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Wikipedian in Residence Programs

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At a glance:

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Typically, Wikipedians in Residence (WiR) are **Wikipedia** editors who act as liaisons between the Wikipedia community and an institution, e.g. a university, research organization, or GLAM institution: galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. These positions are sometimes known as Wikimedians in residence—referring to Wikipedia’s parent organization, the **Wikimedia Foundation**—or Honorary Resident Wikipedians.

The first WiR, Liam Wyatt, volunteered with the **British Museum** to contribute information about its holdings to Wikipedia with the goal of making its collections more accessible to the broader community (“Wikipedians” 2010; Cohen 2010). Since then, **more than 200 WiRs** have liaised with a wide range of GLAM institutions worldwide, including national, university, and local libraries; scholarly societies; research institutes and organizations; intergovernmental and nonprofit organizations; media organizations; national and local museums; national and specialized archives; and botanical gardens (“Wikimedians” 2020).

WiR positions can take many forms, from part-time, short-term volunteer positions to permanent, full-time employment (“Wikimedians” 2020; “Wikipedians” 2020).

The tasks of a WiR often include some combination of the following:

- Training, such as teaching institution staff and community members how to contribute to Wikipedia or about relevant issues such as copyright and licensing or digitization
- Leading outreach events such as edit-a-thons, in which participants edit and contribute to Wikipedia or other Wikimedia Foundation projects together
- Digitizing collections or holdings, adding the images to Wikimedia Commons and metadata to Wikidata
- Strategic planning for outreach and knowledge sharing
- Contributing information to Wikipedia (“Wikimedia” 2020; “Wikipedia” 2020)

Wikipedians in Residence and the INKE Community

In 2014, the University of Victoria (UVic) Libraries, the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab (ETCL), and the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences—all INKE partners—announced the launch of an **Honorary Resident Wikipedian** program at UVic. **Christian Vandendorpe** was appointed as the inaugural Honorary Resident Wikipedian from 2014–2016, followed by fellow INKE Partnership member **Constance Crompton** from 2017–2018, **Erin Glass** from 2019–2020, and **Silvia Gutiérrez De la Torre** from 2020–2021.

Crompton’s Cultural Data/Data for Culture project, based at the Humanities + Data Lab at the University of Ottawa, examines Wikimedia projects as platforms for open knowledge. The project also calls upon the academic community to contribute their knowledge to Wikimedia projects, “the largest source of structured cultural and humanities data in the world” and one readable by humans and by machines:

“The Wikimedia suite of projects needs non-specialist editors, but it also needs specialists from the academic sector: undergraduate and graduate students, faculty members, and librarians with specialized knowledge and access to scholarly resources. Are you an expert on Roman coins, life in 12th-century Spain, Victorian urban planning, or colonialism in Canada? Wikipedia needs you to help democratize that knowledge, and to contribute to what the data-driven uses of Wikimedia data know

| about human culture.” (The Humanities Data Lab n.d.)

Crompton argues for the value of Wikidata for Humanities research in “[Familiar Wikidata: The Case for Building a Data Source We Can Trust](#),” based on research shared at the [2020 INKE Gathering: Open Scholarship for the 2020s](#).

A post on the Simon Fraser University Library blog, [Radical Access](#), similarly argues that participating on Wikipedia “is particularly important for contributors belonging to the academic community, who not only have access to high quality scholarly information that can provide a foundation for a reliable article, but also the subject area expertise necessary to make more complex topics accessible to a large audience” (Robinson-Clogg 2020).

The [SFU–UVIC Digital Pedagogy Network](#), based in the SFU Library’s [Digital Humanities Innovation Lab](#) and partnered with the [Electronic Textual Cultures Lab \(ETCL\)](#) and [UVic Libraries](#), among others, included an [Indigenous Wikipedia Edit-a-thon](#) in its events in 2016; details of the event can be found on its [Wikipedia Meetup page](#).

