Wikipedia

Engaging Students to Improve Public Policy Content

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WIKIMEDIA project

Wikipedia

- Open-source encyclopedia - anyone can contribute
- 24 million pages and 15 million registered users
- Accuracy and balance of content subject of debate
- Some literature about content validity
  - Brown (2011) examined thousands of Wikipedia articles in political science and found that they are "almost always accurate when a relevant article exists, but errors of omission are extremely frequent." (*PS*, p. 339)

Wikipedia in top five most visited web sites in the world!

- Wikipedia has 371 million unique visitors/month, comprising 11.7 billion page requests/month, which represents 5% of the world population!

How do volunteers contribute?

- Writing articles
- Editing existing articles
- Spelling & grammar
- Formatting -- "Wikifying"
- Adding references
- Helping new users
- Creating/adding images/photos/illustrations
- Subject matter expertise
- Mediation
- Administration

Wikipedia Public Policy Project

- $1.2m from Stanton Foundation to Wikimedia Foundation for project in AY 2010-11
- Purpose to improve quality of public policy-related articles on Wikipedia
- Trained student "Ambassadors"
- Recruited faculty participants
- Offered materials and support

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_United_States_Public_Policy

Participating Schools
Spring 2011

- Boston University
- Georgetown University
- Indiana University
- James Madison University
- Louisiana State University
- Michigan State University
- Montana State University – Bozeman
- New York University
- San Francisco State University
- Santa Clara University
- Simmons College

- Syracuse University
- Texas Southern University
- Troy University
- University of California – Berkeley
- University of Kentucky
- University of San Francisco
- University of Southern California
- Virginia Tech
- Western Carolina University
- Winona State University

Sample Course General Policy Courses

- Public Policy Analysis: Public Roles in Private Markets
- Public Policy Design and Evaluation
- Policy Analysis
- Political Research Seminar
- Professional and Technical Editing
- Advanced Seminar in Political Communication
- Public Relations Seminar
- Seminar in Public Affairs
- Public Policy Making
- Wikipedia and Public Policy

Sample Subject-Specialized Applications

- Environmental Policy
- Energy Economics and Policy
- Telecommunication Policy Analysis
- Cyberlaw
- Federal Indian Law and Policy
- Copyright, Commerce, and Culture
- Advertising and Marketing Law
- Transnational NGOs in World Affairs
- Refugees in the Arab World
- International Trade and Strategy
- Approaches to Development
- Women and Human Rights
- Habituating and Addictive Drugs in Our Culture

Article Assessment and Rating

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_United_States_Public_Policy/Assessment

Assessment Area	Scoring Methods	Score
Comprehensiveness	Based on how fully the article covers significant aspects of the topic	1-10
Sourcing	Based on adequacy of inline citations and quality of sources relative to what is available	0-6
Neutrality	Based on adherence to Neutrality of View policy	0-3
Readability	Based on how readable and well-written the article is	0-3
Formatting	Based on quality of the article's layout and basic adherence to Wikipedia Manual of Style	0-2
Illustrations	Based on how adequately the article is illustrated, within the constraints of acceptable copyright status	0-2
Total		1-26

2/3 – 3/4 of Wikipedia articles have been rated by the community of contributors

- US Public Policy WikiProject modified the typical rating rubric to be more quantifiable
- Establishes thresholds for each article class
- Stub – 1-2 in comprehensiveness
- Start – 3+ in comprehensiveness
- C – at least 4 in comprehensiveness + 2 in sourcing
- B – 7 in comprehensiveness, 4 in sourcing, 2 in readability, 2 in neutrality
- GA (Good Article) 8 in comprehensiveness, etc.,
- A – 10 in comprehensiveness
- FA (Featured Article) full points in every category

ARTICLE ASSESSMENT AND RATING

United States Public Policy articles by quality and importance							
Quality	Importance						
	Top	High	Mid	Low	NA	???	Total
⊕ GA	1	1		4			6
B	1	10	7	2		1	21
C	1	15	10	6		6	38
Start	3	4	16	18		23	64
Stub	2	4	6	26		11	49
NA		1			24		25
Assessed	8	35	39	56	24	41	203
Unassessed			21	11		322	354
Total	8	35	60	67	24	363	557

IT'S EASY:

