Veni, Vidi, Vicipaedia: Using the Latin Wikipedia in an Advanced Latin Classroom

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Abstract

Vicipaedia, the Latin Wikipedia, offers instructors an easy and flexible way to integrate composition assignments into a course. The high profile and immediacy of the site makes it uniquely attractive to students while the collaborative nature and complete transparency of the editing process recommend it to instructors. This paper documents the way Vicipaedia was incorporated into one advanced Latin class as a rich learning experience that resulted in better translation and increased understanding of the language. The students' enthusiastic engagement with a broader, digital community also generated significant outcomes beyond those related to Latin language acquisition, ones that benefited not only the students themselves but also the instructor, the department, and the discipline.

Numerous recent articles have defended prose composition as a component of Latin instruction.[1] Davisson has reiterated its utility, Dugdale its venerability. The need for a defense has always surprised me, as composition was always a part of my own training, from high school through graduate studies, and one that I found sharpened my skills and profoundly deepened my understanding of the language. My high school creative writing assignments and composition courses in both undergrad and graduate school are fond memories.

As much as I would like to create similar memories for my own students—while similarly honing their skills and deepening their understanding, of course—composition has proven more difficult to incorporate into my own curriculum. Time constraints in the beginning levels leave little room for more than the textbook's English-to-Latin exercises. Due to the small number of students at my institution who take Latin at the advanced level we are unable to offer a dedicated Latin Com-

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1 The foundation for such defenses rests on Saunders (1993).

position course. This past year I attempted to incorporate composition into a regular advanced-level course offering (one normally devoted solely to translation) and ended up with a rich learning experience that produced significant outcomes both in Latin and in broader pedagogical terms. That rich learning experience was turning my students (and myself) into editors of [Vicipaedia](), the Latin Wikipedia.[2]

This article will demonstrate the value of engaging with Vicipaedia by relaying my own experience. After outlining the peculiarities of the Latin program at my institution and my own understanding of the value of prose composition, I will discuss how I myself learned to edit Vicipaedia, the ways in which it was incorporated into my classroom, and the effect that it had on the learning outcomes I had designed for my students. Besides the obvious desire to increase my students' facility with Latin and understanding of the language I also had other broader goals that will be discussed separately. These involved engaging my students in the digital world, increasing the visibility of my department and discipline within my institution, and bringing my language teaching more in line with my overall pedagogy and the mission of my university. Some possibilities for further development will be presented and, finally, a short appendix will serve as an introduction to the mechanics of editing Vicipaedia for interested instructors.

Background

At Gonzaga University students work through a Latin textbook (*Wheelock*) over the course of three semesters. The fourth semester is given over to building the skill of translation in a transitional course that involves reading a continuous narrative slowly and carefully, with generous amounts of review. After that come 300-level, or Advanced, Latin courses, centered on an author or genre. Enrollments and staffing limitations are such that fourth-year courses are not feasible, so the Advanced Latin courses contain both juniors and seniors. Freshmen and sophomores are also present in these courses, since every year we have students arriving with sufficient high school Latin that they can skip the introductory courses. In the five years that I have taught at Gonzaga this "one room schoolhouse" approach has

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2 Similar to Mahoney (2015), I will exclusively use "Vicipaedia," or "the Latin site" to refer to the Latin Wikipedia ([la.wikipedia.org]()) and "Wikipedia," or "the English site" to refer to the English version ([en.wikipedia.org]()). Mahoney appeared as I was completing this project and remains an essential introduction to Vicipaedia by an experienced editor. While she does offer suggestions for incorporating the site into Latin courses, the present article, as articulated above, is devoted more to the issues surrounding prose composition in particular, as well as some of the surprising benefits that can result from integrating Vicipaedia in this way.

yielded enrollments ranging from four to fifteen students in a given semester. The content of the Advanced Latin courses is rotated so that students can theoretically take them all four years and not repeat authors or texts. We alternate Republican and Imperial authors every year, with prose in the fall and poetry in the spring.

As can be seen in the above description, our program is a fairly traditional one. In part this is a feature of the program as I inherited it but it also reflects my own training and pedagogy. Thus I had never questioned the value of prose composition as a part of language training, and was disappointed that our enrollments ruled out the possibility of a separate course devoted to it. In a traditional program such as ours the arguments made in defense of composition by Saunders (1993) over twenty years ago still carry weight and I note that they are still cited by the various instructors who have proposed innovative ways of incorporating composition into their classrooms in recent years.[3] Nonetheless I recognize that newer approaches such as Comprehensible Input have arisen. As will be discussed below, I think that Vicipaedia can offer something to Latin instructors regardless of their chosen pedagogy.

In the spring of 2015 the one advanced Latin course offered at Gonzaga was Republican Poetry and the chosen author was Lucretius. Five students were enrolled. Besides completing the usual assignments of translation and scansion the class also read and discussed Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* and some of its most prominent critiques.[4] In looking for a means to include composition in the class I thought of Vicipaedia, a site I had included in past courses as an occasional supplement or diversion much as I have used Nuntii Latini or its imitators.

My original conception of how Vicipaedia would be included in the course revolved around its entry for Lucretius, which at the time was a poorly written stub with clear grammatical errors in its Latin.[5] My goal was to have students gradually develop their skills and confidence in editing Vicipaedia over the course of the semester and then rework the entry on Lucretius as their summative final project. This meant learning something about Vicipaedia and how it worked.

3 Besides Davisson and Dugdale, mentioned above, see, for example, Trego, Gruber-Miller, Beneker, and Lord.

4 Most notably Jim Hinch's devastating review "Why Stephen Greenblatt is Wrong—and Why It Matters." *LA Review of Books,* 1 Dec. 2012. Web. 15 Sept. 2015. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/review/why-stephen-greenblatt-is-wrong-and-why-it-matters>

5 Thanks to the transparency and archiving discussed below, the page as it stood at the time can be viewed in its entirety here.

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH VICIPAEDIA[6]

Anyone can edit any of the Wikipedias, including Vicipaedia, at any time. While this doesn't require the creation of an account, registration makes it far easier to track edits and changes. One of the advantages of the Wikipedia system is its transparency. All changes are recorded and recoverable. In the event of unregistered accounts the IP address is listed. For this reason I knew that I would be requiring my students to register so that I could track their work. My first step was therefore to register an account of my own, "Dr. Ostorius." Since the transparency would work both ways I also registered a second account under another name to experiment with editing. Registering on either the Latin or English site carries over to the other.