Wikipedians in Residence in the Press

Several Wikipedian in Residence (WiR) programs have been covered in the media. Vandendorpe’s inaugural appointment at UVic, for instance, was covered by [CBC News](#) and the Victoria [Times Colonist](#), as well as [other local media](#). The University of Toronto’s appointment of Alex Jung as its first WiR in 2018 was covered by the [Toronto Star](#), and Concordia University’s appointment of Amber Berson as its first WiR in 2019 was covered by [CBC News](#), [CTV News](#), [City News](#), and the [Montreal Gazette](#).

WiRs have also garnered attention in the academic press. In addition to the first hiring of a WiR by a university—by the [University of California, Berkeley](#) in 2014—the academic press has also covered the WiR program more generally, addressing the issue of [Wikipedia in the university classroom](#) and [the success of WiR programs for improving the quality of Wikipedia articles](#), for example.

In 2015, [Times Higher Education](#) (*THE*) covered West Virginia University’s creation of a WiR position tasked with addressing Wikipedia’s gender gap: surveys in 2011 and 2018 suggest that about 90% of Wikipedia’s volunteer editors identify as men (“Gender Bias on Wikipedia” 2020; Straumsheim 2015).

Many WiR roles are based in university libraries, and, as a 2019 article in [University Affairs](#) points out, university libraries and other libraries are also engaging with Wikipedia in other ways (Aschaeik 2019). Speaking to the library community, the American Libraries Association publication [Leveraging Wikipedia, Connecting Communities of Knowledge](#) (2018) emphasizes the common goals of the library and Wikipedia communities and offers advice for how to increase engagement in Wikipedia editing in library communities—public libraries as well as research ones—which includes hiring WiRs (Proffitt 2018).

WiR programs are of interest to the wider community as well. A 2014 article in [The Atlantic](#) about the [Houghton Library’s WiR program](#) links the program to the Library’s mandate, particularly its goal of making its information and resources—its “treasures”—openly available to the wider community (Garber).

A 2015 piece in [USA Today](#) about West Virginia University’s WiR program notes that it was created specifically to address [Wikipedia’s gender bias](#), something that other Wikipedians in Residence have also addressed since, including, in Canada, Concordia University Library WiR [Amber Berson](#) and University of Alberta WiR [Erin O’Neil](#). Similarly, a 2019 [Maclean’s](#) article highlights the necessity for students and other users and contributors to Wikipedia to think critically about the platform, including asking who is contributing information and moderating contributions, and what the community’s biases are (Hutchins).

In a 2019 [interview published on The Conversation](#), WiR for the [Philadelphia’s Science History Institute](#) Mary Mark Ockerbloom points out that WiR positions can be controversial within the Wikipedia community, particularly when they are paid positions, out of concern about conflicts of interest.

Ockerbloom notes that conflict of interest is an important concern for all Wikipedia editors, but that being paid to edit content is not necessarily a conflict, particularly because Wikipedia, cultural institutions, and the WiRs they employ share common goals (Hocquet 2019).

Reactions from the Broader Academic Community

The emergence of WiR programs is a sign of changing attitudes toward Wikipedia within the academic community. In the years following Wikipedia's launch, many in the academic community dismissed it as inaccurate and unreliable.

Now, realizing that it is where many students, community members, and researchers go for information, many in the academic community—including **former University of Victoria Honorary Resident Wikipedian Constance Crompton**—are calling upon the community to improve the quality and reliability of its information and use it as a platform for sharing the wealth of knowledge that the community possesses (Hutchins).

Wikipedian in Residence Programs and Open Scholarship

As an open, collaborative, nonprofit, and community-led resource that aims to make information available and accessible online, Wikipedia's mission and goals align closely with that of the Open Scholarship movement.

WiR programs often address gaps in the Wikipedia's knowledge base, addressing and bringing awareness to issues related to inequalities in access to knowledge and the sharing of knowledge from marginalized communities.

Moreover, Wikipedia and other Wikimedia projects are important components of the global open knowledge infrastructure. For example, Wikidata is a significant hub for linked open data. Andy Mabbett, the WiR for **ORCID**, notes that ORCID iDs can be used as persistent identifiers in Wikipedia for scholars, who may not have **VIAF (Virtual International Authority File)** identifiers or other persistent identifiers (see "**ORCID: Connecting Research and Researchers**," "**ORCID Update: Integrating ORCID iDs into Research Funding Workflows**," "**The UK Persistent Identifier (PID) Consortium**," and "**Wikidata in Research Libraries**"). In this way, Wikidata and Wikipedia can be integrated into the broader digital research infrastructure.

