



Wikipedia

and Academic

Libraries

A Global Project

Edited by

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and Roberto A. Arteaga

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CHAPTER 14

NOTES FROM THE FIELD: THREE WIKIMEDIAN-IN-RESIDENCE CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

When the University of Alberta Library hired its first Wikimedian-in-Residence (WIR) in 2019, the team had difficulty finding detailed information about how to plan for a WIR and set up the role for success. This chapter details two Wikipedia residencies that served as a guide for the Alberta team in building their WIR project. Case studies of the University of Toronto and Concordia University in Montréal are presented alongside a case study of the University of Alberta. Each study includes details about how the role was approved and funded, how hiring decisions were made, how the WIR focused their efforts, and the impact at their institution. Together, these three examples demonstrate the variety of options for funding and hiring a WIR role and for the focus of the WIR's work in their term. The chapter poses concrete questions for librarians considering implementing a WIR role at their institution and offers recommendations from each WIR experience as guidance in answering those questions.

Keywords

Wikimedian-in-Residence, Outreach.

Introduction

A Wikimedian used to be an easy shorthand for the community of editors who created and expanded the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Today we've seen the Wiki "universe" expand to encompass a variety of interrelated projects and a growing understanding that a Wikimedian is anyone who engages with the encyclopedia in a critical self-reflexive frame, which includes a much wider community than before. As academic readers and users we must take ownership of our role and relationship to Wikipedia to see that we are all members of this online community and equally complicit in its construction.

Creating a Wikimedian-in-Residence (WIR) program is one way a library can engage with this online community but is far from a one-size-fits-all experience. What the resident will do and how the program is set up depend on many factors including institutional priorities, funding options, community expectations, and existing programming.

To better understand the role of a WIR in an academic library and to look at the institutional factors that shaped the residencies, we interviewed colleagues at two different Canadian academic libraries with recent WIR programs and used our experiences to complete three descriptive case studies.

In this chapter, we cover each residency, including its achievements and the factors that shaped it. From these three experiences, we pulled out some of the common questions that should be considered when thinking about how to engage in a successful WIR program. The goal is to act as an introduction to the topic of WIR and illustrate what these positions can look like at different academic libraries, with the hope that this will guide others to create their own successful WIR programs.

What Is a WIR

Over the past ten years, WIR positions have become a popular way to establish collaborative working relationships with the larger Wikimedia community in an effort to increase the quality and quantity of content across Wikimedia projects. Some WIRs focus on content creation using library resources, which could be editing Wikipedia articles or uploading digitized public domain content to Wikicommons. Other activities

**(Sample) Wikimedian-in-Residence
Scope Diagram
for a GLAM-Wikimedia Partnership**

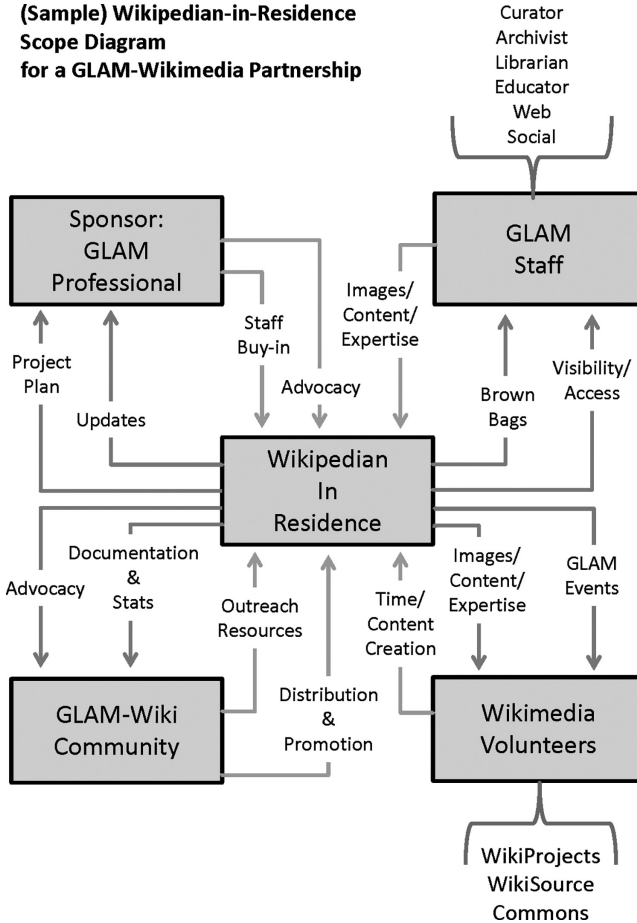


Figure 1 Sample Wikimedian-in-Residence scope diagram.

