

Wikis to Communicate

Sara Rofofsky Marcus
Electronic Resources / Web Librarian
Kurt R. Schmeller Library
Queensborough Community College
222-05 56 Avenue
Bayside, NY 11364

Leading participants through the exploration of the use of a wiki in the course, this session assists participants in creating a wiki to suit their own pedagogical style for a course of their selection. Exploring tips, techniques, tribulations, and successes, participants will determine the best way to integrate wikis into their courses, while remaining true to their teaching style. In order to best determine the appropriate way to integrate wikis in one's course while remaining true to a teaching style, participants will first establish their teaching style and identify the ways in which online tools such as a wiki can best suit their own classroom style. Each member will leave with the rudiments of a wiki created for a course of their choosing.

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to encourage faculty to consider (1) their teaching style, (2) wikis, and (3) the integration of wikis into their own teaching style. Rather than forcing the use of a wiki in a cookie-cutter method, the presenter will encourage faculty to explore various usages of a wiki and determine which best suit their own personal needs and teaching styles. Based on the experiences of the presenter, this session shows how a wiki can be used for different purposes based on the class dynamics, learning objectives, and instructor / student comfort with technology.

Methodology

As an instructional designer, librarian, face-to-face and online instructor, the presenter has experience with working with students and faculty in a variety of formats. Having used Blackboard and other school-provided LMSs to teach online and hybrid courses, the presenter decided to utilize a wiki in a course as opposed to the perceived limited applications of the LMS provided by the school. A literature review, experience, and discussions with other faculty and with students enrolled in the course led the presenter to utilize this method in a more Web-based method in a subsequent term.

Results

The wiki was used to create a visual, collaborative, online interface in which the students and faculty member all participated and contributed. Wikis are highly collaborative by nature. This helps ensure quality and order. By collaborating to create an online visual resource, participants can provide their own skills to the portions best suited to their knowledge base along with reviewing contributions of others. Through the relatively effortless collaboration available via wikis, the community creating this valuable resource can share individual knowledge and skills. Group members were required to brainstorm, gather subject expertise, and work together to present the group's vast wisdom as a single

entity. Defying barriers such as time and place, geographically or even just time-diverse, participants can be invited to share their unique and dispersed knowledge. The low learning curve of wikis helps eliminate the technical barriers as does the self-contained publishing software nature of the wiki. The wiki enables a distributed set of users to edit and overwrite existing content, create new content, revert back to previous versions, comment, attach files, and compare versions. These wikis could be public and accessible to all, or private for select users only. Giving members of the course editorial control, according to the literature and evidenced by experience of the presenter, had the potential to imbue in them a sense of responsibility and ownership, developing and using all sorts of collaborative skills to negotiate with others on a final version. However, it was very hard to get some of the students to contribute because of the sense of everybody, and yet nobody, owning the content posted. Students were able to import images for others to caption, and were able to work together to organize their collective images and knowledge to create a visual and textual resource that is hyperlinked as the users create throughout the term. The wiki being accessible on all platforms and browsers enabled students in varying computing environments to contribute equally to the material, and also enabled all participants to see the material, as long as it was not an uploaded file in a specific format.

Conclusion

The wiki enabled the students to work together on a product that was truly their, as a class, own. This wiki would be available to them after the course ended, and even after they graduated, as a resource to refer to. The collaborative nature encouraged the students to realize that the final product would only be as good as the work put into it. Rather than requiring textbooks for the course, students were able to create the knowledge based on past experience and their own research to share with their fellow classmates. Group editorial access enabled students to help each other on the materials presented, and also encouraged questions and corrections as needed by peers rather than solely from the instructor. The ability to work as a group without needing to be in the same place at the same time encouraged students to participate more, as did the ability to contribute without having to speak or hear each other's comments. The access to a computer lab enabled those who wished to work simultaneously in the same place to do so.

Recommendations

It is not recommended to use a wiki as the sole means of communicating (such as grades or private matters) nor as the sole source of information (textbooks and lectures from the instructor are appreciated). The instructor needs to be comfortable with the method of presentation, and needs to create a rubric to grade contributions. The students also need to have explicit instructions and disclaimers, including very specific and clear guidelines on adding content. Exploration of a wiki as a supplement to a course, or as a final project to be submitted by groups of students is highly recommended. To determine the best wiki software to use for your purposes, it is recommended you look at <http://www.wikimatrix.org>, which compares more than fifty different wiki platforms on over 100 variables.

Resources

Boeninger, C. (2007). Wiki as research guide. In Hanson, K. and Cervone, H. F. (eds.) *Using interactive technologies in libraries* (Library and Information Technology Association Guide, 13), p. 39-58. NY: Neal-Schuman.

Farkas, M. G. (2007). *Social software in libraries: Building collaboration, communication, and community online*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.

November, A. (2008). *Web literacy for educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.