

Wikipedia-academia collaborations benefit both parties

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Wikipedia has been through many changes since its inception in 2001. Now that it dwarfs all previous encyclopedias in scope and depth, collaborations with expert contributors are aiding the increased focus on

content quality.

In a recent letter to *Science*, a group of researchers make the case that there has never been a better time for experts to help shape the world's most-read information source. This is illustrated with examples of Academia-Wikipedia collaborations that have benefited both parties. Academics gain a public impact that is matched by few other outreach platforms (even obscure Wikipedia pages often get hundreds of reads per day). In return, the [encyclopedia](#) benefits from the accurate and expert-reviewed information.

The Wikimedia Foundation, the organisation that hosts Wikipedia, is currently formulating its strategy through to 2030 and has identified collaboration with the wider knowledge ecosystem as one of its key themes.

"It's a resource that we've all benefited from at one time or another. Scholars have the privilege of being able to devote their careers to knowledge, so I think it's only fair to give a little back," says Thomas Shafee

The academic community has a range of ways to get involved. The first is for individual scholars to directly edit the encyclopedia. Recent updates to its editing interface have made it as easy to write as a Word document. Multiple academic journals also offer the opportunity to dual-publish articles so that a cite-able version is published in the journal, and used to create or overhaul the topic's Wikipedia page (e.g. *PLOS*, *Gene*, *Wiki.J.Med*). The Wikipedia editor community is organised into groups with similar interests called "WikiProjects," which cover all pretty much all possible topics.

On a larger scale, there are also several successful models for organisations to form partnerships. One option is to organize groups of

experts to review and update important pages (for example Cancer research UK's updates of several cancer pages). They can also train their members to ensure the best sources are integrated into articles (or example by the Cochrane Library). Indeed, several medical schools now teach Wikipedia editing as a student course. Another possibility is directly providing their own content for use by the encyclopedia (for example Osmosis.org medical video content). Even more extensive integration of their information is also possible with Wikipedia's structured knowledge database, Wikidata (for example the pages for genes and RNA families).

Greater involvement by subject experts will improve Wikipedias quality, which will in turn attract more contributors. Although the letter to Science focused on the biomedical field, these are examples of a much wider phenomenon. For instance, there have been several ongoing collaborations between Galleries, Libraries and Museums around the world to add their curated and well-sourced knowledge to Wikipedia (GLAM-Wiki).

In all this, the real winners are the general public. Barely a few decades ago an encyclopedia was a luxury item that few could afford. Now everyone has free access to an encyclopedia larger than could ever fit in most homes if printed. It seems reasonable to keep pushing for such a resource is as good as it can be.

More information: Academics can help shape Wikipedia. *Science* 11 Aug 2017: [DOI: 10.1126/science.aao0462](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao0462)

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