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### 'O wiki'd wit and gift, that have the power / So to seduce!': Creating a Public Collaborative Digital Space for a Special Collections Environment

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## 'O wiki'd wit and gift, that have the power / So to seduce!': Creating a Public Collaborative Digital Space for a Special Collections Environment

### Session Type

Event

### Abstract

(with apologies to the Bard: quote modified from Hamlet, 1.5.4950.)

The Folger Shakespeare Library's wiki, Folgerpedia, performs a number of functions for the institution and its community: it makes visible scholarly activities, maintains institutional history, and serves as a site of research on Shakespeare and early modern topics. Primary audiences for the Folger—and thus, for Folgerpedia—include scholars, students (K12 and college level), generalpublic enthusiasts, and library professionals. Folgerpedia's mission is to create and support the collaborative generation of information surrounding our collection, Library, institution, programming, and education initiatives.

One of the challenges facing Folgerpedia is to foster a space that provides scholars, students, and enthusiasts with quality information while ensuring that contributors, including invited scholars and Folger staff, find both a sense of community and are ensured credit for their contributions. Generalpublic and student users have full reading access to the content of Folgerpedia, while scholars and Folger staff are invited to contribute articles. Finally, material is being ingested and archived from the former version of folger.edu, with staff serving as editors.

The Folger's academic profile and reputation, coupled to the folger.edu domain, makes the wiki highly discoverable by search engines and highly credible to student researchers. In many ways, Folgerpedia functions as a discovery space for our collections and early modern topics, allowing scholars of many levels to connect with new aspects of our holdings. This talk will present the challenges, techniques, and (hopefully) triumphs of the Folger's first year of facilitating collaboration in a public wiki space.

### Location

KIPJ G

“O wiki’d wit and gifts, that have the power / So to seduce!”: Creating a  
Public Collaborative Digital Space for a Special Collections  
Environment<sup>1</sup>

Presented at the 2015 Digital Initiatives Symposium

April 29, 2015

University of San Diego

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Shakespeare Library

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<sup>1</sup> Both Folgerpedia and this paper have been collaboratively generated, and we would like to note that we are not neither the primary forces behind Folgerpedia, nor its originators. While we have each shaped aspects of the project, we do so in consultation with many invested parties and with the understanding that the direction of the wiki can easily change. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the ideas and hard work of the following staff at the Folger: Eric Johnson, Director of Digital Access; Erin Blake, Head of Collection Information Services; Owen Williams, Assistant Director of Scholarly Programs; Rachel Stevenson and Sophie Byvik, General Content Editors; and Matt Bogen, Head of Information Services. Content editors for specific departments include Meaghan Brown (Institute), Katie Dvorak (Education), and Abbie Weinberg (Central Libraries). Quote modified from *Hamlet*, 1.5.51–52.

## Abstract

This paper explores the development of Folgerpedia, the Folger Shakespeare Library's external-facing wiki, highlighting the challenges, techniques, and triumphs of the Folger's first year of facilitating collaboration in a public wiki space. In doing so, we focus on the methods that we use to build a resource which is both reliable and sustainable, while engaging contributors from academia and appealing to diverse audiences.

In 2014, the Folger Shakespeare Library launched Folgerpedia, a collaboratively edited online encyclopedia of “all things Folger.” As a special collections research library with a strong scholarly focus on early modern literature and history, staff at the Folger envision the new wiki space as a repository of institutional history, a locus for topical content in our major collecting areas, and as a place for readers to self-curate information about the Folger’s collection. One of the biggest draws of wiki platforms is their open accessibility to both revision and interpretation by later users. However, this flexibility can lead to a diluted (and sometimes ephemeral) record when it comes to properly crediting authors, editors, and collaborators. Thus one of the form’s most compelling features, becomes, in an academic environment, troubling to major portions of our target audience. This paper will examine the considerations of credit and community that shape Folgerpedia, placing concerns with garnering collaborative engagement in the wider context of digital humanities projects broadly and institutional wikis specifically. We will describe where Folgerpedia originated, its context in the Folger’s greater online presence, the current state of implementation, and our goals moving forward.

