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International Committee

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The International Committee is developing a Resource Listing of International Trauma Training Programs. This will serve as a resource for members and other visitors who are interested in international trauma issues. If you know of international training programs in trauma, please contact Elizabeth Carll at ecarll@optonline.net or 631-754-2424 for the possibility of including it in the resource listing.

Giving Trauma Psychology Away on Wikipedia

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Research and professional psychologists have long agreed to share the responsibility to give psychology away. This duty implies an educational mandate to make our research and theory available to the public.

At the moment, one powerful way psychology is communicated to the public is through the shared web-based encyclopedia, Wikipedia. With a software base (a Wiki) that allows users to edit entries, Wikipedia is an encyclopedia written collaboratively by contributors around the world. Anyone can add or edit entries. Wikipedia is the first place people, including students, look for information. This often occurs because Googling a psychological term will result in a Wikipedia page as the first site. For many domains the quality of the information on Wikipedia is good, but for the domain of trauma psychology, there is currently a lack of accurate information and even, in some cases, misleading and inaccurate information. As members of Division 56 it is our duty to correct this problem—to give trauma psychology away on Wikipedia.

In addition to contributing to Wikipedia ourselves, the teachers amongst our group also can teach our students to take responsibility to edit this collaborative encyclopedia. During our winter 2008 term I taught a graduate seminar at the University of Oregon called, “Understanding Childhood Trauma: Historical and Societal Contexts.” One of the required assignments in this seminar for each of the 14 participants was to lead or co-lead a class discussion and then to either post a summary of that discussion on the course website or to edit a Wikipedia page. The particular assignment I gave my students was the following:

Wikipedia Alternative Assignment

An alternative to the discussion summary requirement is to edit a Wikipedia page (by deadline of discussion points posting requirement). If you select this alternative, you need to email [the instructor] the specifics. Also it would be great if you posted details of the edit on the class on-line discussion board. See these pages for how to edit Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_edit_a_page and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedia_editing_guidelines



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In class I explained that the students would not be graded on the quantity or quality of the edits but rather receive full credit simply for having done the assignment. Only one student had ever edited Wikipedia before participating in this class. Ten of the 14 students elected to edit a Wikipedia page. The students who selected this alternative expressed great enthusiasm for it. They learned how to contribute to this world-wide collaborative project and they felt a sense of accomplishment in adding important information or correcting errors. My students chose a variety of pages to edit including pages regarding the treatment of child abuse, child sexual abuse, day care sexual abuse cases, and imaginary friends. At the end of the course, students described the Wikipedia editing experience as empowering and satisfying.

Early in the seminar I had explained to my students that controversial topics are often vulnerable to “editing wars” on Wikipedia, so that they should be aware that their edits could be removed very soon after they were added. I explained that certain guidelines on Wikipedia can be used wisely. For instance, when noticing an unbalanced perspective, an edit that is both educational and has better probability of remaining on the page is one that includes information about the controversy over the topic and provides a link to a different perspective. That link could be a web page maintained by the author or someone else that is not subject to external editing. For example, two of my former graduate students noted problems with information on memory for trauma and have thus created a web page “Common Myths about Memory for Trauma” (<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/alum/myths.html>) that can be used as a link inside Wikipedia entries.

Providing accurate information to the public is a professional duty we all share. Millions of people check Wikipedia for information on a daily basis and the need for accurate trauma psychology information is vast. Contributing wisely to Wikipedia is a way we can quickly fulfill this important responsibility to educate and give information on trauma psychology away.