I began small by correcting some of the weaker Latin on certain pages, e.g., changing *tribus* in reference to Native American tribes to *natio* on a number of pages. The user interface is fairly easy to grasp. After only an hour or so I felt comfortable creating my first page. I decided to create a page for Spokane, Washington, the city in which my university is located:
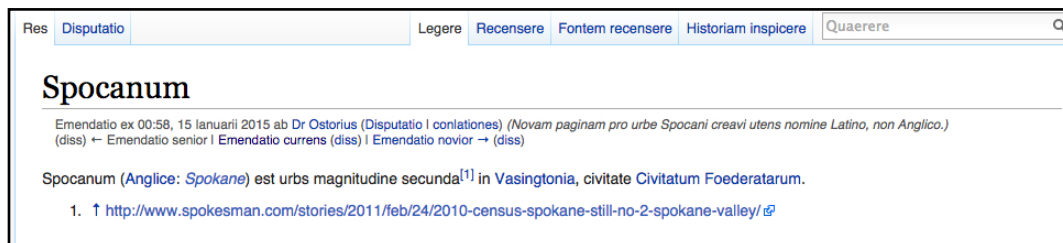
Figure 1. Spocanum, initial draft

Note the transparency mentioned above. All changes are recorded and recoverable by clicking on *Historiam Inspicere*. This image is the result of such a search and therefore shows who produced the edit, the date and time, and any comments made by the editor (which can be made in any language).

One reality of the Wikipedia system became readily apparent. Within an hour the Spokane article I had created had been edited and augmented by someone else:

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6 As mentioned above, Mahoney (2015), a Vicipaedia editor with many years experience, provides an excellent overview of the site and its history, especially for those unfamiliar with the Wikipedia system. For a more step-by-step guide to getting started as a Vicipaedia editor see the Appendix below.

Figure 2. Spocanum, edited by a Vicipaedia editor

Much of this was bringing the page into alignment with some of Vicipaedia's standards, of which I was unaware at the time. While this user, Jondel, is an experienced Vicipaedia editor, note the improper Genitive in the image caption. A flurry of edits followed over the course of the day, some of them done by automatic programs or "bots" that are designed to maintain uniformity. Among the edits by actual people was the following request for a citation regarding the Latin form of the city's name:

Figure 3. Spocanum, request for citations

Nine hours after I had created it the page had stabilized as follows:

Figure 4. Spocanum, page stabilized

This experience made it clear to me that I had to become more familiar with the workings of Vicipaedia, and Wikipedia, before involving my students.

Wikipedia itself is eager to involve academics and their students as editors. The English version of the site has numerous resources geared towards the educator who wants to incorporate Wikipedia into the classroom through the Wiki Education Foundation (http://wikiedu.org/). They provide templates and tutorials (both for instructors and students) and, once a course is registered on the site, an assigned classroom program manager. Mine contacted me within a few days of my course being registered.

All of this is through the English site, however. Vicipaedia has no such infrastructure as of yet. Thus those aspects of the course had to be done through Wikipedia. Nonetheless my classroom program manager was up for the challenge and recruited one of the more prominent Vicipaedia editors, Andrew Dalby, to assist in what appeared to be an unprecedented inter-Wiki enterprise. Andrew provided valuable advice in shaping the Vicipaedia experience for my students and me. Additionally, once I had created a Usor page on Vicipaedia the following welcome message appeared on the *Disputatio* or "Discussion" portion of that page:

Figure 5. User welcome page

The message alerted me to, respectively:

- Links and hints for new users (available in a variety of languages, including English)

- An editing and style guide (also available in English)

- A translator's guide (in English)

- A forum for questions

- A link to Vicipaedia's entry on Neolatin vocabulary

- Links to online Latin dictionaries in various languages

- A list of sources for Latin names of places, including both texts and links

Familiarizing myself with these took approximately a weekend, during which I practiced my skills by creating a number of pages and engaging in dialogue with other editors. After this I felt ready to bring Vicipaedia into the classroom.

Vicipaedia in the Classroom

The course met for fifty minutes three times a week. I allotted half of every Friday class to Vicipaedia, beginning in the fourth week of the semester. The delay allowed the students time to learn about Lucretius, as the first assignment was to read and assess the page devoted to him. As mentioned above, at the time it was a poorly written stub, with very little biography and clear grammatical errors in its Latin. An overly long and superfluous quotation from the *De Rerum Natura* dominated the page. The state of the page surprised and motivated my students.

The next step was to have them learn the basics of editing. While all of my students had used Wikipedia none had experience editing it or much knowledge about its internal workings. Thus the early assignments were geared towards orientation. Most useful were the training tutorials—one for the students and one for me—provided by the English site.[7] These involved not only the practicalities of editing but also the philosophical underpinnings of the site. These are articulated in what Wikipedia calls its Five Pillars:

1. Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia

2. Wikipedia has a neutral point of view

3. Wikipedia is free content

4. Wikipedians should interact in a respectful and civil manner

5. Wikipedia does not have firm rules

The ramifications of numbers 1 and 4 in particular generated productive discussion in class, since the students had not considered the nature of Wikipedia before. Number 4 would be revisited in class when other Vicipaedia editors would edit the students' creations, sometimes to their chagrin. Other principles that are stressed in the tutorials are verifiability, notability, and avoiding original research.

The basics of editing were then practiced on the Spokane page that I had created. The first assignment after completing the orientation was to produce a list of famous Spokanites, people who had either been born or lived a significant portion of their lives in Spokane. We focused on notability to winnow this list down to

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7 Student tutorial: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_students.
Instructor tutorial: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_educators.

five in order that each student could be responsible for one. Then, in class, we added them one by one to a template I had created for Spokane's *Cives Illustres*, using Bing Crosby as an example. The result was that each student added a name to the following subsection on the Spocanum page:

Figure 6. Famous Spokanites

The students worked from laptops or smartphones as we viewed the page together on a digital projector. Watching these names appear in real time on the screen in the classroom gave the students an immediate sense of accomplishment, as did the knowledge that this was now live on the Internet. Note that students were at this point still adjusting to one of the stipulations in Vicipaedia's style guide: that a first name with an established Latin form should be given in that form. "Tom" would later be corrected to "Thomas."