could include organizing events and training sessions to help facilitate contributions. These training sessions might cover Wikipedia editing generally or explore how information in Wikimedia projects is created, contested, and disseminated online. Having a Wikimedian who is familiar with the Wikipedia editorial processes can provide a range of opportunities on who to engage within the Wikimedia community.

With more than 175 self-reported residencies on the WIR Wikimedia Meta page, there are no shortage of examples for what a position could look like. Some positions are paid, as in our example case studies, while others are volunteer positions, tied to earning class credit or

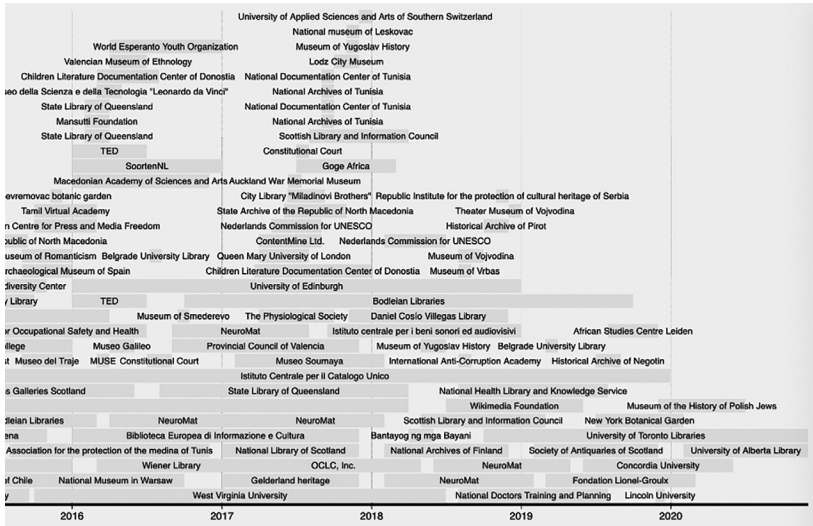


Figure 2 Screenshot of an interactive timeline of Wikimedian-in-Residence positions to illustrate the breadth of positions.

incorporated into existing position duties. The interactive timeline of all WIRs listed in Wikidata featured on figure 2 is an excellent visual tool to illustrate the diversity of WIR positions worldwide.

Resources

A variety of community guides already exist to help institutions create a WIR position. There is an excellent starting page on the Wikimedia Meta-Wiki titled “Creating a Wikimedian in Residence position” (2020), which outlines everything from the variety of roles a WIR can take on to the steps in getting started. Once a WIR has been established, the “Wikimedians in Residence Exchange Network” (2020) can provide peer-to-peer support for organizations and individuals engaged in sharing open knowledge in the Wikimedia platform.

Three Case Studies

Given the myriad of WIR examples, those new to the Wikimedia community can find it difficult to understand which one might be the best

model for a specific institution. At the University of Alberta Library, when we first proposed the position, we were fortunate enough to be able to reach out to our colleagues at the University of Toronto Libraries and Concordia Library to learn from them about how best to set up the position. This chapter represents an extension and formalization of those early conversations.

These case studies are similar in that they are situated in a specific cultural context of publicly funded Canadian academic libraries, but each had a different approach. To compile these case studies, we interviewed both the supervising librarian and the WIR and asked them to reflect on how the position got started, what they focused on, and the impact they felt both personally and institutionally.