Although the Folger Shakespeare Library is perhaps best known for its collections of Shakespeare and early modern materials, we also have a strong reputation as a research center, with seminars, colloquia, conferences, and workshops that bring together scholars from across the globe (puns always intended). We are also an education space with an active K–12 mission and a theater that produces the work of Shakespeare and modern playwrights. Our programming includes family-oriented community events, public lectures, poetry readings, and concerts. The Folger serves a variety of communities while maintaining a high level of scholarly rigor. Our digital offerings, like our in-person programs, must maintain that same level of academically credibility, while presenting material in a straight-forward and unbiased presentation style that is accessible to multiple audience levels.

We believe that students will search Folgerpedia for easily discoverable and credible information about Shakespeare, his plays, and his times. Scholars might look to reconnect with speakers and classmates from Folger courses, or rediscover the exact title of a talk. Theatre historians and drama enthusiasts might research past performances. Researchers and librarians may wish to read up on the Folger’s collecting, cataloging, and curatorial policies. Staff member have an easily accessible place to go for help remembering names, events, and policies. These diverse audiences have different needs and concerns, and we envision this developing space as a

place where Folger readers, scholars, and other engaged patrons can contribute information about the Folger specifically, and early modern subjects more generally.

Wikis are fairly rare in museum and library environments. Where they exist, most cultural institutions use them for internal documentation and staff communication. The vast majority of these wikis are gated: gated wikis require users to obtain permission before contributing content. Gates can be set to regulate access at various levels, from simply requiring an account before contribution to track interactions (as Wikipedia does) to restricting reading and contributing privileges to a small approved audience. On one end of the spectrum, a very limited number of institutional wikis openly encourage contributions from the general public regardless of affiliation or expertise. The Science Museum in London began its Object Wiki in early 2008, the same year the British Postal Museum began its now-defunct Postal Wiki (Looseley and Roberto).<sup>2</sup> On the other, both reading and contributing access is limited to staff members. For example, the Seattle Art museum's gated wiki is not publically-readable, but serves as a community space for staff and volunteers.<sup>3</sup> Some institutions which have publically readable wikis may also have private staff-only wikis for internal communication; the Folger's intra-net wiki is called Bard2.

In between these extremes are wikis which allow reading, but not contribution rights. At Queens College (part of the CUNY system), Alexandra Dolan-Mescal, the Special Collections Librarian and Institutional Archivist maintains a wiki which "serves as a tool for those working within the department as well as a documentation of our practices for the archival field."<sup>4</sup> This strictly professional-practices wiki does not include information about the collections, nor, indeed, about the institution. The tantalizing "community portal" section is empty and there is no indication how (or whether) readers of the wiki are invited to contribute. Similarly, the wiki for Thomas Jefferson's plantation, Monticello, invites limited user engagement to a wiki which primarily serves as vehicle for content presentation.<sup>5</sup> Once users join the Monticello Online Community, they may comment on articles, but not contribute or edit articles themselves.

Wikis that are used as content management systems for academic topics also typically fall within this middle-ground, with a tightly-gated contributor base consisting solely of a

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<sup>2</sup> <http://objectwiki.sciencemuseum.org.uk/wiki/Home> and <http://www.postalheritage.org.uk/wiki>

<sup>3</sup> Current Volunteers. (n.d.) <http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/about-sam/volunteer>

<sup>4</sup> [http://archives.qc.cuny.edu/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://archives.qc.cuny.edu/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/tje>

research team and a wider reading-only user base. Although public, such platforms are designed to serve the specific needs of limited community. For example, the London Book Trades wiki, hosted by the Bodleian Library, employs the MediaWiki platform to present information on the Stationers' Company of London. Under development since 1989 as a subject-specific database with several waves of scholarly contributors, the information was formatted as a wiki sometime after 2009.<sup>6</sup> The project's origin as a database and its current form as a content-management tool for early modern biographical information shapes its organization of information around unique ID numbers and a rigid structure. So while London Book Trades wiki is publicly readable, it is tightly gated and clearly aimed at a small scholarly community rather than a wider audience. The majority of their readership has no contribution rights whatsoever.

