

Edit This!

Enhancing Collaborative Public Programming through Wikipedia Events

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PROBLEM

Too often, students--not to mention staff and faculty--are unfamiliar with the resources available in their university's archives. Designing meaningful and engaging public programming is a challenge for any archives.

How could EWU Libraries create an event that would attract undergraduate participants AND provide authentic engagement with archival materials?

EWU archivists and librarians partnered with the history honors society, Phi Alpha Theta, to organize a Wikipedia edit-a-thon for undergraduates focused on university history topics and using primary sources from university archives.

- EWU archivists and librarians believed undergraduate students could write a well-cited article relying primarily on pre-selected primary sources from the university archives.
- Wikipedia was identified as the preferred platform as it is a well-known information resource that welcomes anonymous contributions, especially those citing documentary evidence.
- Phi Alpha Theta, the history honors society, partnered with EWU Libraries to help design and advertise the event to attract student participants.
- Wikipedia article topics were selected by EWU librarians, archivists and student collaborators based on the potential appeal to student participants and the availability of relevant archival material. 2016 topic: Former coach/athletic director, Red Reese; 2017 topic: Major campus fires.

PLAN

Students engaged with and became aware of a wide range of primary source materials available through EWU's Archives & Special Collections, as well as increased their digital literacy by using the Wikipedia platform. EWU Libraries increased its and the university's global web presence, as well as increased its partnerships with student groups.

- Students were excited to engage with primary source materials that they had not used in research before. They worked with historic newspapers, yearbooks, correspondence, institutional records and microfilm.
- Students expanded their awareness of the wide variety of useful and compelling archival resources that EWU has for students to use in their research.
- Students increased their digital literacy by learning how to add text, photos, hyperlinks, and references to Wikipedia pages.
- Students refined their ability to use raw primary source materials to create prose that tells a story.
- The EWU Library and Archives were highlighted on the Wikipedia home page, drawing attention and awareness to the collections and the university.
- The Wikipedia edit-a-thons have increased the University's Wikipedia presence, and the focus on producing a single high-quality article led to a much larger audience when each article was featured on Wikipedia's main page.
- The edit-a-thons created a fruitful partnership between two organizations on campus that hadn't been connected before.

OBSERVATIONS

CONDUCTING THE EVENT

Librarians, archivists and student collaborators worked together to select article topics, assemble materials, coordinate event activities, and produce completed well-referenced articles featured on Wikipedia's main page.

- Librarians, archivists and students brainstormed and Selected Wikipedia article topics that they hoped would be highly-interesting to undergraduate students.
- The archivist, with the help of archival staff and librarians, selected materials to be used at the event.
- Student collaborators helped to advertise and recruit participants for the event.
- A detailed online guide was constructed, giving both links to digitally available archival and other primary source materials, and supplying basic editing instructions for Wikipedia, including its in-house citation style.
- On the day of the event, space in the lobby was converted with the addition of technology, signage, and an array of archival materials and facsimiles.
- Students were encouraged to engage with archival documents and use them to add material to the article: the archivist and several librarians acted as guides, assisting students with understanding the documents and with how to contribute to Wikipedia.
- By the end of the day, in both 2016 and 2017, student volunteers had produced a well-referenced article from scratch on the chosen topic. The quality of their work was high enough that in both years, the article was briefly featured on the main page of the English-language Wikipedia.

NEXT STEPS & FURTHER RESEARCH

EWU Libraries continues to improve its Wikipedia edit-a-thon programming. Potential improvements include a more streamlined process for topic generation, development of assessment methodologies, Expanded campus-wide impact, and increasing the diversity of primary source formats.

- Refine the process and criteria for topic selection. Selecting a compelling topic supported by a wealth of primary source materials is critical to the success of the event. Small student/faculty focus groups were used to generate topics, but this process could be adjusted.
- Assessment of the event should be improved. Improvements could include development and implementation of surveys or other instruments to collect more data about the impact of the event on student attitudes/perceptions of the archives and participants' levels of digital literacy.
- Consider expanding the event by connecting with other public programming or learning opportunities for students. Explore additional campus partners.
- Explore the addition of non-text primary source formats, such as audiovisual materials (oral histories, films, etc.).