University of Toronto Libraries

The University of Toronto Libraries is one of the largest academic library systems in Canada with more than forty libraries spread over three campuses (About | University of Toronto, n.d) and is located in Canada's largest city. There were existing pockets of Wikipedia work already happening in the library around campaigns like #1lib1ref. This precedent gave Jesse Carliner, communications librarian in the Chief Librarian's Office, an opportunity to approach the chief librarian about creating the WIR position. Carliner positioned the residency as part of the conversation around promoting special collections, arguing, "Students are going to Wikipedia articles to find resources, so that's where we need to be!" (personal communication, August 17, 2020). Because of the library's unionized environment, the role was created as a student library assistant position and advertised in the regular hiring channels, like the Library Website and listservs. In September 2018, the University of Toronto Libraries posted a position to "improve the discoverability of University of Toronto Libraries resources and collections in Wikipedia" (personal communication, August 17, 2020) and hired graduate student, Ji Yun Alex Jung, for a one-year, part-time contract. Jung brought some Wikipedia editing experience, and his work in Toronto's Civic Tech community prepared him for the independent

work and the task of communicating sometimes complex information to a general audience.

Residency Focus

Of our three case studies, University of Toronto focused the most on article creation and editing work. At Toronto, Jung's writing work focused on adding information from the library's unique digital collections to Wikipedia. He contributed work related to the discovery and early development of insulin, including new articles for "Connaught Laboratories" (2020), an institute at the University of Toronto that manufactured insulin, and "Rodney Bobiwash" (2020), an Anishinaabe activist and scholar who helped expand First Nations student support in Canadian education systems.

Jung created a comprehensive GLAM page at "Wikipedia:GLAM/University of Toronto" (2020) Libraries for reporting on and tracking Wikipedia editing activity at the university and encouraging collaboration in the community. He also created a Wikidata aware "Template for archival records" (2020), so they could be linked to a Wikipedia page later in residency. While events and community engagement were not a focus for Jung's residency, he did support edit-a-thons and other events when approached.

Residency Impact

As part of his editing work at University of Toronto libraries, Jung tracked the traffic from Wikipedia back to the university's digital collections and found a significant increase in referral traffic. This gave the Library quantifiable data to show that Carliner's goal of "being where the researchers were" was working (personal communication, August 17, 2020). This data helped them move Jung into a new Open Technology Specialist position that is covered in another chapter of this book. Statistics are not the only way to show WIR impact, but Jung's tracking clearly shows how the library collection was being accessed and used by Wikipedia users.

In terms of the impact on the individual, Jung said the WIR helped him develop his research and writing skills and honed "writing for the sake of documenting rather than in support of an argument" (personal

communication, August 10, 2020). Looking back at the experience, he was pleased at how his understanding of library services and collections expanded and how he had a new appreciation for the volume and scope of the collections.

Concordia University Library

Concordia University is a public comprehensive research university and one of four major academic institutions located in the bilingual city of Montreal, Quebec. Lorie Kloda, Associate University Librarian of Planning & Community Relations, had heard about successful WIR initiatives and felt it aligned well with “Concordia digital strategy” (n.d) and what Kloda called the library’s “experimental mindset” (personal communication, August 20, 2020). Concordia Library funded the position with unrestricted donor funds, so they had an open hiring process and advertised the position both at the university and in the community at large with a posted salary of \$10,000 CAD plus benefits. There are many active local Wikimedians in Montreal; the city is the geographical home of Wikimedia Foundation Canadian Chapter and there is a history of Wikipedia engagement at other GLAM institutions in the city. Concordia Library hired Amber Berson, a Montreal-based writer, curator, and Wikimedian as WIR from June 2019 to May 2020. Amber worked part-time, one full day per week. She brought extensive experience as both a Wikipedia editor and instructor from her ongoing role with Art + Feminism.

Residency Focus

At Concordia, teaching and outreach were the main components of the WIR, with minimal article creation or editing work. Berson used most of her limited time to develop and deliver training to library staff and the broader Montreal community. Guided by her philosophy that Wikipedia is about mentorship, sharing, and giving, she delivered more than thirty training workshops in the community. Workshop topics included Wikipedia 101, Wikidata, and topic discussions such as bias on Wikipedia. The workshops

were typically smaller, and Berson found them invaluable teaching experiences, noting that low attendance doesn't detract from the experience of those who attend and in fact allows more instruction for each person. She also set up a framework for library staff to teach information literacy with Wikipedia. Kloda noted that decentralizing information literacy work from the WIR to library staff positively influenced the receptiveness to Wikipedia training and ongoing editing work at the institution (personal communication, August 20, 2020).

