

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

## University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

---

Campus News Archive

Campus News, Newsletters, and Events

---

2-7-2022

### UMN Morris Intro Class Gets Wikified

Communications and Marketing

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel\\_news](https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Communications and Marketing, "UMN Morris Intro Class Gets Wikified" (2022). *Campus News Archive*. 2962.

[https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel\\_news/2962](https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/2962)

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus News, Newsletters, and Events at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus News Archive by an authorized administrator of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact [skulann@morris.umn.edu](mailto:skulann@morris.umn.edu).

The U.S. Women's Soccer Team, a fictional character in the *Life is Strange* video game series, and an indigenous amateur detective focused on missing and murdered Indigenous women. If you think these sound like great topics for a college research paper, you're almost right.

In fact, these are topics with new content on Wikipedia, thanks to the students in the fall 2021 Introduction to Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) class at UMN Morris.

Emily Bruce teaches GWSS 1101, an intro class which is designed to have a service-learning component. When she took over teaching this class three years ago, Bruce contemplated what that might look like for her.

"Previous professors who have taught this, who've been in sociology or anthropology, have done kind of engaged work in our local community. But I'm a European historian. My research is about people and places quite far away from Morris. And I also hadn't had that much experience with running a service learning project before I jumped into this class. But I have had experience teaching with Wikipedia, and it occurred to me that that was a way for our students to make a mark on the world, you know, to do something meaningful rather than just the same old, write a paper that only your professor reads."

Basically, professors replace traditional writing assignments with a Wikipedia assignment, requiring students to research and write material that then gets placed in Wikipedia articles. Bruce found inspiration and support for using Wiki Education for this course from Professor of Art History Julia Dabbs. Dabbs has used the platform in her Women in Art History course.

According to Wikipedia, instructors at more than 500 universities have been creating new content for the online encyclopedia through the Wiki Education program since 2013.

Bruce says the program includes robust epistemology around credibility, along with some really thoughtful information about what makes a source useful, informative, and reliable.

"The GWSS 1101 course gives students just a little taste of a lot of different things: theory, different disciplinary methodologies to get at questions about gender and sexuality, and women's history. It's a fun class. I'm lucky I get to teach it."

Bruce says her students are the experts on it by the end of the semester, and it's fascinating to watch that happen.

"I mean, from the range of topics, I learn actual content information from the students."

Bruce also credits colleagues like Angela Vetsch, the digital services coordinator for Briggs Library, for helping her students find sources and access data.

Bruce also admits that there are challenges to address with this kind of course.

“This is a different kind of writing. How do you figure out that they've done enough work, and how do you assess it? There's no standard rubric here.”

Students are still researching topics related to course content, they're still synthesizing sources, they're still writing; that's where most traditional research projects leave off. What the Wikipedia project adds is new media literacy development. Students learn the technical and social skills needed to work with wiki-technology, and they're pushed to collaborate and engage with Wikipedia's social network.

Wiki Education has a dashboard that allows Bruce to track the edits and content created for the online encyclopedia. The fall semester class added 12,000 words and 57 references to articles that had received 37,000 views as of the end of the semester in December.

But each of the 24 students contributed in different ways. One student spent a great deal of time communicating with a person who already had a biography on Wikipedia, but they were able to get an updated photo to post.

“I think that greatly improved that page for any visitor.”

Other students didn't add that many words or references, but they added important citations.

And others worked to create new content, such as a brand new page on Lissa Yellow Bird-Chase, the founder of Sahnish Scouts, a citizen-led organization dedicated to finding justice for missing people and their families. Yellow Bird-Chase has been widely covered in the media, but there was no Wikipedia page for her before Bruce's students wrote it.

In addition to their contributions to Wikipedia, the students write about their work in the class.

Bruce shared that one student admitted in her closing reflection that she wasn't paying attention at the beginning of the semester and just put her name on the board by the general topic of murdered and missing indigenous women. She had no goal other than to complete the class for credit. In her reflection, she states that through the research, Lissa Yellow Bird-Chase's story became very important to her.

“Once she realized the subject mattered to her, she learned everything she could about how to contribute to the article. She became motivated because she saw herself in her subject. The topic mattered to her in a real way.”

Bruce has had students who say it might have been easier to write a research paper or take an exam, but, by the end of semester, this project motivated them beyond the scope of the class.

“I was leaving a group meeting, and the students were pursuing something where they weren't sure they were going to get the information by the deadline for the project. And they said, ‘But of course, if we get it after the deadline, we can still make those edits.’ Like, that's the thing that's

cool about doing a project. That's not just for a grade. It's to make the world better. That's music to my ears!"