This list provided the framework for the next assignment, which involved more advanced editing. Over the next two weeks students were expected to add descriptors (e.g., *actrix, cantor*) to their Spokanite on the Spocanum page and then hotlink their names to individual pages. Most of those pages had to be created by them from scratch, as only Bing Crosby and Hilary Swank had preexisting pages on Vicipaedia.

Two tools highlighted by Andrew Dalby proved especially useful in this. The first was the code {{in progressu}} that could be added to the top of a page to indicate its status as a work in progress. When entered it generated the following (with the English dropdown activated):

Figure 7. In-progress tool

For the most part this prevented aggressive editing by other Vicipaedia users, although it was not a guarantee. Our plans to also edit the Vicipaedia page for Gonzaga University had to be dropped after another user began a series of edits even though the {{in progressu}} formula had been applied. As will be discussed below, this could have been avoided by using Wikipedia's Sandbox feature.

The other resource that was useful at this stage was the formula that spelled out what elements were necessary for a page to be considered a stub:

Figure 8. Stub requirements tool

This formula served as an outline for assignments and a ready checklist for assessing student performance. It also helped reinforce the lessons from our orientation on what the nature and purpose of an encyclopedia is, particularly through the requirement that students go out and create links on other pages to the one that they were creating. The end result was the following list, with each entry hotlinked to a fully developed stub produced by the students:

Incolae notabiles

Inter illustres qui Spocani nati sunt vel diutius habitabant sunt:

- Henricus "Bing" Crosby, cantor et actor
- Thomas Foley, politicus Americanus, iurisconsultus
- Ryan Lewis, editor musicae
- Craig T. Nelson, actor
- Ioannes Stockton, lusor canistriludii
- Hilaria Swank, actrix

Figure 9. Famous Spokanites linked to fully developed stubs

We then turned our attention towards editing the Lucretius page. Having read a good deal on Lucretius by this time the students readily saw the deficiencies of the existing page. Their obvious point of comparison was the corresponding entry on Wikipedia, but I also drew their attention to the entries for Lucretius on the Spanish, French, Italian, and German versions of Wikipedia. It did not require fluency in those languages to see that there were multiple perspectives on Lucretius and different points of concern among the various editors.

Since the Lucretius page was preexisting and of a higher profile than our Spokane page, I decided it was best not to approach it piecemeal. Working on revisions gradually and then making one sweeping edit seemed best, so we availed ourselves of another Wikipedia tool, the Sandbox. This is a space available to any registered user that allows for unfettered experimentation with editing. The results do not leave this particular page, or "sandbox." We had not used this tool initially in part because it is not available on Vicipaedia; the class used the Sandbox associated with my Dr. Ostorius account on the English site.

As a class we spent one period discussing what we found lacking on the Vicipaedia Lucretius page and arrived at five areas that needed to be addressed, e.g., his Epicureanism, his relationship with Memmius, his later influence, etc. Each student

took responsibility for one of the areas. The plan was for each of them to write one or two short sentences in Latin on their assigned topic. Two weeks would then be spent working on this composition in class, with feedback given by the other students and me. Additionally each student was also assigned a book of the *De Rerum Natura* to summarize briefly in Latin as a replacement for the existing summaries. This was to be similarly workshopped in class. Once a consensus was reached we would move out of the Sandbox and update the Lucretius page on Vicipaedia. That was the extent of my original plans for incorporating Vicipaedia in the course.

It became apparent early on, however, that I had failed to take into account my students' enthusiasm and their desire for self-expression. As soon as I outlined the original assignment for them they began to ask when they would be working on pages of their own choosing. Hence I added one final project to the course: the creation of a Vicipaedia page of their choosing. The only stipulation was that it had to be a completely new page on the site. By the end of the term, therefore, Vicipaedia had pages for [Snoop Dogg](#), [Dave Grohl](#), [Felicity Jones](#), [Janelle Monáe](#), and [Pat Summitt](#). Each had to meet the same basic requirements for a stub as listed above. This was completed one week before the end of the semester and it was interesting to watch their reactions following the completion of the assignment as other editors or bots touched up their pages. Some took offense at changes being made while others lamented that no one was paying any attention to their creation.

To make room for this added assignment I decided to focus on the summaries of the *De Rerum Natura* and to shortchange the other additions we had planned for the Lucretius page. Their initial drafts on their assigned topics had been as follows:

His relationship to Memmius [edit]

Memmius erat amicus Lucretio. Carmen Lucretii, *De Rerum Natura*, dedicavit Memmio.

His Epicureanism [edit]

Propositum rationis Epicureae est voluptatem conficere et dolorem evitare. Epicurus doceat bonum est moderate vivere.

His influence on Latin writers [edit]

Postquam mortem Lucretii, poetas multos Romanos adfecit, hoc est Vergilium, Horatium, Ovidiumque.

His influence on later, non-Roman writers [edit]

Multos annos postquam vitam Lucretii, Stephen Greenblatt, scriptor, adficitur a Lucretio in suo libro. Potes legere in The Swerve.

His rediscovery [edit]

Liberi anno 1417 Poggio Bracciolino reperiebant. Anno 1473 primum imprimebant.

Figure 10. Planned additions to the Vicipaedia Lucretius page

While we wouldn't be able to devote the weeks we had planned to revising these, nonetheless, having read *The Swerve*, my students were keen that something be included about Lucretius' influence and Poggio Bracciolini's recovery of the text in particular. So we spent one class period combining and reworking three of the sentences above (with a little stronger guidance from me than in our other assignments) into the following:

Post mortem [edit l edit source]

Post mortem multi poetae Romani Lucretium aemulati sunt, inter quos Vergilius in primis, sed etiam Horatius, Ovidius, et alii. Multis post saeculis tamen philosophia Lucretii posterioribus, praesertim Christianis, tam displicuit ut exempla operum quasi evanuerunt. Anno 1417 Poggio Bracciolino ultimum manuscriptum invenit et poema *De rerum natura* in lumen reddidit.

