Random Thoughts

You don't want to depend on me to provide specific details, quotes or any kind of linear representation of a meeting or presentation that I attend. My "notes" are random. Might not incredible creativity and innovation spring from rambling, random exploration? Well, maybe not.

We asked librarians who attended the Joint IU Libraries/UITS Research Technologies Roundtable sponsored program: "Crowd-Sourced Knowledge: Wikipedia, Mass Collaboration and the Scholarly Record" on April 30th in Bloomington to share their "random" thoughts with us. Virginia Sojdehei and Sherri Michaels managed to meet our very short copy deadline. Their observations are not so random, and certainly thoughtful.

The "Crowd-Sourced Knowledge: Wikipedia, Mass Collaboration and the Scholarly Record" panel was moderated by Robert H. McDonald, Associate Dean for Library Technologies and featured Brad Hamm, Dean of the IU School of Journalism, Pnina Shachaf, Assistant Professor in the School of Library and Information Science, Joel Silver, Associate Director and Curator of Books at the Lilly Library, and Adam Leite, Associate Professor of Philosophy.

Brad Hamm, Dean of the School of Journalism, is really quite funny. I could have listened to him talk all day about the current happenings in the newspaper world and the future of journalism. I was quite surprised to hear that fairness and unbiased news reporting is actually a relatively recent journalistic development (by recent I mean in the last 75 years or so), and that before that there were many daily papers for each community and each was developed to further a specific agenda or point of view. He raised some very interesting points about losing this objective point of view as each major paper cuts many newsroom positions. This leaves only a select few covering major things like the White House. Are we to rely solely on what the White House Press Secretary tells those few people? Will they have the time to truly investigate the facts behind these stories? On a local level, can we rely on a dedicated citizen to report town council happenings as we cut more positions? Interesting, fascinating questions.

I was struck by two things that Adam Leite, Philosophy professor, said concerning Wikipedia. One idea concerned the purpose of Wikipedia. If Wikipedia's purpose is to be an authoritative reference for scholarly record, then it is failing miserably as so few things are cited. If its purpose is to provide a baseline level of information to the average citizen about whatever topic they search for, then perhaps it is eminently successful. The problem is that Wikipedia has no clearly defined purpose on their pages, so it's actually hard to determine if it is "successful" in meeting the aims. The other thing that sticks with me is that he talked about the collective understanding that a group has for a particular topic within Wikipedia becomes a new standard, even if the information is incorrect. It becomes question of whether the information is good enough?

-- Sherri Michaels, Intellectual Property Librarian, IU ScholarWorks, Bloomington

Throughout the presentation/discussion, my thoughts were frequently along the lines: that was then, this is now, and what is to be in the future? For example, Joel Silver compared (reference

sources) treatment of the *Pride and Prejudice* character "Mr. Darcy" between then and now. In the past, checking for treatment of fictional characters would have started with a standard reference publication like the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Such handbooks provide relatively brief information; whereas, with development and growth of Wikipedia, one will find more lengthy and open-ended discussions on "Mr. Darcy" or just about any other topic of interest to people.

However, with the evolution of Wikipedia, comes the question of its authority and accountability. There is speculation of what Wikipedia's goals are, because Wikipedia's vision of its future is not apparent. Depending on how its future goals are shaped will determine whether it can be used/validated as a scholarly resource.

Interesting Wikipedia and Crowd Sourced Knowledge facts that I learned:

- 75% of Wikipedia is non-English. (Pnina)
- Given the ongoing dialogs that take place in multiple languages, will alter/change the answers. An example used: finding the meaning of the word "pico." (Pnina)
- *Citizen Journalism* is a form of *Crowd Sourced Knowledge*. Part of this phenomenon is due to an interesting statistic: In the past 10 years 25,000 reporters have been lost due to reduced employment. (Brad)
- Crowd Sourced Knowledge will change reference; it hasn't yet, but it will!

-- Virginia Sojdehei, Reference Services Librarian, Information Commons Undergraduate Library Services, IUB

Do you have post- program/workshop/seminar/lecture/reading thoughts that you'd like to share with other InULA members? Send your random or not so random thoughts to Emily Okada: okada@indiana.edu. Deadlines are random! We aim for 2 issues of InULA Notes each year. But sometimes we're able to put out 3.