

### Final Take-Home Essay Assignment

From the questions below, select two of your choice, and write an essay that responds to each of those questions. Each essay answer should be at least 800 words long. All questions relate directly to the readings we have done in the second half of the semester. Your essay answers should demonstrate that you have done the readings carefully and thoughtfully. Use details from our readings, but also add on your own experience and your own examples.

Select two the following questions for your essay:

1. In his book *The Problem of the Media*, Robert McChesney notes that journalism today in this country finds itself in a crisis. In particular, he writes that in order to save money and avoid appearing partisan, news organizations no longer contextualize news coverage. According to McChesney, “coverage instead barrages with facts and official statements” (71). Watch and tape a news show of your choice and examine McChesney’s argument. How is the news presented? What exactly does the anchor say? Is there background information or commentary? How is that presented? Can you confirm McChesney’s observation or not? In answering this question, look at McChesney’s analysis of his point and analyze your own findings as well.
2. According to the Nielsen rating system, Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* has received record ratings in the last two years or so. That fact seems quite stunning, given that *The Daily Show* is a *fake* news show. How could we explain this phenomenon? How does this phenomenon fit into the media analysis presented by Robert McChesney in his book? In particular, you might want to re-read McChesney’s argument about the “broad depoliticization” of the American public that’s one result of the current media system (p 72). In your answer, make specific references to *The Daily Show*; in fact, I would recommend you watch a podcast of a show online, or tape a TV show so you can refer to specific sections of the show.
3. McChesney is ambivalent about the promise of the Internet as a source for democratic information gathering. He fears that unless users become proactive in shaping laws concerning the Internet big business interests will prevail. He notes, “it is also unclear to what extent the emergence of the Internet as an alternative will have an appreciable effect upon mainstream journalism or entertainment” (217). Take up McChesney’s argument and examine it by considering some aspects of the open-source movement—for instance, *MySpace.com*, *Wikipedia.org*, or Internet blogging in general. To what extent are these sites manifestations of democratic action? In what way are these sites actually circumventing the profit-driven marketplace of mainstream media? And, is there a possibility that such sites might turn the momentum of Internet regulation into a more democratic direction? Use specific examples in your answer, and feel free to consider my own argument about *Wikipedia.com* that I’ve been working on (see next page for my paper summary).
4. In his book McChesney argues overall that media in this country should be a public good in the same way that education, the post office, public libraries, and public transportation are. Take up this argument and discuss it. Do you agree with McChesney? Do you disagree? As

you debate this argument, consider how other countries run their public media systems (for instance the BBC in Britain). Use specific details from McChesney's book, other readings we have done, and your own experience.

**Additional note:**

Your essay answers should manifest both careful thinking and good academic writing. Keep the following points in mind as you write your essay:

- Use relevant quotations from the readings and other specific examples so that they help you make your point. Don't just string together quotations, but work and think with them. Always integrate source material into your own writing—use introductory phrases and comment on what you're quoting.
- When you quote, make sure you use correct citation procedures. Look up APA or MLA documentation style in a handbook or on the Internet. See the four-page handout from the UVSC writing lab at <http://www.uvsc.edu/owl/styleguides/>. You do not have to include a title page, but don't forget to add a References page for APA papers (or a Works Cited page in MLA).
- Focus your essay on a controlling idea and organize in such a way that this idea is being supported and explained throughout in fully developed, unified paragraphs.
- Don't forget about the importance of effective transitions between paragraphs that help the reader move through your essay.
- Use good style, syntax, and grammar: correct sentences, varied sentence structure, active voice, and fresh diction.

I expect to be reading your best work. Revise, edit, and proofread carefully before you turn in your essays.

**This assignment is due in class Wednesday, April 26, 2006**

You will receive extra credit if you take your paper to the writing center before it's due.

## What? We'll Study *Wikipedia*?: Multidisciplinarity and Collaborative Online Communities Christa Albrecht-Crane

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This paper addresses the *open source* movement, specifically the challenges and possibilities of the user-contributed online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* for teachers of rhetoric and language studies in terms of expanding our discussion to include the multidisciplinary “compositional” nature of collaborative online communities. On *Wikipedia* anyone can submit an article on a topic, and the others can edit, or contribute to it—in effect rendering *Wikipedia* a milieu where traditional notions of editorship and knowledge control have undergone some radical changes. *Wikipedia* is uniquely positioned to educate us (and is, arguably, already educating many of our students) in matters of intellectual property regimes and knowledge making.

As *Wikipedia* is an intriguing contemporary site of legal and political contestation, it appears that teachers of writing should pay close attention to the structure and potentiality of this resource. On the one hand, a consideration of *Wikipedia* must acknowledge the configuration of the Internet as such—a communications infrastructure where both its physical layers and its layers of code are free and accessible to all its users. As Terry Flew notes in this regard (in *New Media: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford U Press, 2005), these Internet layers “are neutral, non-rivalrous resources available to all without needing to seek the permission of others” (217). On the other hand, a study of *Wikipedia* also includes considering its status as an “alternative” to traditional encyclopedias or sources of authoritative information. I want to ask: what happens when anyone out there is enabled to contribute to a discursive entity that by definition (i.e. as an “encyclopedia”) is legitimized as offering knowledge? How are both users of and contributors to *Wikipedia* folded into this digital assemblage? How do our students—who are already part of this Internet development—view knowledge and authority, and thus their place in culture’s infrastructure?

The paper will work through these issues by way of the following structure (in which I intend to engage the audience throughout, as I break into discussion with the audience all the way through):

1. An analysis of how *Wikipedia* is set up and how it functions. For this part of the presentation, I will use media (laptop, projection on a screen) to actually surf *Wikipedia*. It should be fascinating to examine entries on “critical pedagogy,” or “rhetoric” with an academic audience that clearly is invested in those concepts!
2. A discussion of the legal issues surrounding *Wikipedia* and other open-source communities. This part will tease out some philosophical questions regarding ownership, the polity, citizenship, and authority in digital culture.
3. Finally, a consideration of how *Wikipedia* marks a site of both cultural education as well as pedagogical opportunity. Following the lead of a number of teachers and scholars (for instance, Jeff Allen, T. Mills Kelly, Andy Carvin, and Jimmy Wales) I want to examine how *Wikipedia* can be used for pedagogical purposes, particularly in the writing classroom. Questions will include, among others: what happens when students write entries or add to existing entries? What are the challenges posed by public writing in general? How does *Wikipedia* impact the conventions for co-authoring texts?