Figure 11. Actual addition to the Vicipaedia Lucretius page

I will discuss the work that we did focus on, the summaries of the books of the *De Rerum Natura*, and the outcomes that resulted below.

Our schedule thus ended up as follows. Except for the tenth week approximately half an hour of class time was devoted to the Vicipaedia project:

Week	Assignment
3	Introduction.
4	Read and assess Lucretius page on Vicipaedia.
5	Complete student tutorials, discuss nature of Wikipedia.
6	List notable Spokanites, add to Spocanum page.
7	Create viable stub pages for said Spokanites.
8	Finalize those stubs.
9	Discuss deficiencies of Vicipaedia page on Lucretius, assign topics and books.
10	Rushed workshopping and finalization of section on Lucretius' legacy. (Full period)
11	Work on summaries of *De Rerum Natura* books.
12	Work on summaries of *De Rerum Natura* books.
13	Finalize summaries of *De Rerum Natura* books.
14	Workshop personal pages.
15	Finalize personal pages.

Latin Outcomes and Assessment

Of course the Vicipaedia assignments were no substitute for a dedicated Latin Composition course. They did, however, provide an opportunity for students to stretch themselves and engage with the language in a uniquely rewarding way. As Saunders (p. 392) remarks, "The goal of prose composition depends on the level of the students." My goals were relatively modest. Knowing that I did not have the time for comprehension instruction in this area, I made it my goal to stress certain aspects of Latin.

These were aspects that I thought would benefit my students' understanding of the language, but also ones I thought were lacking on Vicipaedia. As I prepared for the course by reading extensively on the site, I noticed that, unlike [Nuntii Latini](#), the Latinity of the various editors varied widely. Much of it read exactly like translated English. Thus I thought it would benefit both my students and the website to stress certain ways that Classical Latin and English differ in expression. My hope was that this would assist them in translating Lucretius as well as in their composition efforts. I wanted to encourage my students to write in as Latin a manner as possible. To that end I drew up an admittedly subjective list of priorities that was based on my own reading of Vicipaedia and the deficiencies I perceived there. It was also aimed at some of the aspects of Lucretius' Latin that were proving difficult for my students in their regular translation assignments. That list was composed of the following:

- Verbs over nouns. E.g., *the book praises Venus* instead of *the book contains praise of Venus.*

- Ablative absolutes and participles in general. E.g., *with Epicurus praised* instead of *he praised Epicurus and then . . .*

- Less common case uses. E.g., *Epicurus outstrips Hercules.* Constructions such as the Dative with compound verbs or Ablative of specification are largely avoided on Vicipaedia. Instead a lot of prepositions are used, sometimes resulting in Latin that looks more medieval.

- More complex syntax. E.g., Indirect Statement and Question. Vicipaedia editors avoid the subjunctive mood in general.

- Finally, when writing about Lucretius and the *De Rerum Natura* I encouraged them to incorporate Lucretius' own vocabulary and phrasing.

This required a good deal of time and effort, which we were only able to bring to bear fully on the summaries of the *De Rerum Natura*, due to time constraints. The three weeks we spent on those, however, demonstrate real progress.

As mentioned above, the summaries as we found them were nearly incomprehensible:

Partes [edit | edit source]

Poema Lucretii mittitur ad Gaium Memmium et scribantur sex liber in quibus exponetur disciplina Epicurea seminum.

Liber primus: NIHIL GERITUR EX NIHILO in exordio laus Veneris (Aenaedum genetrix) est, hominum deorumque voluptas.Venus invocata est quod Marti roget pacem Romanis. Praeterea laus Epicuro est. Lucretius tandem exponet disciplinam Epicurea: nihil geritur ex nihilo, sed omnia mutant. Semina (corpuscula minima) aeterna, individua, immutabilia est.

Liber secundus: MOTUS ET PROPRIETAS SEMINUM

Liber tertius: ANIMUS RES MORTALEM

Liber quartus: DE SENSIBUS

Liber quintus: ORBS MORTALEM FORTUITUMQUE

Liber sextus: DEFINITIO DE RERUM NATURA

Figure 12. Initial summaries of *De rerum natura***, books 1-6**

The students' first drafts were improvements, but largely lacked the characteristics listed above, as seen in this snapshot of our Sandbox page:

Summaries of the Books of the *De Rerum Natura* [edit]

1 (I will write)

2 Liber duo res primordiorum describit et fides Omnia esse fortuita. Quae etiam "the swerve" appellavit.

3 Lucretius Epicurum laudat. Animum mortalem esse et quomodo animum situm sit exponet. Genum humanum mortem non metuere hortatur.

4 Lucreius pericula amoris describet. Amor voluptatem promittit sed dolorem dat.

5 Liber quintus est laudationem of Epicurii. Lucretius scribet de initiium of mundi, humanitatis, and religionis.

6 Liber sex describit naturam deosque. Lucretius incipit explicare causas tonitrus, fulminis, concussionum.

Figure 13. Summaries of *De rerum natura***, students' first drafts**

The students' work in the Sandbox could easily be tracked by clicking on the "View History" tab of the Sandbox, as seen in the following sample:

- (cur | prev)○   18:36, 13 April 2015 Rklohe (talk | contribs) . . (2,691 bytes) (+106) . . (→*Summaries of the Books of the De Rerum Natura*) (undo | thank)
- (cur | prev)○   00:13, 13 April 2015 2601:8:aa80:1098:a8c3:20f8:fdd8:7bbf (talk) . . (2,585 bytes) (-6) . . (→*His influence on Latin writers*) (undo)
- (cur | prev)○   23:18, 12 April 2015 MJosephine10 (talk | contribs) . . (2,591 bytes) (+79) . . (→*Summaries of the Books of the De Rerum Natura*) (undo | thank)

Figure 14. View history of student work

Note that the middle entry is by a student who forgot to log on, hence her work, as mentioned above, was recorded only under her IP address.

After the first drafts were posted we worked mostly in class on revising and elaborating them. The translation of Lucretius that occupied the majority of our class time helped with the composition. Students became much more aware of the aspects of Latin outlined above when they occurred in Lucretius (as they did quite frequently). Their familiarity with Lucretian language naturally increased as the semester progressed as well. I also modeled good practices as I wrote the summary of the first book myself. Three weeks of lively feedback and workshopping yielded the following:

De rerum natura   [edit | edit source]

Solum opus Lucretii quod exstat vulgo *De rerum natura* appellatur. Lucretius poema Gaio Memmio dedicat. In sex libris disciplinam Epicuream explicit.

