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The Good, the Badge, and the Ugly: Takeaways from Creating an Information Literacy Badge

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Abstract

Digital badges are micro-certifications that indicate competence in particular skills. At Columbia College, we combined coursework on information literacy skills with a Wikipedia editing project to create a digital “Research Badge” administered through the campus learning management system. Our poster at SCLA 2019 shared project successes and areas for improvement.

Keywords

information literacy, badges

Through a partnership with the nationally recognized Student Leadership Competencies program, we, the librarians at J. Drake Edens Library at Columbia College, created an information literacy-based “Research Badge,” accessible through the campus Learning Management System (LMS) and accredited through a digital badging platform. This badge, with its basis in leadership competencies through the lens of research, gives students a chance to learn about research principles and put those skills into practice through a Wikipedia editing project.

Digital badges indicate knowledge and often provide a validated measure of specific skills, not just overall understanding. They provide a visual representation of learned skills that can be shared through a badging platform or through embedded tools, such as badge integrations on the career-focused social network LinkedIn. Digital badges are part of the growing trend of micro-credentialing, or small-scale credentials.

We created the Research Badge using Canvas, the campus LMS, and Credly, a digital badging platform. We created lessons by adding content to Canvas pages, sharing outside links, and embedding videos explaining information literacy concepts such as determining keywords, writing citations, and more. By releasing content through scaffolded modules, the Research Badge allows for asynchronous learning.

Before the badge was publicized on campus, two student volunteers worked through the materials on Canvas. One student completed the badge in full, editing a Wikipedia article as a part of her capstone project. From the students’ feedback, we reassessed the badge, tweaking some materials and adjusting assessments and instructions as needed.

The Wikipedia editing portion was designed to apply research skills to a tangible, real-world project. As there is a gender disparity on Wikipedia, students are required to exhibit their competency

through researching and writing about a female leader or woman-led organization. This project aligns with Columbia College's focus on social justice.

There was an initial push for the library to partner with Wiki Education, an educational organization affiliated with Wikipedia. Unfortunately, the asynchronous delivery of the Research Badge made Wiki Education's platform unsuitable for the project. Without the organization's help, this portion of the Research Badge has become more difficult to troubleshoot in the event of technical problems or the violation of Wikipedia community norms. Even so, Wiki Education's training materials have proven useful, with their training platform being a great resource in learning how to navigate and edit on Wikipedia.

Owing to Canvas's technical features and our ability to share outside resources with students, the Research Badge is accessible even to nontraditional and off-campus students, two groups targeted as audiences for this training. Because Canvas is so data-driven, there are several assessment opportunities available to us. We can track student progress in real time and adjust materials as needed.

There has been limited engagement with the badge thus far. With this minimal focus testing, it has been difficult to determine where problems—and solutions—lie. That said, there is flexibility built into the badge's content and delivery. Moving forward, we will continue to rework the Research Badge in accordance with the needs of the campus and our students.