Institutional wikis that are publicly readable, but also aimed at community building often include some level of restriction on posting both to foster responsible online behavior and engender a sense of community. The Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) Wiki of Swem Library at the College of William and Mary employs the wiki format for frequently asked questions and quick facts.<sup>7</sup> Like Folgerpedia, the SCRC Wiki was inspired by the design of a new website and was designed, as its creator Amy Schindler describes, to provide a space for institutional knowledge assembled over years of answering questions from students, administrators, and the curious public (192–193). Established in March of 2007, the SCRC Wiki was originally ungated. By August of 2007, spamming led administrators to establish a gate requiring users to provide a valid email address to add or edit content (194). Now a subheader which at a glance suggests contributor access instead directs readers to email or call the library “to share your memories or what you have discovered while using the SCRC’s collections.” In her description of the effectiveness of the SCRC wiki as a community space, Schindler describes the head of the Asian Student Council *emailing* the University Archives and asking for material to be added (198). Currently, two staff members are the main contributors to the SCRC wiki and requests for access from non-staff users are “mostly spam” according to Kimberly Sims (personal communication, June 5, 2015). While at the time of writing it is still possible to create an account with the SCRC wiki, this option is not promoted to readers on the landing page and the staff is considering disallowing non-staff contributions.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://lbt.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mediawiki/index.php/History\\_of\\_the\\_Project](http://lbt.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mediawiki/index.php/History_of_the_Project)

<sup>7</sup> [http://scdb.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://scdb.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)

Folgerpedia's mission as a community-building space, delivery platform for institutional history, discovery space for scholarly content, *and* as public outreach for a physical repository raises the difficult task of facilitating engagement with disparate communities, from scholarly experts to Shakespeare enthusiasts. This goal is complicated by the fact that Folgerpedia is a public-facing but gated wiki, with differing levels of participation and "engagement" means different things at different levels: experts, including scholars, staff, and actors, are invited to contribute content, while non-expert groups, such as students and enthusiasts, will have reading-only access. Operating both within academia and as part of a wider outreach program, we must balance the need for a flexible, open, and welcoming public digital space with the need to maintain the Folger's rigorous standards for academic content. The initial building phase of Folgerpedia has largely been concerned with ingesting content from staff and garnering engagement from other content creators, specifically our scholars. Consumption of the wiki by enthusiasts and students—our reading-only users—drives considerations of tone, content presentation, and editorial policies, but they have not been the focus of outreach at this stage.

To create a public digital humanities space in a special collections environment, we need to address issues of credit, be aware of the social and political challenges to collaboration in academia, and recognize that the disparate needs of the multiple communities we serve can all influence the development of our space. It is easy to forget that both contributing content and editing a wiki are intellectual labor. The addictive nature of wiki-editing and the low academic standing of well-known wiki spaces such as Wikipedia lead to portrayals of wiki creation and maintenance as hobbies, rather than productive collaborative projects suitable for scholars. Such volunteer work often has motivational challenges. There are plenty of mothballed collaborative, crowd-sourced community projects, such as Early English Books Online's "EEBO Interactions," which attest to those difficulties. As Anna Battigelli pointed out, "If traffic indicates success, the site received too little to certify its academic or commercial value" (2013). While the creation of articles for Folgerpedia is an enjoyable way to spend time, we also recognize that the kind of intellectual labor we are seeking as contributions to Folgerpedia is closely tied to an academic's livelihood.