I. Venerem laudat et genetricem omnium appellat. Epicuro etiam laudato duo principia disciplinae Epicureanae explicit: nil ex nilo gigni posse et nil ad nilum disolvere. Ergo omnis natura duabus in rebus constitit quae corpora innumera et inane sunt.

II. Explicit quomodo disciplina Epicurea sola homines feliciores faciat, dein motum et naturam caecorum corporum, vel seminum, e quibus omnia constent. Fortuita sunt omnia propter clinamen seminum. Sunt alii orbes terrarum praeter nostrum.

III. Epicuro iterum laudato, naturam animi exponit, in primis animum esse mortalem. Perit nobiscum. Homines ne mortem metuant hortatur. Iste metus fons malorum est. At mors ad nos nil est.

IIII. Confitetur quomodo mel versuum medicamen amarum philosophiae celet. Multa multumque de sensibus et corpore exponit, dein pericula amoris. Amor voluptatem promittit sed dolorem dat.

V. Epicurum laudat et cum caelestibus confert. Epicurus Herculi et aliis deis longe praestat. Dein initium mundi et hominum et sermonis et religionis explicit. Quorum omnia forte facta sunt, sine auxilio deorum. Mundus creatus olim item peribit.

VI. Epicuro iam iterum laudato, pietatem veram discit. Dei, tranquilli et longe remoti a nobis, imitandi sunt. Natura rerum et clinamen seminum tonitrus, fulmina, nubes, imbres, motus terrae, morbos, et cetera creant, non dei. Denique illam pestilentiam Athenis explicit.

Figure 15. Final summaries of *De rerum natura*, **books 1-6**

This was then posted to the actual Lucretius page on Vicipaedia.

The final project, in which the students created Vicipaedia pages of their own choosing, was assessed in two ways. The first was as a Vicipaedia page. The rubric for this was simply the requirements for a stub, as seen in Figure 8 above.

The other assessment focused on the student's Latinity. They were encouraged to incorporate the aspects of Latin that we had stressed in the *De Rerum Natura* summaries into their own pages. Since we spent less time in class workshopping these pages the resulting Latin was not as highly developed, but each student managed to incorporate at least one of the points mentioned above (e.g., less common case uses, ablative absolutes, etc.) into their text.[8] Anecdotally all of the students expressed to me that their understanding of Latin had been significantly increased

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8 As can be seen on the aforementioned pages for Snoop Dogg, Dave Grohl, Felicity Jones, Janelle Monáe, and Pat Summitt.

and deepened.[9] The time devoted to the project may have meant that we read less of Lucretius but I believe we read it better.

Other Outcomes

I had other goals besides improving my students' understanding of Latin. My second goal was to change their relationship to Wikipedia. I also quickly realized that there were potential benefits in this project for my department and discipline, as well as myself and my pedagogy. Third, the Vicipaedia project brought my language teaching into alignment with the outcomes of my other, non-language, courses. And fourth, it increased the visibility and relevance of Classics at Gonzaga among my colleagues and administrators.

"Want to stir up a room full of college faculty and librarians? Mention *Wikipedia*." Head and Eisenberg began their recent study of Wikipedia usage among American college students with a quote that may ring familiar to many educators (Head and Eisenberg). University websites are rife with warnings about the pitfalls of using Wikipedia.[10] Nonetheless, only 9% of students participating in Head and Eisenberg's study declared that they "never" used the site. All of the students in my class had used Wikipedia. None had previously edited it.

Attitudes among academics are changing, however, as evidenced by the title of Avi Wolfman-Arent's recent article, "Academics Continue Flirting With a Former Foe: Wikipedia." He notes that "Where there once was skepticism, even outright hostility, there is now a tacit embrace of Wikipedia's power to amplify ideas" (Wolfman-Arent). In preparing for this project I found myself agreeing with the work of Adeline Koh, an Assistant Professor of Literature at Richard Stockton College, who identifies herself as

> part of a growing movement of teachers who inte-
> grates student editing of Wikipedia pages into our
> pedagogy. There are many pedagogical reasons for
> this; integrating Wikipedia editing into your cours-
> es teaches students to navigate the rules and social

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9 I would add parenthetically that the process benefited me as well. I certainly enjoyed the challenge of editing Vicipaedia myself. As mentioned above, composition was a regular part of my own training and I greatly value the ways in which it hones my skills as it brings them to bear in a new environment.

10 See, for example, those offered by the libraries at Harvard, which offers a fairly blanket dismissal, or Williams, which contains a more nuanced discussion.

> *norms of an online community of knowledge creation, trains them in developing responsible public-facing research, and introduces them to ways of dealing with a variety of responses to their work. (*[Koh "Integrating"]*)*

Koh's points translated to our work well. Students learned to navigate the world of Vicipaedia, they knew that their work would be in the public eye, and they dealt with a variety of responses to it. The public nature of this work, combined with the complete transparency of the Wikipedia system, ensured that they took their assignments seriously, as well as their new roles as members of a knowledge-creating community. This meant that the project benefited not only my students but also Wikipedia itself.

Wikipedia is designed to be democratic and open but in recent years there has been concern over the decreasing number of editors involved in the site ([Lih]). From 2007 to 2013 the number shrank by a third ([Simonite]). Of even greater concern is the fact that the overwhelming majority of those editors are male ([Potter]). This has prompted the formation of numerous Wikipedia "Edit-A-Thons" designed to encourage women to become involved in Wikipedia as editors, as well as to increase the amount of woman-centered content on the site ([Koh "Edit-a-Thon"], [McGurran]). My Lucretius class consisted of three women and two men, a fairly typical ratio in my Latin courses. One student in fact, minoring in Women and Gender Studies in addition to her Classics major, was well aware of the phenomenon of Edit-A-Thons and welcomed the opportunity to become a Wikipedia editor.

