Wikipedia Assignments and Postsecondary Degree Completion

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Abstract

In this research I propose to gather retrospective data from Wiki Education Foundation's student database to identify candidates to survey in order to assess the efficacy of a Wikipedia-based assignment is on postsecondary degree completion.

Introduction

One of the most important factors for social mobility in the United States is postsecondary degree completion. However, underrepresented groups and first-generation students often are at a significant disadvantage from other students. Understanding factors that link to student persistence is key to supporting a diverse population of students and providing opportunities for diverse student populations.

This research is important for Wikimedia projects as there are already dozens of (mostly postsecondary) education Wikipedia programs out there and they are all struggling to find funding to continue their mission. This data will open up new understandings of the pedagogical benefits of working with Wikipedia, while the programs themselves continue to improve and diversify Wikipedia's content.

I will be building on the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) research I conducted in 2016-2017, which suggests that students found themselves more motivated to complete their work and indicated feelings of self-efficacy.

I hypothesize that students who have participated in a Wikipedia Education program will have a higher rate of degree completion compared to their peers at their institution. This is supported by indication that self-efficacy is one of the largest indicators of student success and persistence (Robbins et. al., 2004; Usher et. al., 2008).

To do this I propose to utilize Wiki Education's database of students to conduct a retrospective survey of approximately 1,000 former students, mainly targeting underrepresented groups at HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs, to gather information about self-efficacy and college completion post-Wikipedia assignments over two years.

I will gather student data, devise a survey, and administer the survey to former students. From this initial data, I will compare the results of former student degree completion to college, national, and demographic averages to assess the correlation between Wiki Education's program and degree completion.

Date: I can begin preliminary data collection as early as June 1st, 2024, as there is no calendar requirement for this data. This phase of research will wrap up by June 30th, 2025.

Related work

I completed a "Student Learning Outcomes" research project along with Wiki Education in 2017, which illustrated that (among other things) students completing a Wikipedia-based assignment felt this assignment increased

feelings of success in their schoolwork. Students reported that they were proud of their work, spent more time, and were more satisfied with their class assignments than traditional coursework. Students overwhelmingly believed that their perceptions of Wikipedia positively changed after editing Wikipedia. While many students expressed having perceived the space as unreliable before editing Wikipedia, their perception shifted through completing the Wikipedia assignment to show more trust in Wikipedia as a reliable information source, which connected the Wikipedia assignment's learnings with the Association of College Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education. This research was extended and published OA in two articles in 2019 and 2022, underscoring these effects (McDowell and Stewart, 2019; Vetter et al, 2019; McDowell and Vetter, 2022)

Methods

I will utilize survey methods and comparative analysis to understand the data.

Data collection: I will identify students from Wiki Education's database of former students who participated between 2 and 6 years ago.

Surveys: Survey questions at this phase will be simple and mostly regarding graduation time and postsecondary demographics (eg: institution, degree program, and whether they were first generation)

I will recruit participants by emailing participants who have participated in the Wiki Education program.

Analysis: I will run a comparative analysis regarding degree completion between student demographics, area demographics, and institutional demographics, which I will obtain from the institutions where the students attended.

Expected output

This research will be published in a scholarly, open-access journal in the fields of Communication and Education. Additionally, this information will be published in various Wiki Education outreach posts. The primary intended audience will be education researchers, Wikipedia education representatives, and education funders.

Risks

The greatest challenge of this research is that students will be difficult to find and respond. This is why I have built in extra time for graduate student researchers to identify students as well as money for incentivization.

Community impact plan

This research will directly assist Wikipedia Education community members in connecting self-efficacy to degree completion, which many education funders are seeking data for improving.

Evaluation

Completion of the project and gathering the data in this project will be an excellent success. As I stated above, the greatest challenge will be to get former students to respond to gather the data.

Budget

Total: $50,000
Summer Salary for Principal Investigator (PI): $10k
Graduate Student Assistant Salaries: $20k
Incentivization for research participants: $10k
Travel and dissemination: $10k

Prior contributions

In addition to teaching with Wikipedia for over a decade, I have given in over a dozen countries on teaching with Wikipedia, I have published numerous articles in this area and continue to work on the areas of Wikipedia, education, and understanding information:

McDowell, Z.J. and Vetter, M.. Wikipedia and the representation of reality. Routledge. August 2021.

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McDowell, Z.J., and Stewart, M.D. “Student Learning Outcomes with Wikipedia-Based Assignments.” International Journal of Open Educational Resources. Volume 1, Issue 2 Spring/Summer 2019 ISSN 2641-5488.

Robbins, S. B, Lauver, K., Le, H., David, D., Langley, R., & Carlstrom, A. (2004). Do psychosocial and study skill factors predict college outcomes? A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(2), 261–288.

Usher, Ellen, & Pajares, Frank. (2008). Self-efficacy for self-regulated learning: A validation study. E*ducational and Psychological Measurement*. 68, 443–463.