In asking scholars, actors, and program participants to contribute to Folgerpedia and the online Folger community, we are asking for their time and expertise. Therefore, the labor involved in this kind of public digital humanities project requires specific and clear attribution of



credit. For example, in the article on the history of the database Early English Books Online, Erica Zimmer is credited as the primary author of the article.<sup>8</sup> We also acknowledge that the inspiration (and much of the information) for the article came from Ian Gadd's presentation to the Early Modern Digital Agendas seminar in 2013. This kind of public credit line has the side benefit of showcasing how pedagogical materials, in this case a database history useful for teaching critical digital literacy skills, can derive from Folger programming.

The textual credit line was particularly important here because Zimmer's account is not part of the automatically recorded history of the article on Folgerpedia. Zimmer developed "History of Early English Books Online" in our InSites wiki testing ground, out of public view, and it was then pushed to the main Folgerpedia platform. Neither the developing site, nor its automatically recorded history, are publicly readable. The use of InSites as a parallel, more heavily-gated wiki space for the development of long-form encyclopedia-style articles and as a private collaboration space for courses, helps combat one of the criticisms tied to wiki publication, that writing for wikis is, in some ways, "thinking in public." The transfer from one wiki space to another obscures the editing history of an article, which is preserved on the original private wiki. This lack of documentation is a concern only for pages developed in InSites. When contributors make a new page directly in Folgerpedia, the editing and contribution history function keeps a record of the contributor's work, and scholars can point to this record as evidence of their involvement.

While the individual articles of a wiki are more typical academic "products" than many on-going collaborative digital humanities efforts, in line with "notes" and invited encyclopedia entries, the low prestige and potentially ephemeral nature of a wiki environment make them difficult to classify in the typical Tenure and Promotion categories. In the last five years, professional groups such as the Modern Language Association and American Historical Association have provided guidelines for considering the labor involved in digital projects during Tenure and Promotion reviews.<sup>9</sup> These recommendations recognize that many digital humanities projects cross traditional boundaries between teaching, service, and research. The intellectual work represented in a wiki like Folgerpedia may at first appear to be focused on outreach and community engagement (traditionally a "service" function), but can also include the

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<sup>8</sup> [http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/History\\_of\\_Early\\_English\\_Books\\_Online](http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/History_of_Early_English_Books_Online)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.mla.org/guidelines\\_evaluation\\_digital](http://www.mla.org/guidelines_evaluation_digital) and <http://ncph.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/Engaged-Historian.pdf> respectively.

development of teaching materials, and (unlike Wikipedia<sup>10</sup>) the presentation of original research, such as articles on a specific collection item, play, or early modern historical event. The consistent and clear acknowledgement of scholarly contributions—however they are classified by a contributor’s home institution—can be critical to a scholar’s willingness to engage in digital humanities projects. We suspect that the limited gatekeeping of our wiki will eventually *help* garner contributions by assisting scholars in making the case that their articles are service to the academic community.

Bethany Nowviskie, now the director of the Digital Library Federation, and the former director of digital research and scholarship at UVA’s Scholars’ Lab, points out that two main issues affect scholars’ willingness to participate in collaborative digital humanities projects: (1) the difficulty of fitting the rolling development of digital humanities projects into traditional product-based Tenure and Promotion review processes and (2) the myth of the individual genius-scholar who retains sole authorial control over intellectual products.<sup>11</sup>

In Folgerpedia, our challenges come on both fronts: justifying the effort of writing for the wiki as worth-while to the contributor (including, not incidentally, justifying staff time involved), and creating a space where contributors are comfortable with the idea of textual intervention and the lack of full authorial control inherent in wiki environments. Such collaborative writing and editing are primarily non-hierarchical in the wiki environment. Although it is possible to create editors with greater privileges than normal users, what sets wikis apart from many other digital platforms is the ability for multiple users, significantly those outside a structured administrative hierarchy, to iteratively change the content of the site. Wikipedia and nearly all of the secondary literature that has been written about wikis make one thing crystal clear: if you don’t want your writing to be edited, *don't post it on a wiki*. As Hilary Wilder and Sharmila Ferris note, the potential for academic wiki articles to lose permanence is a particular quandary for the academic author, and this instability leads to a sense of inherent vulnerability (2007). In other words, academics are strongly invested in controlling the form of their texts and lack of control makes them anxious. While the “history” function on a wiki keeps a record of changes and prior versions of a text, some contributors may be concerned that the ease of changing and adapting a contribution also applies to the visible text describing