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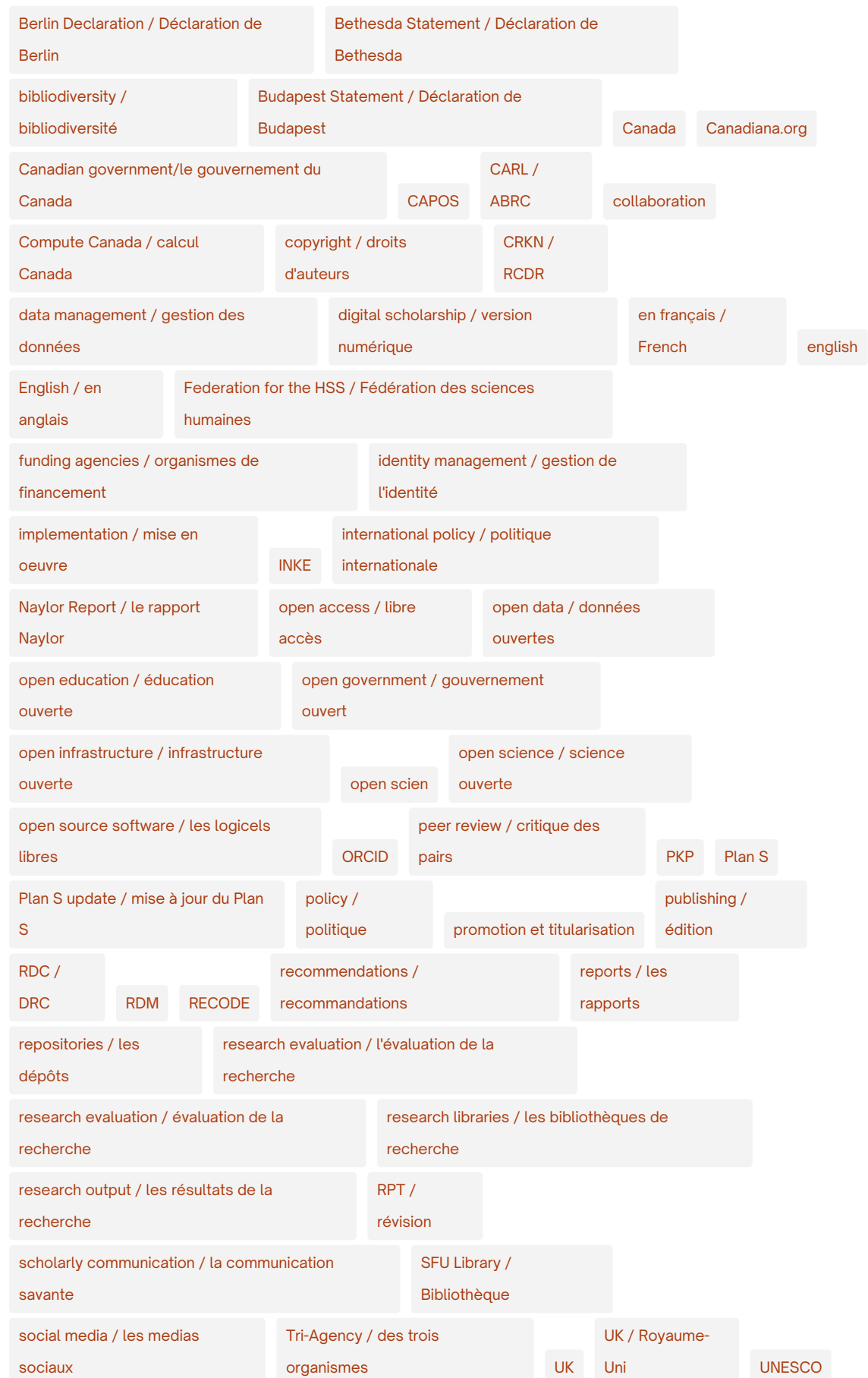
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