During her WIR term, Berson also took a creative approach, organizing an exhibition about the history of Wikipedia as part of a research-creation project mounted at Concordia to explore the impact of going digital on Concordians' lives and work. This was helpful to get the community thinking about Wikipedia but also provided something Berson could reference back to when talking about the importance of understanding Wikipedia in our modern context. Berson had plans for two projects that are not yet completed: creating resources about sourcing and citation for journalism students and developing a peer-edited feminist best-practice manual for Wikipedia. The WIR program wound down when COVID-19 lockdowns began in the last two months of Berson's contract, and she hopes to return to the unfinished work at a later date.

Residency Impact

At Concordia, the desired outcome for their first WIR was an increase in information literacy and informed engagement with Wikipedia. Kloda felt strongly that Berson achieved that. Another one of the outcomes Berson anecdotally observed was a shift in how the community perceived Wikipedia, from thinking about it as a secondary source to a tertiary source of information. In workshops, guest lectures, and one-on-one consultations, she found a good reception for conversations about the history of Wikipedia, open-source culture, and anti-capitalist struggle. This gave her an opportunity to speak with a lot of students who now have a better understanding of how and why to critically appraise information on Wikipedia and to contribute to the site.

University of Alberta Library

The University of Alberta is a public research intensive university located in Edmonton, Alberta, and the library has a long history of supporting open movement projects. When a call went out to the library looking for short-term projects to be funded with donor money, Digital Projects librarian Sarah Severson pitched a WIR project. In February 2020, the University of Alberta Library hired Erin O'Neil, a digital humanities graduate student, to work part-time until August 2020, which was later extended to December 2020. The project had a \$14,000 CAD budget and O'Neil's hours fluctuated to accommodate her student schedule; she worked almost full-time in summer 2020 and up to 10 hours per week during winter and fall semesters. She brought some Wikipedia editing experience to the role as well as experience in community facilitation. O'Neil and Severson worked closely together throughout the residency as Severson had Wikipedia experience.

Residency Focus

One of the residency goals at Alberta was to engage the wider community to better learn how Wikipedia could help improve users' access to our collections. In the first month of the residency, O'Neil participated in a #lib1ref edit-a-thon organized at the library by Severson and helped facilitate a larger collaborative Art + Feminism edit-a-thon on March 5, 2020. When the COVID-19 lockdowns became a reality in Alberta in mid-March of 2020, we moved all our programming plans online. O'Neil and Severson designed an online Wikipedia 101 course to give any interested library staff more in-depth training. The six-week course was delivered in March and April, and again in June and July. We also tried a few efforts to run virtual office hours and collaborative editing sessions but these didn't find the same uptake. In an attempt to open up conversations beyond learning "how" to edit on the site and tackle the "why," O'Neil and Severson ran an online, public speaker series in fall to dive deeper into three issues: public accountability, Indigenizing Wikipedia, and information activism.

Like Jung at University of Toronto, O’Neil created a GLAM page at “Wikipedia:GLAM/UAlbertaLibrary” (2020) to collect all the Wikipedia work she was doing at the University of Alberta. The page contains archives of the Wikipedia 101 course, ongoing editing tracking, and resources about using Wikipedia as a pedagogical tool. During her WIR term, O’Neil supported several classes with Wikipedia assignments and noticed increased interest in Wikipedia as university instructors planned for online delivery of classes during COVID-19 restrictions.

At University of Alberta, writing Wikipedia articles was a core component of WIR activity. Early on in the WIR term, we collaborated on a list of articles and themes that were either featured in the library’s collection or of interest locally, and this list is posted on the GLAM page. Two examples of article creation are “Miriam Green Ellis” (2020), whose archives are housed in the Bruce Peel Special Collections at the University of Alberta Library, and the “Indigenous Art Park” (2020) recently created in Edmonton in a neighborhood adjacent to the university.

