

How college students use wikipedia for course-related assignment



Why then are academics so wary about the use of Wisped within universities? There are a number of related reasons. Before outlining them we should acknowledge that there may be differences according to academic discipline in attitudes towards Wisped. Speaking to academics from the natural and medical sciences over the last year, it seems that those subjects are less concerned with issues of originality of source than the arts and social sciences.

It also may be [pica] and this is genuine speculation [pica that academics in the English speaking world, where most of the academic introverts over Wisped use has been, are more sensitive to the source than in other parts of the world. These qualifications aside, there are definite reasons why Wisped use is, at the very least, contentious in universities.

First, it is the product of anonymous individuals rather than known authorities, Wales is quite explicit on this: One of the fastest things we're beginning to lose is the view of the world that there are a handful of thoughtful, intelligent people that should be broadcasting their views to everyone. And then the public is some sort of crazed rabble, easily swayed by rhetoric and so forth. Now we have to have a more nuanced understanding.

Wisped is not necessarily anti-academic but it is anti-elitist as evidenced by the short shrift given to eminent academics in debates when they expected deference (see Keen 2007, Second, the non-proprietary nature of Wisped cuts against academic culture which valorizes the rights of the author and publisher. Third, the anonymity of Wisped articles is alien to the cache of the

named writer of the journal article or book. Fourth, the collaborative process challenges the norm of individual creation, prevalent in the arts and social sciences.

Fifth, as intimated, Wisped departs from the standard mode of vetting by peer review. It is not true that articles are not reviewed. On the contrary, they are scrutinized by far more editors than for any journal. However, as the contributor is generally not an academic expert, so the reviewer is not generally an academic expert. So Wisped rejects academic custom in the compilation of knowledge. In addition, there are a number of what might be termed 'learning and teaching' issues pertaining to its use within universities.

First, there is the issue of the accuracy of Teaching in Higher Education 651
Downloaded by [University of Glasgow] at 05: 27 12 December 201 2 Wisped entries, something that relates to the lack of formal expertise and peer review. Reviews of the accuracy of Wisped entries by formal expert(s) have actually been generally positive (for natural sciences see Giles 2005; American history Meier 2008). Despite this, the suspicion still surrounds Wisped that it cannot be trusted.

Salvation's (2009, 1 19) assertion that 'most people probably have an ambivalent attitude toward Wisped, thankful for its existence, using it recurrently, but with reservations about its total reliability' seems valid. Some academics would no doubt sympathize with the sardonic observation of comedian Frankie Boyle that Wisped entries should begin with 'I reckon'.

Second, some have questioned whether Wisteria's determination for studied neutrality is convincing.

Sullivan (2010) complains that as Wisped only displays one voice, diversity is not incorporated and therefore articles become bland. Wale's response is unapologetic: ' Guilty as charged, we're an encyclopedia' (in Read 2006). Not that his approach to knowledge is without theory, it derives rather from his admiration for the convoluted ' objectivism philosophy of Aryan Rand, the Russian e emigre; philosopher and novelist (Younkers 2007).

A third learning and teaching concern is that, regardless of the reliability of Wisped, it is in itself an illegitimate form of research. Here the thinking would be that a student who culls Wisped for assignments does not understand scholarship. This consists of the consideration of various sources: a judicious sifting and ordering of knowledge, rather than lifting bite sized hunks of text that purport to capture a subject.

On this Wales concurs, telling students: ' For God sake, you're in college; don't cite the encyclopedia' (in Young 2006). Some universities in the US have banned Wisped use, whilst others recommend a more discriminating approach Coaches 2007; Morley 2008). The latter is what Wales and others within Wisped advise: it should be used only as a starting place in academic research, a references source and a revision aid. What, however, is the evidence on Wisped use by students and academics at universities?