The project also benefited my department and discipline. Editing Vicipaedia refutes some of the commonly made complaints about the teaching of Latin and Classics. I'm sure everyone who teaches Latin has heard versions of the same criticisms: Latin is a dead language, Latin is useless, it's "ivory-tower stuff," etc. Students who have worked on Vicipaedia are able to rebut many of those criticisms. Is Latin dead? While the grammatical rules may be fixed (a common definition of a "dead" language) nonetheless here is a living community of writers using Latin in the modern world. Does Latin have no relevance to contemporary life? Here are articles on everything from [LeBron James] to [ISIS]. What application can Latin have? Here there are people applying Latin every day in order to communicate across national and linguistic borders.

The international aspect of Vicipaedia is of particular interest at my home institution. Because Gonzaga is a Jesuit university one of the key components of its mission is global engagement.[11] This can be difficult to incorporate into a Latin classroom. Contributors to Vicipaedia, however, come from all over the world. My students were surprised to find their Vicipaedia contributions being edited by people from places such as Italy and the Philippines. The collaborative nature of the site means that students are interacting with people all over the globe.

Local engagement is also valued by my institution and the dean of my college, Arts and Sciences, in particular.[12] Although they are strongly encouraged to do so, Gonzaga students do not always engage with the local community. My students not only had to research Spokane but also represent it to the worldwide community of Vicipaedia. Each of them learned new facts about Spokane through this project, as did I. All of this aligns with my university's mission statement that it "educates students for lives of leadership and service for the common good" (Mission). That they "apply [their] skills for the benefit of others" (Mermann-Jozwiak).

The benefits also extended to the medium in which my students were working. As mentioned above, the project benefited Vicipaedia, by adding content and improving its Latinity, and the Wikipedia system, by bringing in new editors. Over the course of the semester I came to realize that this was in keeping with my university's mission as well. This was also part of the tcommon good. We were simply extending our ideas about citizenship and service to the digital world. "Digital citizenship" is a topic of growing concern for educators.[13] For me it simply means expanding my definition of service and engagement to the increasingly pervasive and influential digital world.

Among academics the default conversation about Wikipedia is still often whether or not it should be cited in scholarly work.[14] Simply decrying the most widely used reference work in the world, however, achieves little, especially since it is designed to be corrected when wrong. What seems to be lacking is a willingness

11 "The Gonzaga experience fosters a mature commitment to dignity of the human person, social justice, diversity, intercultural competence, global engagement, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, and care for the planet" (Mission).

12 "I am proud to be the Dean of a college faculty that demonstrates, on a daily basis, its dedication to students, and to the broader Spokane community" (Mermann-Jozwiak).

13 Note discussions at such popular educational forums as Edutopia and teachthought, and the efforts of Mike Ribble's Digital Citizenship Institute.

14 Hence warnings such as Harvard's, which discourages students from using Wikipedia in general, or Williams's, which discusses the matter with more nuance.

to engage, i.e., to be a responsible digital citizen. That was the habit I intended to inculcate in my students through their Vicipaedia assignments. I am not alone in thinking that working with Wikipedia is good training for digital citizenship ([Collier](#)).

My dean was also pleased to hear of the project due to an increasing emphasis in our college on digital humanities. There may not yet be complete consensus regarding the term (see e.g., Schnapp), but I favor the fairly simple definition offered by Elijah Meeks, the digital humanities specialist at Stanford University: "The use of computational methods and tools for the study of traditional humanities questions" ([Meeks](#)). The work my students performed over the course of the semester—translation and composition—was in its essence completely traditional. The digital context required new tools and methods and so transformed their experience.

As to my own pedagogy, it has been influenced over the last few years by L. Dee Fink's work, particularly his *Creating Significant Learning Experiences.* This is a book that is promoted heavily at my university via course design workshops and seminars. Fink encourages instructors to create "rich learning experiences"—rich in that they "enable students to achieve multiple kinds of significant learning all at the same time." (Fink, p. 123) For Fink there are six kinds of significant learning (Fink pp. 43-61):

1. Foundational Knowledge, or the basics of understanding and remembering.

2. Application, or developing the skills to use foundational knowledge.

3. Integration, or making connections. Fink includes in this interdisciplinary learning, working within a learning community, and connecting academic work with other areas of life.

4. Human Dimension, or addressing the relationships and interaction we have with ourselves and with others.

5. Caring, or developing enthusiasm for a topic.

6. Learning How to Learn.

Editing Vicipaedia was a remarkably rich learning experience because it involved all six of these to a degree. Students learned how to apply their understanding of Latin grammar and vocabulary in a way that integrated them into a worldwide community of editors. They collaborated with those editors and with their classmates and reflected on those collaborations. The overall project definitely generated enthusiasm among the students that was only heightened by the opportunity to create Vicipaedia pages of their own choosing. Finally, my own inexperience allowed them to learn how to learn. Numerous questions came up throughout the project, whether related to Latin vocabulary for modern concepts or the particulars of the Wikipedia system, that I could not answer readily. This meant that we had to work together as a class to answer them and so students were given a model of how to seek out knowledge.

POTENTIAL

It should be clear that Vicipaedia offers innumerable opportunities for the Latin instructor. This article documents its use in a small, advanced-level course, but there is no reason it could not also be used in other types of courses in other ways, even in the earliest stages of instruction. Projects can be large or small. My own project ended up more scaled back than I had planned. Instructors with more time could do much more. Students could even develop with Vicipaedia, moving from simple assignments in their first years, perhaps largely involving reading, to fully developed editing by graduation.

In one way my project is not repeatable: the summaries of *De Rerum Natura* are done. Nonetheless, I can see the value in having a future Lucretius class review them. As to other subjects, Vicipaedia is very underdeveloped when compared to other Wikipedias. It comprises only 125,000 individual pages at present, compared to over five million on the English Wikipedia. There are many fallow fields. Allowing students to build their own pages in particular involves infinite possibilities.

I have mentioned the ways in which this project aligned with the goals and mission of my institution. There are other opportunities here as well. In discussing this project with colleagues in Modern Languages the possibility of interdisciplinary collaboration was raised. Could courses in different languages work together on the same topic but different Wikipedias? A university-wide Edit-A-Thon, organized around disciplines? The ancient historian in my own department is also interested. Wikipedia would offer his students a venue for their own research, as would Vici-

paedia if we linked a history and a Latin course. Student research and interdisciplinary studies are other subjects highly valued by my university and, I suspect, many other institutions.