Residency Impact

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and we had to change many of our original plans for the residency, we were not sure how to measure impact resulting from the residency. We very consciously did not tie any specific quantifiable outcomes, like number of participants for the speaker series or number of edits to Wikipedia, to any of the activities. What we did observe was there was considerable community enthusiasm for Wikimedia, both in the library and at the university, and we learned a lot through the conversations and questions. O’Neil used the GLAM page as a place to bring together what she learned and curate resources for the campus community.

In terms of the impact on the individual, O’Neil said the WIR term was an excellent experience for building community at the university and stoking a passion for open knowledge, and being a WIR gave her graduate student life a stimulating new dimension. As a result, she will

be continuing to engage in Wikipedia work at the university and in Edmonton after her WIR term concludes.

Recommendations and Questions to Consider

After our interviews and conversations, we found that there were a few themes that emerged when the WIR positions were set up. We reframed these as questions to pose when thinking about how to engage in a successful WIR program at a library and offer recommendations.

What's Happening at the Institution Already?

Coming into the residency, each of our case studies had varying levels of institutional Wikipedia engagement. We each knew anecdotally of some pockets of activity either in the university where professors are engaging library resources for a Wikipedia article writing assignment, library space being used for edit-a-thons, or library staff regularly editing as a part of their job, but there was no centralized activity on any of the campuses. None of us felt it necessary to have regular Wikimedia contribution activity on campus in order to justify the WIR, but the University of Toronto Libraries used the existing vibrancy of programming as a part of their pitch. At the University of Alberta Library, Severson was new to her role and used the WIR as a means of learning more about what was happening on campus and how the library could better support those activities with existing services.

Who Should Be Hired into the Role?

When writing a WIR position description, it's good to think about the ideal candidate for the specific institution. For example, some institutions are looking to hire someone who can bring Wikimedia expertise. At Concordia, Kloda was not a Wikipedia editor and wanted to hire someone with experience in the Wikimedia ecosystem, so they could direct the position projects. Their library already had a successful Researcher-in-Residence program, so a residency model with someone from outside coming in was familiar to the library.

An alternative is to hire someone with more institutional experience and less Wikimedia experience and include a learning component in the position. Both Toronto and Alberta situated the WIR as a student role and were ready to invest in more time for training. Internationally, there is a lot of support available from local Wikimedia chapters and the Wikimedia community is full of resources on how to edit, so learning and then teaching about Wikipedia is very doable. Jung spoke about how spending the first part of his residency exploring and learning about the Wikimedia ecosystem helped him feel confident in the role. At the University of Alberta Library, we felt that by hiring a student we could gain an important perspective from outside the library on our collections and resources.

Will the Position Be Paid?

In the tradition of Wikipedia editors, many of the early WIR positions were filled on a volunteer basis. In all three of our case studies, the role was a paid one. Whether or not there are funds to pay an editor, and how much, will impact how the role is shaped. Another consideration is where to find the funding for the role. In all three of our case studies the WIR positions were funded internally through either discretionary or donor funds, which meant the positions were treated more as a special project rather than ongoing roles. This gave the libraries flexibility on who they could hire but also meant that they had a finite life span. Other options for funding a position could include project grants from the Wikipedia Foundation or partnering with a local Wikipedia chapter.

If the decision is made to create a paid WIR role, it is best practice for them to be clear about any affiliations and to be aware of Wikipedia's conflict of interest policy. While the community considers WIR editing acceptable, they are expected to identify their WIR status on their user page and on talk pages related to their organization when they post there. One recurring debate is if WIR should be required to go through the Article for Creation (AFC) process, which means that any new pages must be submitted as drafts and then reviewed by experienced editors. While in theory this process is sound, those who oppose argue on the "Wikipedia talk:Conflict of interest" (2020) page

that it is an overreach of the AFC original scope and intent and in the process assumes bad faith that discourages editors even if they are not WIR. Others are concerned that placing the constraint of the AFC could cause “significant collateral damage to the partnerships, collaboration and relationships with GLAM organisations and higher education institutions” (Joseph, 2020).

