

UC Berkeley hires first Wikipedian-in-residence (Update)

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A 24-year-old geography major is the first Wikipedian-in-residence at the University of California, Berkeley.

The school announced recently that it had hired Kevin Gorman to advise students and professors on the complex task of editing articles for Wikipedia, the user-generated online encyclopedia that gets 500 million monthly visitors.

Many universities around the country have classes producing content for Wikipedia, but in-residence Wikipedians have previously been tied only to private institutions like the U.S. National Archives.

UC Berkeley would be the first American university to create a position devoted to improving the site and getting its own scholarship out to the public.

The idea is to enhance the quality of the articles on Wikipedia, and provide access to more source material like academic journals, which are often only accessible through university or public libraries.

Gorman also hopes to help provide more diversity in the people editing Wikipedia. Surveys suggest 90 percent of the site's editors are male, and 80 percent white.

"Providing content not yet found on Wikipedia, in areas that suffer due to our systemic biases, is vital work," he wrote, according the university.

Editing Wikipedia articles is already part of the curricula in environmental justice and cultural studies courses at Berkeley. The students will tackle existing articles on air pollution, urban agriculture and hydraulic fracturing.

But instead of their research only being read by instructors, the hope is that quality student research can now be accessed by a larger audience on Wikipedia.

"I'm not interested in students writing term papers that only I and the graduate-student instructor read," associate professor Dara O'Rourke said in a school news release. "That's not utilizing students' potential to the fullest."

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