

Scholarly

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IT500: Critical Concepts and Competencies for the IT Professional

12/14/2013

As a student's academic objective shifts from undergraduate school into graduate school, it is imperative that they learn how to gather and utilize appropriate resources during research. These academic resources can be acquired from online scholarly resources, the university's library, or even the local library. The most important concept to remember while searching for scholarly sources is the trustworthiness of the material. Thus, when a student cites references in essay papers and projects, it is of utmost importance that the results are credible, and that all associated citations are from scholarly sources. The question of *What exactly is a scholarly source?* is indeed the number one inquiry that every graduate student should contemplate when looking for reliable references. Scholarly sources can be peer-reviewed articles and journals, community-based scientific data, and medical sites and information that have been approved by doctors and other senior level editors and reviewers.

In these modern times, in the era of the Internet, there are countless available sources online. However, due to the large amount of misinformation that plagues the online medium, it is ultimately the graduate student's responsibility to scrutinize with extreme prejudice the reliability and validity of all information that comes from the Internet. One popular online source, whose use numerous academic institutions are now banning, is Wikipedia. Wikipedia is a wiki, meaning it is a live, frequently modified online encyclopedia. Is Wikipedia considered a scholarly source? If Wikipedia is a scholarly source, then it will have all the attributes of scholarly material. However, if Wikipedia is not a scholarly source, then it would be inappropriate for use by the graduate student. Consequently, if Wikipedia is determined not to be a valid reference, what other available academic resources are at the graduate student's disposal? The most important thing that the graduate needs to remember is that they can successfully write

at the master's level if they seek out solid academic references and resources from credible sources.

When trying to determine exactly what is considered a scholarly source and what is not, it is best to elaborate on the meaning of scholarly. This refers to the solid credibility of the authors, publishers, editors, and reviewers of the referenced material. Academia has developed a system of checks and balances to review and confirm the validity and reliability of information that is made available for public consumption. The very nature of this process, commonly referred to as peer-review, reduces the proliferation of misinformation and maintains the integrity of the material being distributed. Of course, this does beg the question, “Why should I listen to them [the professionals] over anyone else?” This is a good question.

Scholarly articles are usually derived from researchers and scientists holding advanced degrees in their fields of expertise. The process of research itself is a thorough procedure that typically requires permission to even begin the research. Once the research has been initiated, strict guidelines must be adhered to (for example, the scientific method must be utilized). Following the completion of the research, it must be submitted for peer review. And then, and only then, when the research or information has been reviewed and its reliability and validity verified, can it be published. This entire systematic process justifies why the graduate student should be inclined to cite from and reference peer-reviewed academic resources over most other non-peer-reviewed information.

Considering what is known to be scholarly, is Wikipedia a good resource? This is a highly debatable question that has students, teachers, and Internet users publicly disclosing their opinions. On the positive side, many people believe Wikipedia is a great place to begin an academic inquiry; it is no different than using an encyclopedia. Debates, an online source, claims

that Wikipedia is a force for good, stating that Wikipedia has 3.6 million articles available (Debates, para. 2). In fact, the very idea that Wikipedia often cites credible research, as opposed to the static information found in encyclopedias, actually makes Wikipedia a better academic resource than encyclopedias. Debates goes on further to declare that Wikipedia continues to grow in size and importance (Debates, para. 2).

There is no doubting that Wikipedia is the world's largest source of online articles. Likewise, the digital endeavors to create, categorize, and maintain the world's largest database of information is extremely respectable. Additionally, the open access nature of Wikipedia allows the entire planet to participate in building an evolutionary knowledgebase that is available to anyone who has access to the Internet; this is also known as crowdsourcing.

Obviously, Wikipedia has its merits; however, many academics question its use as scholarly material. Williams College Library, an educational website, states that Wikipedia should probably not be cited in academic papers, mainly because the articles at the Wikipedia site are not a part of scholar discourse (Williams College Libraries, para. 4). Wikipedia may house millions of articles. However, this does not make it an authority on the information; Wikipedia merely speaks on the behalf of others.

One major flaw with the online database is that literally anyone can submit changes. Some would consider this an asset (as the information gets updated regularly); however, the academic community perceives this as allowing non-specialists, non-degreed, and non-experienced individuals to submit information that could be vague, improper, or just plain wrong. Thus, the use of Wikipedia by the graduate student could quickly land them in an academic quandary. Citing information that is wrong, using material that could change

overnight, and accepting data from non-experienced, non-credentialed authors are all elements that should be unconditionally considered to be off-limits by the graduate student.

If Wikipedia is to be academically out-of-bounds, this challenges the graduate student to explore other available resources. One great resource is the university library, specifically the Kaplan University library. There are six support centers that can be found at the library that can address the academic needs of the student; they are the Math Center, Writing Center, Science Center, Technology Center, Business Center, and Disability Center. Each support center also has sub-categories. For instance, the two sub-categories of the Technology Center are the Technology Tutor and the Techie Thursday Webinars. Technology Tutor has live support and email for over sixty Information Technology undergraduate and graduate courses. This support category will be extremely useful to the graduate student whenever there is prerequisite knowledge that may be required for a course. The Techie Thursday Webinars offer many live sessions on information technology topics. These can be extremely useful to the graduate student just to expand their general knowledge.

Additionally, three extremely useful services are the Writing Reference Library, the Citation Guidelines (APA & more), and the Writing Workshops. The use of each of these services allows a graduate student to write better, higher quality papers. The Writing Reference Library is a great place to look for writing types and tools, and to learn more about the writing process. The Citation Guidelines area has a plethora of writing guidelines, PDFs and videos on APA, and policies and information on how to avoid plagiarism. Finally, the Writing Workshops have numerous quick tips about the writing process, documents on how to write, information about creative writing, and general information about professional and research writing. The main focus of each of these areas is to provide the student with all the necessary resources and

tools to write effectively and to produce well-rounded papers. (Kaplan University)

In conclusion, the dissemination of scholarly sources has conducted due diligence on collegiate sources. The scientific and academic communities go through a lot of effort to create guidelines for research, scientific experimentation, and ultimately the publication of scholarly articles. Wikipedia does indeed offer millions of articles, which are readily available for public consumption. However, due to its lack of peer-reviewed material, and allowing anyone to submit changes to the database, Wikipedia is not considered a scholarly source. Furthermore, if a graduate student cites from Wikipedia, the results will be deleterious to their overall academic achievement, resulting in lower grades. As for the availability of usable sources, there are scholarly articles and journals, as well as peer-reviewed medical and technology materials available, all of which can be found at the Kaplan University library. If the graduate student avoids Wikipedia and utilizes the scholarly sources available at the Kaplan University library, they will be successful at writing at the graduate level.

References

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