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<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No\\_original\\_research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research)

<sup>11</sup> <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-4/evaluating-collaborative-digital-scholarship-by-bethany-nowviskie/>

authorship, that their name may become attached to statements and opinions that misrepresent their position, or that that their labor may simply disappear.

Staff contributions are similarly implicated in issues of credit—after all, staff must justify the time spent on Folgerpedia as opposed to our other duties. Nowviskie’s second point, the myth that scholarship happens in isolation, is flipped in a library context. There, scholarship is often what happens to other people, and staff time is primarily characterized as service, even when they conduct original research. Folger staff contribute not only institutional history articles and articles of professional interest, such as descriptions of the Folger’s cataloging policies, but also write topical articles for Folgerpedia related to book history, early modern literature, and theatrical history. Although the Folger does not have a tenure structure, as some academic libraries do, we still have expectations for research and publication, as well as service to our fields. Most staff members are either PhDs or have multiple masters degrees, and “our fields” encompass not just library and information studies, but a wide variety of humanistic disciplines. Folgerpedia allows us to contribute to scholarly conversations which occur throughout the Folger, while also providing a platform to reach out to both scholars and non-expert users on a variety of programming fronts.

Folgerpedia is not our only avenue for digital outreach, nor our primary means of connecting readers and our digital properties. It is part of what Eric Johnson calls the “Folgersphere,” which he defines as “the Folger's online infrastructure: things we own, things we lease as our own, and spaces where our presence lives.” (E. Johnson, personal communication, February 5, 2015). The Folgersphere is comprised primarily of the main folger.edu website; Folger Digital Texts; Luna, our digital image repository; Hamnet, our OPAC; and Folgerpedia. It is supported by several social outreach programs such as the Collation blog and designated twitter handles. The Folgersphere properties serve different, although occasionally overlapping purposes.

The main folger.edu website is, of course, the most common entry point for our virtual visitors. It is designed to provide easy access to information about the Folger's current exhibitions, collections, and events. Folgerpedia complements folger.edu by providing a venue for valuable institutional history that is both too detailed and too dated for the current website. The Folger Digital Texts<sup>12</sup> are our freely available editions of Shakespeare’s works, edited by

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/>

Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. The texts are fully searchable and the XML encoding allows users to experience them in a variety of ways, such as generating parts and cues for a specific character. The texts can be read online or downloaded as PDF or XML files. Because all Folger digital properties are licensed with a Creative Commons Attribution-nonCommerical copyright, these files open the encoding as well as the text for experimentation and manipulation by users.

Our digital image repository,<sup>13</sup> which runs on the Luna platform, serves as the home for digital surrogates of our collection items. These images may be anything from a single woodcut to a whole book digitized in a turn-page view. Images on Luna are licensed under an even broader license than the Folger Digital texts, a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike, allowing for commercial use under certain circumstances. The Folger's presence on social media, including Twitter, Facebook, and blogs such as *The Collation* and *Making a Scene: Shakespeare in the Classroom* allow the staff of the Folger to address a wide range of patrons through a unidirectional outreach program. Accounts on Flickr, Pinterest, and Youtube allow for media-sharing on platforms more user-friendly and discoverable than our Luna server.

