

Will You Wiki?

Policy Students' Experience of Learning by Doing Wiki Projects



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Research Questions

Researchers have identified *team tasks* and *active revision* as two useful tools for teaching and learning public policy (O'Hare, 2006). This project investigates whether a wiki can help encourage Masters in Public Policy (M.P.P.) students to develop significant subject matter expertise in an environment of collaboration and frequent revision. In Fall 2009, twenty M.P.P. students enrolled in PUBPOL 675 (International Human Rights Policy) used a wiki to complete a group project on one of five major human rights issues. Each student contributed an individual wiki page and worked with classmates to create group pages related to their core issue.

Key research questions are

- 1) What (if any) features of the wiki support learning through revision?
- 2) What (if any) features of the wiki support learning from peers?

Sources of data analyzed include

- 4 blinded surveys during the semester (N varied 11-22)
- End-of-semester focus group (N=11)
- Final online survey (N=11)

Why a Wiki?

Wikis are designed to make online collaboration easy. Wiki software invites users to create, edit, and link webpages—using various types of content, such as videos, audio files, and images. Revision is an integral part of wiki work. Sample pages from student wikis are shown at the right.—

"[I hope you'll] do the wiki project [again] -- I think it balanced the whole group work/individual work better than any other class I've taken."

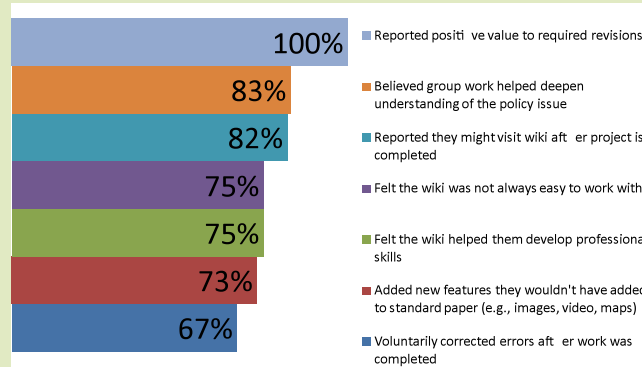
References & Acknowledgements

O'Hare, J. (2006). *Pedagogy for Policy Analysis and Management*. Paper presented at the Association for Policy Analysis and Management Spring Conference, Park City, UT.

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Survey Results

Students who responded to the surveys reported the following:



Wiki allows for inclusion of variety of content types, such as video

Wiki enables students to create colorful graphic representations

History of revisions and comments by peers and instructor

Key Findings

Revisions

- Students reported making revisions to their wikis far longer than in traditional assignments
- 100% reported positive value to required revisions

Learning From Peers

- Students reported that the wikis supported collaboration more than traditional group projects by requiring group editing and encouraging use of each other as resources or experts
- Students reported greater willingness to edit or revise contributions of others

General Dividends

- Students felt the wikis enhanced learning by requiring them to reflect on their work and make revisions
- Students considered audience more than in traditional academic papers

Limitations

- 75% felt wiki technology was not always easy to work with
- Students rated the wiki as equal to other course features that facilitated learning (e.g., instructor comments, reading/editing online input from other students).

"[The Wiki made me] play both sides, as writer of the website and user of the website. [It] also enabled me to feel free to leave some questions there [and] to not be too conclusive."

Implications for Teaching

- Group work was key to the success of the wiki projects: Many students felt that the wiki provided a structure that facilitated productive group discussions and even distribution of work, since all members can easily view and comment on contributions of others.
- Some students encountered technical difficulties while using the wiki, which caused frustration. Therefore, it is important for faculty to address technical aspects of a wiki they want to use for a course and have students begin the project early in the term in order to allow them to gain familiarity and necessary technical skills.