For Latin instructors using less traditional approaches Vicipaedia can also be of benefit. In her recent defense of Oral Latin Rasmussen repeatedly conjoins the skill of speaking and writing. Vicipaedia offers the opportunity for such students to express themselves to the widest possible audience. The same is true for those advocating a Latin pedagogy more in line with the teaching of modern languages, such as Carlon. My Wikipedia classroom program manager knew of numerous modern language instructors involved in projects on their respective languages' sites, but, to his knowledge, I was the first Latin instructor to do so. My own understanding of the Comprehensible Input method is limited, but Vicipaedia certainly offers the sort of "understandable and compelling messages in the language" (Patrick 110) that the method requires. When students taught by this method are ready for output as well, Vicipaedia ought to be an attractive forum.

Conclusion

For me this project was an attempt to incorporate, even in a small way, prose composition into a curriculum where it is otherwise impossible. Editing Vicipaedia will never be a substitute for a dedicated Latin Prose Composition course in a traditional Classics curriculum. Nonetheless it is a rich learning experience that generates numerous beneficial outcomes, both for the students and the instructor. I will continue incorporating it into future Advanced Latin courses and am currently developing ways to bring it into my beginning and intermediate courses as well. The Wiki Education Foundation wants to work with educators to improve Wikipedia and its related sites. I encourage my fellow Latin instructors to reach out to them.[15]

Appendix

As mentioned above, the English Wikipedia has numerous resources geared towards the educator who wants to incorporate the site into the classroom through the Wiki Education Foundation (http://wikiedu.org/). They provide templates and tutorials (both for instructors and students) and, once a course is registered on the site, an assigned classroom program manager. While their tutorials on creating and editing Wikipedia pages are thorough, this appendix is intended to walk interested instructors through the basics and to give a sense of the time needed to become familiar with the system.

While it is possible to edit Vicipaedia without creating an account, registration makes it far easier to track edits and changes. Registering on either the Latin or English site carries over to the other, as well as many of the Wikipedias in other languages. Registration simply involves choosing a screen name and a password and takes seconds:
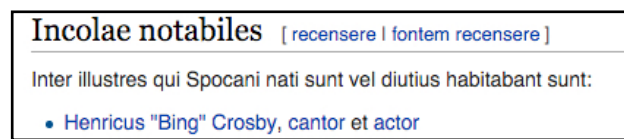

Figure 16. User registration page

Editing

There are multiple ways to begin editing. At the top of every page is the option to edit the page as a whole:

Figure 17. Choice to edit the entire page

Most subsections present the option as well:

**Figure 18. Choice to edit a subsection**

The difference between *Recensere* and *Fontem Recensere* is the interface. Clicking on *Fontem Recensere* brings up an html-coded interface:

Figure 19. Fontem Recensere: editing the source code

By clicking on *Prospectum ostendere* at the bottom one can preview changes before publishing them.

Users familiar with coding may find this the most attractive option, but others will want to click on *Recensere*, which brings up a newer and more user-friendly graphical interface, similar to that of word-processing programs such as Word:
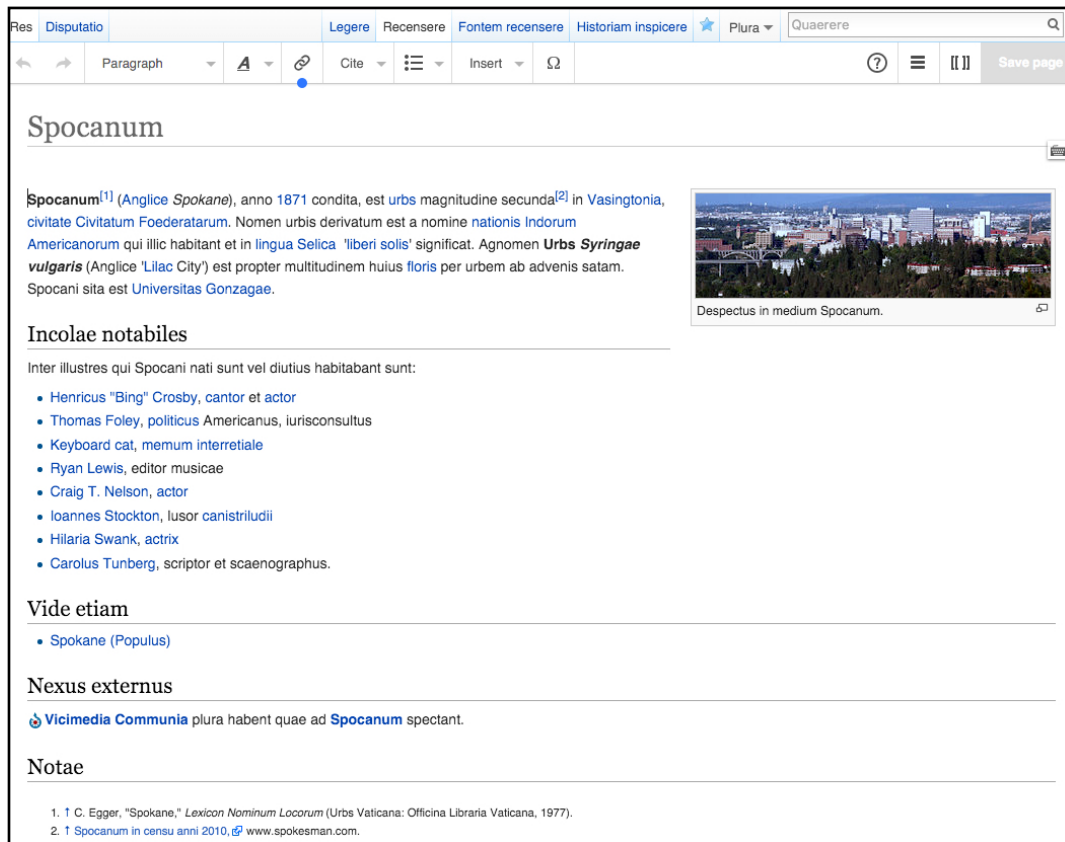
Figure 20. Recensere: WYSIWYG editing

Input here is similar to editing any document. The toolbar is in English regardless of the user's selected language preferences. Clicking on "Save page" brings up the option of previewing changes before publishing as well.