The idea for Folgerpedia began in mid-2013, during discussion of the need to revamp the folger.edu website. It quickly became apparent that there was entirely too much content that was generated surrounding the Folger and its collections than could reasonably fit into a more modern, streamlined website. Clearly, another tool was needed to capture and present this information. Eric Johnson, Erin Blake, and Nadia Seiler, who was one of our rare books catalogers, outlined the needs of this tool. It had to provide a casual reference space: that is, one "not intended for citation, but [which could] be used as a reference to assist research" (E. Johnson, personal communication, August 15, 2013). The platform needed to capture staff knowledge in a publicly-accessible way, with minimum training and effort, while still allowing easy collaboration among contributors. It needed to be a flexible platform that could present multimedia content, while capturing the and displaying its own editorial history.

A wiki would clearly satisfy nearly all of these needs. As Eric pointed out at the time, "there is a lot of existing open-source wiki content that we could use out there on the web, including an obscure site called Wikipedia (you might have heard of it)" (E. Johnson, personal communication, August 15, 2013). Jokes aside, social awareness of Wikipedia was actually one of the strongest arguments for making our own outward-facing wiki that was similar to, but

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<sup>13</sup> <http://luna.folger.edu>

distinct from Wikipedia itself: wikis have become a familiar digital format for information-consumers, but Wikipedia carries considerable cultural baggage. It can, however, serve as a model and guide, not only for the kind of content a wiki can host, but also for the form that content appears in and the technical “how-to” for creating pages. Our desire to bank on users’ familiarity with Wikipedia influenced our choice of the MediaWiki platform, the same platform that powers Wikipedia. We hope that contributors might already be familiar with the article creation and editing side of the process. We’re not alone in this: the Science Museum Object Wiki employs MediaWiki for the same reasons (Loosely and Roberto).

Although many of Folgerpedia’s articles deal with physical collection items, including a number which feature transcriptions of early modern manuscripts, Folgerpedia is not a digital repository. The Folger has a variety digital repository spaces; and while the MediaWiki platform can host a limited range of data types, it deliberately excludes some that would be of particular interest to scholarly audiences, such as XML. Therefore it is not, and cannot be, a replacement for a digital content management systems like Luna or house-developed MySQL-php driven sites like Folger Digital Texts. It is also distinct in both form and function from folger.edu. As web design tends more towards images and short informational prose, wiki articles are uniquely suited for the presentation of discursive texts. Folgerpedia allows us to present much of the same information in more easily navigable, digestible, and interconnected chunks. By employing the wiki’s native system of links and categories to allow flexible navigation, we transmuted what had been large blocks of intimidating text on the old folger.edu (the dreaded “Ginormous Wall o’ Text”) into a number of connected articles with navigation aids such as clickable sub-headers.<sup>14</sup>

Folgerpedia is particularly suited for this kind of information, including discursive essays and dated material from past exhibitions, theatrical performances, and Institution courses. Event-specific information is often removed from folger.edu shortly after the event takes place, to prevent confusion by users searching for upcoming events and deadlines. Folgerpedia is designed to facilitate not only institutional memory, but also memory of the institution. Topical articles that result from past events, such as Brett Hirsch’s bibliography article “Digital editions of Renaissance drama,” which was generated as part of the Early Modern Digital Agendas

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<sup>14</sup> The Folger is dedicated to maintaining a history of its web presence. The archived website can still be accessed at yeolde.folger.edu.

institute in 2013, showcase the scholarship that happens at the Folger.<sup>15</sup> We hope that these articles will serve as outreach to raise the profile of such programs for future applicants.

The first articles were created on 12 March 2014, and Folgerpedia was officially launched on 9 July. The wiki was publically announced in a 29 July *Collation* post by Rachel Stevenson (2014). The earliest test pages were articles explaining policies on camera use and how to apply for a Reader's Card; cataloging articles explaining MARC fields; and articles on Exhibitions and public programs held at the Folger. As Folgerpedia moves forward, more articles on specific collections, early modern historical and literary topics, and specific individuals are being added. More recently, articles have been made or added to regarding a wide range of subjects, including our Rosebury Collection of Civil War BroadSides, the exhibition "Cultural Cross-Currents of the Nineteenth Century," the character Don Pedro, and the scholar Ian Gadd.