How Will Institutional Priorities Translate into Residency Goals?

Before even writing the WIR position description, it's helpful to reflect on the priorities of the institution hiring them. Does the library have unique and special collections that could be added to Wikicommons and/or used to enhance Wikipedia and that could be made more discoverable like the University of Toronto? Maybe the library values experimentation and administration is comfortable leaving the residency with very broad goals? For example, the UAL included the goal to improve UAL's understanding of the role large collaborative platforms like Wikipedia can play in improving users' access to our collections.

In all of our interviews, both WIRs and librarians cited one of the biggest advantages of working with the Wikimedia ecosystem was that there were so many project possibilities. This was reflected in the goals of each of the position's descriptions. Each of the librarians talked about wanting to leave the position as open as possible, so the residency could be shaped based on the WIR's research interests and skills and the unique library collections. In some respects, this was a real advantage. The candidates who applied for these WIR roles were from a wide variety of backgrounds, so waiting until the WIR was selected before considering specific project work allowed for a greater flexibility to empower and benefit from the specific skills and interests of each WIR. Hiring candidates who demonstrated creativity and a range of experiences both with open knowledge and in digital media made this flexibility in the role work best. In each of our case studies, the first part of the residency process was combining knowledge about WIR programs with institutional goals and proposing a project plan from there.

However, it does take time to decide on projects to tackle, and giving a WIR flexibility to choose their projects should not mean that the WIR is left alone to navigate the library or Wikipedia ecosystems on their own. At Toronto and Alberta, where the WIRs were graduate students and not veteran Wikimedians, there was a learning curve to understand the kind of language and information appropriate for Wikipedia articles. The other unanticipated learning curve was understanding some of the libraries' more unique archival or special collections, which were cataloged in sometimes complicated ways. This challenge had not been anticipated, so it taught us a lot about how we present our collections, which was invaluable.

How Will Engagement Be Generated?

The news of a WIR hire can be very exciting for an institution. It is a good news story that often aligns with institutional goals around digital and community engagement. Reaching out to institutional communications teams and news services is also important to achieve almost every other task as a WIR: when people know about the work, they are more likely to reply to emails or attend a workshop. Both Berson and Jung began their roles with outreach, earning both internal institutional attention and mainstream media coverage (local papers and local TV news). To announce the WIR role at Alberta, O'Neil did several interviews with campus media. Media coverage is especially useful to explain why a library needs a WIR or would engage with Wikipedia at all, as there are still many misconceptions about the site on campuses. Kloda and Carliner both noted that using the good news story angle also brought positive attention to their libraries, universities, and Wikipedia work in their cities.

Future Directions

Everyone we talked to said they would do a residency again if they could. When asked about future plans, Concordia said they would be interested in doing another WIR but imagined it would be completely different in terms of projects or perspectives. At Toronto, Carliner hopes that future Wikipedia work will shift to a balance between

Wikidata projects and Wikipedia article creation and editing. Here at Alberta, we'd like to try the Toronto model where article creation and editing work is focused on a precise area of the library's collections.

The Wikimedia ecosystem goes far beyond Wikipedia articles, and there is great potential for WIR roles focused on Wikidata in particular. While Wikipedia is an excellent pedagogical tool for exploring information literacy, reliable sources, and notability, Wikidata offers students the chance to engage with issues of data completeness, data processing, data analysis, and data ethics.

Conclusion

In the end, each WIR is as unique as the institution that hosts them, but it can be difficult to know how to set up the role for success if it is the first WIR at the institution. This chapter illustrated some of the commonalities and differences between three Canadian university library WIRs and how factors such as institutional priorities, funding options, and community expectations shaped these positions. We hope that by framing the common themes we noticed in our WIR experience, we have offered helpful guidance for colleagues who are building a case for a WIR at their institution. WIRs are critical to building meaningful connections on campuses for expanding Wikipedia and engaging with its complex issues of bias, representation, notability, and editor alienation. The WIR trend is growing, and we hope that this chapter will be one helpful piece in an ongoing conversation about how to make WIRs work well for institutions and Wikipedia alike.

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