1. Log into en.wikipedia.org

2. Select your language and click on the arrow

3. Click Log in/create account, located at the top right side

4. Choose your Username

5. Select your Password

6. Click Create account

7. Editing: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Cheatsheet

USER INTERFACE

My participation

- Met with Wikipedia Foundation representatives during planning stage
- Pilot tested assignment in Summer 2010
- Official participating class in Fall 2010
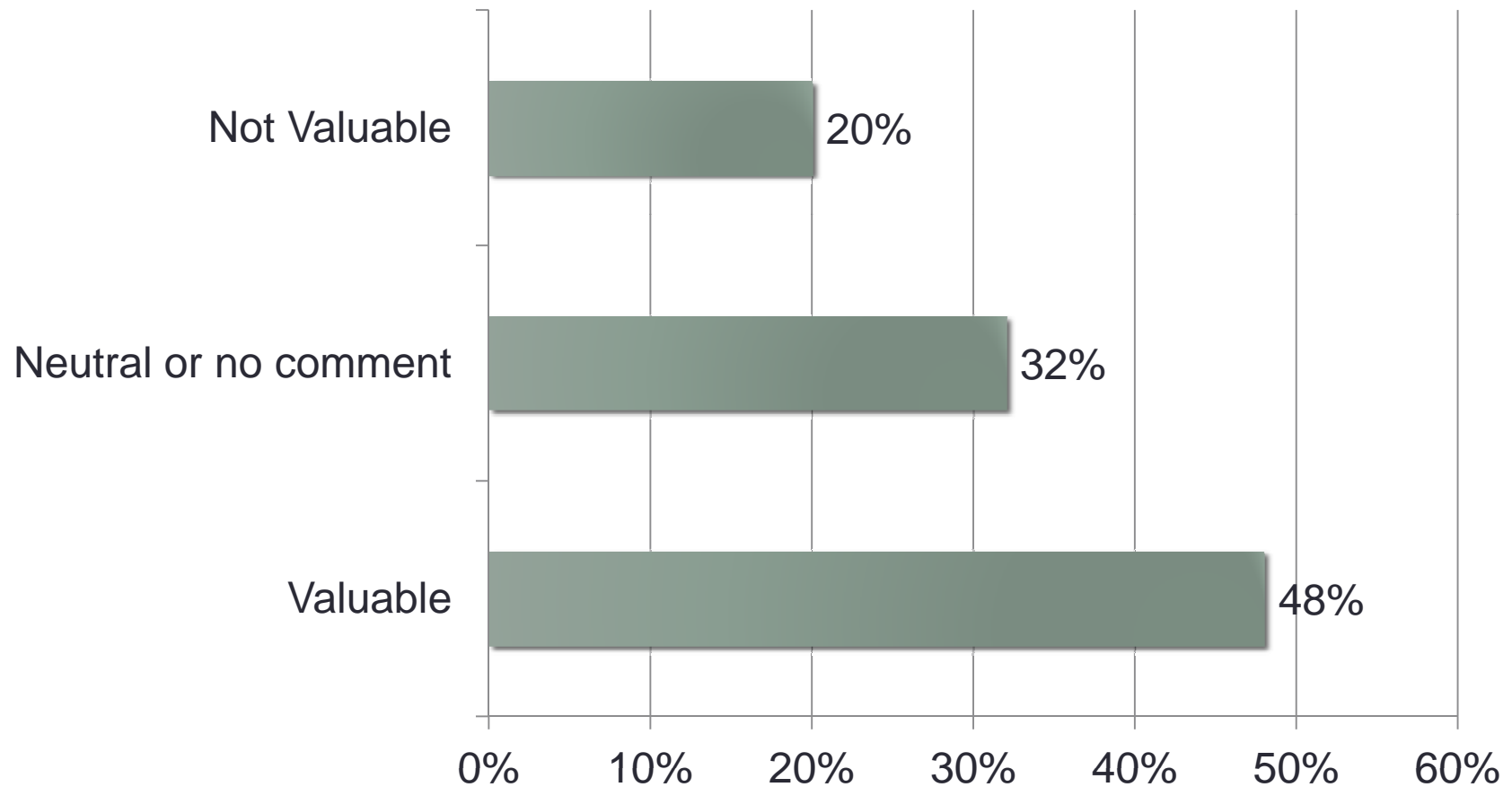- Have continued to use Wikipedia assignment

Wikipedia Assignment

- Students completed policy analysis of a current issue
- Identified mid-level Wikipedia article related to the problem or a policy alternatives examined
- Wrote critique of the article drawing on class readings
  - Content, style, balance, etc.
- Added new content
  - Cited evidence (facts, expert opinion, etc.)
  - Minimum of ½ - 1 page of new text
- Followed for 10 days to identify edits made by others Reflected on changes in critique

Goals of Wikipedia Assignment

1. Focus on information quality
2. Allow students to put their work out in "the real world"
3. Get feedback about whether it was valid, adequately justified, and unbiased
4. Encourage students to work at a higher level of professionalism than they would for a classroom assignment

Value of Wikipedia Assignment
Open-ended responses - Spring 2011

25 evaluations received from 30 students

Sample reactions:

- I felt empower[ed] by the Wikipedia analysis, about the benefits and responsibilities of using a public pool of information.
- I loved contributing my hard-earned research & ideas to Wikipedia. I felt I was helping a grander audience have a more balanced perspective on my issue. It was awesome!
- I believe Wikipedia is the most ambitious social experiment to answer the question of "what is knowledge?" and I am very happy to be part of this discussion.