The best way to become accustomed to either editing interface is by working inside a Sandbox. These are only available to registered users so it's another advantage to registering. Since this feature is only available through the English Wikipedia be sure to access it through there. The option appears at the top right of any open page.
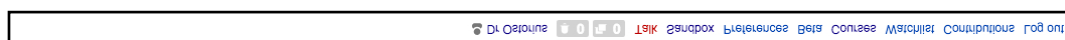
Figure 21. Accessing the Sandbox feature

The Sandbox looks like any Wikipedia page. Once inside it, though, you can experiment with formatting, linking, etc. in either editing interface without worrying about publishing or other editors.
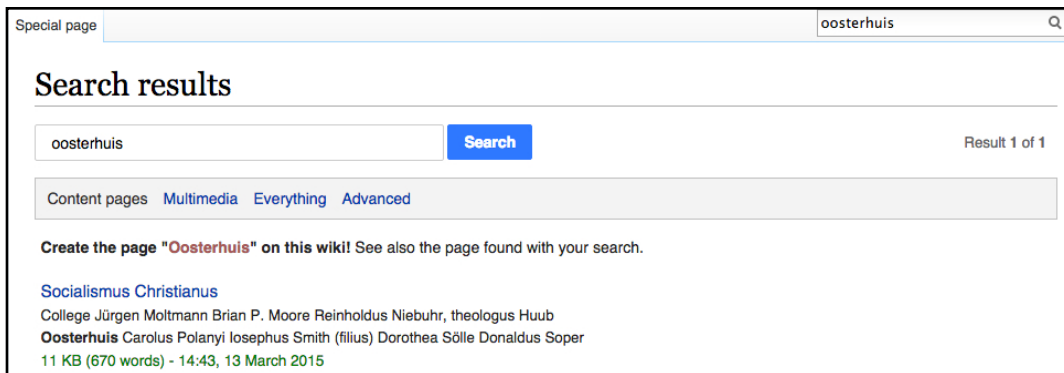
Page Creation

Creating a page is straightforward. When a search turns up empty Vicipaedia asks if you would like to create a page on that topic. There is no page devoted to my name, for example, so a search for "Oosterhuis" produces the following:


Figure 22. Blank page

Surprisingly my surname does occur in the text of an article on Christian Socialism, as that includes a reference to the Dutch theologian and poet Huub Oosterhuis (no relation, to my knowledge).

Another noteworthy advantage of registration is that it allows users to view the editing tools in other languages. This was something my students found immensely helpful, as the meanings of the Latin coinages were not always clear. Altering the settings to display the editing text in English would produce the following version of the above page:

Figure 23. Accessing the editing tools in English

Clicking on the red text (and returning to the Latin) opens the editing box:
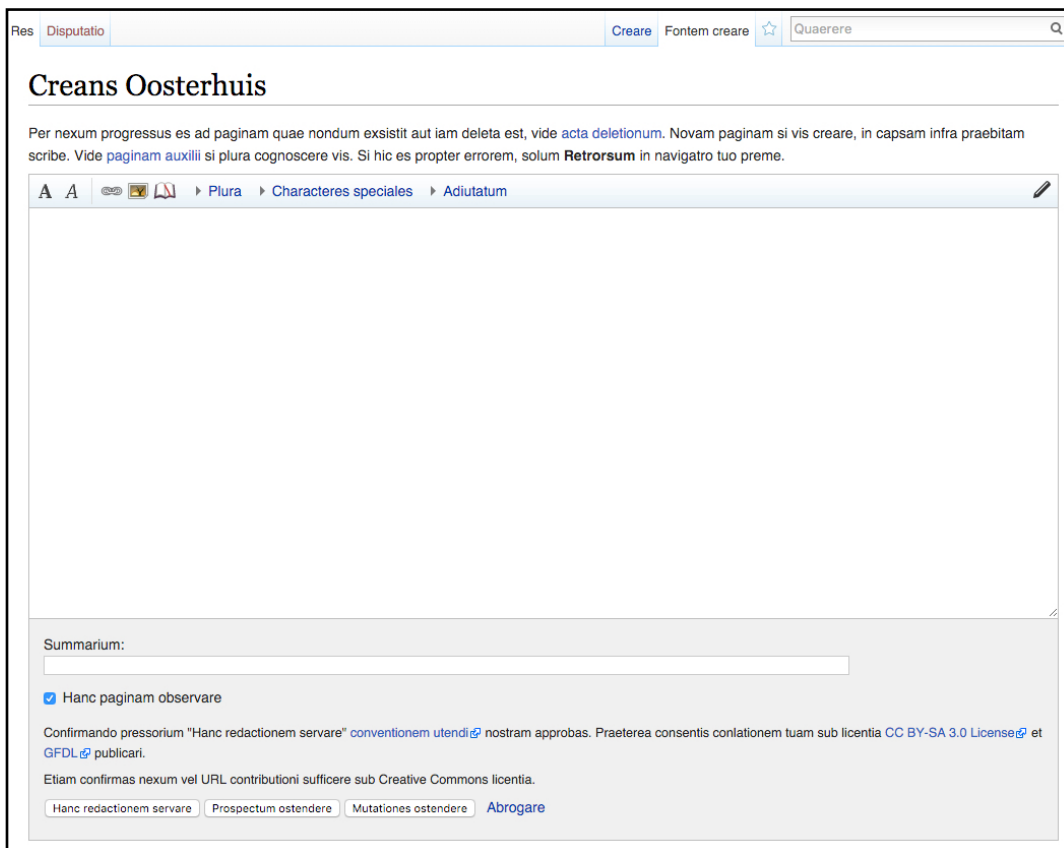
Figure 24. Creating a new page

Click on *Servare hanc rem* and the page is live. Note that the creation process defaults to the code-based *Fontem Recensere* setting. Clicking on the icon of the pencil on the right switches the page to the graphic-based *Recensere* option.

A Note For the Instructor

Wikipedia's tutorial for instructors offers numerous guides and instructional videos to help you design a Wikipedia project for your course. You can design an assignment using this template or "wizard," which also gives you the option of registering your course with their education program. This program is continually developing, however, so it's best to begin simply with the homepage of the Wiki Education Foundation (http://wikiedu.org/).

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