A **Very Good** Wiki Article: +10% to your personal grade
- An **Adequate** Wiki Article: no change to your personal grade
- An **Inadequate** Wiki Article: -10% to your personal grade

Therefore the final project affects all your grades on the team, but each person's work is his/her own.

The Wikipedia Articles (Teams) That You May Choose:

1. The Negro League (Baseball)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negro_League

The article is chock-full of facts and people and dates and events... but almost no citation at all. It has plenty of references, but very little indication of how or if those references were used in writing the article. This article needs a lot of fact-checking, and needs people to look at the references and make sure they were used correctly.

The Team: At Least

3 Source-Checkers

1 Researcher

1 Writer

2. The Peninsular Campaign (1862)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsula_Campaign

A very important series of battles in the American Civil War. Most people think of this as the North's "lost opportunity" to end the war quickly. The Wiki article is pretty slim and only cites two authors. The reference list is also inadequate, as it has only a few secondary sources. This article could use a lot of expansion. There is a lot of information about this campaign - both primary and secondary. What we need is some good writers to expand the article.

The Team: At Least

1 Source-Checker

2 Researchers

2 Writers

3. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_Christian_Temperance_Union

This was the group that started the Prohibition movement in America, and yet there is only a very brief article about it, almost totally without citation or reference. If you click on the links to its leaders and history, you'll find even less; just references to bibliographic dictionaries and encyclopedias and other tertiary sources.

Amazingly, this group still exists! So students should not only research the people and the organization and its history, but you can contact them, yourself, and hopefully set up some phone or email interviews with their New York branch.

The Team: At Least

1 Source-Checker

2 Researchers

2 Writers

4. The McGovern-Fraser Commission (1968)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McGovern-Fraser_Commission

Political Scientists think that this was the most important reform in American presidential politics since World War Two. It set up the primary system, changed the role of party conventions, and included the use of affirmative action. It's the reason our presidential elections work the way they do.

Wikipedia just has a little "stub" about it, but students should be able to research the people, debates, news coverage, and of course the commission's own report. Turn this into a full-sized Wikipedia article with good citation.

The Team: At Least

1 Source-Checker

2 Researchers

2 Writers

5. Charlotte Perkins Gillman

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Perkins_Gilman

The famous author and feminist leader gets a very short Wikipedia entry that briefly mentions flattering highlights of her work, but says nothing about her less-than-savory views on things like race, immigration, and genetics. Moreover, despite a huge reference list, there are only four citations in the article, two of which are from Gilman, herself.

This article needs more research. It needs to be expanded to give a fuller portrait of this woman and her work and ideas.

The Team: At Least

1 Source-Checker

2 Researchers

2 Writers