Folgerpedia is slowly becoming a tool that seminars and colloquia can use to compile collaborative bibliographies, or which they can use to publish essays written in conjunction with Folger courses. Major digital humanities initiatives housed at the Folger, such as the Early Modern Manuscripts Online project (EMMO), also make use of the space as both a record of events and as a publicity tool.<sup>16</sup> EMMO has used Folgerpedia to host transcriptions of Folger materials and to promote its Practical Paleography program, a series of courses in early modern secretary hand aimed at both staff and readers. In addition to targeting groups brought to the Folger by specific courses, we held two edit-a-5ks (they were only an hour, so they were a bit short to be called edit-a-thons). These brief meetings served to introduce readers and staff to Folgerpedia and gave them a chance to try it out.

Creating any kind of barrier to contribution in a crowd-sourced digital humanities project may seem more than a little bit mad. But the Folger's visibility on the web, our use as a credible resource by student researchers, and our academic reputation lead us to be cautious about who can post under our brand. Shakespeare and his life and times can be surprisingly contentious subjects online (for example, the recent movie *Anonymous* created a surge of interest in the so-called "authorship debate" in 2011). To facilitate high-quality content on Folgerpedia, we set general parameters on contributors: anyone within the Folger community, including staff, readers, program participants, performers, and docents, are invited to contribute to the project.

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<sup>15</sup> [http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Digital\\_editions\\_of\\_English\\_Renaissance\\_drama](http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Digital_editions_of_English_Renaissance_drama)

<sup>16</sup> [http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Early\\_Modern\\_Manuscripts\\_Online\\_\(EMMO\)](http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Early_Modern_Manuscripts_Online_(EMMO))

However, it is important to note that contributor rights are not limited to PhD holders, by any means: actors, librarians, and a variety of scholars are invited and welcome to contribute. Rachel Stevenson, our general content editor, emphasizes that “Many people can be and are very informed without necessarily holding advanced degrees. From the inception of Folgerpedia, we worked very hard to make sure that knowledge won the day, not academic pedigree” (R. Stevenson, personal communication, January 15, 2015).

Even in-house, various divisions of the Folger have different uses for Folgerpedia, and as a consequence, different levels of investment. While we have multiple general content editors, two divisions invested in dedicated content editors very early in the process: Exhibitions and the Folger Institute. Not incidentally, these two divisions have the greatest amount of time-marked content that needed to be transferred from other online properties to the new platform. Currently the lightest presence is Folger Education, which just designated an editor in April of 2015. Central Library’s involvement is harder to quantify, as their contributions are classified under a number of category tags, including action-oriented tags such as “Cataloging,” and object-oriented tags such as “Collection,” “Manuscripts,” and “Promptbooks.” While divisions often work within their bailiwick on Folgerpedia, cross-editing and collaborative article writing strengthen both the content in Folgerpedia and connections between divisions.

Although our other platforms do a fantastic job of advertising our collections (particularly the photogenic items that appear regularly in Pinterest, Twitter, and other social media), we hope Folgerpedia’s increasingly high profile in Google searches will facilitate collaboration among scholars within the Folger, as well as help create connections to scholars who cannot come to the physical institution. Folgerpedia encourages the creation of bibliographies, lists of Folger-specific items, and collections of useful links and digital resources: in other words, it encourages users to curate their own collections of Folger-related items and topics. We hope that these lists will be of use to future researchers at a variety of levels, from undergraduates looking for introductions to early modern topics to researchers wondering about the Folger’s collection.

While the bulk of this paper has focused on our efforts to garner engagement from contributors, we want to acknowledge that several demographics of our users will have reading-only access to Folgerpedia. We hypothesize that many of the users who will find our site through search engines will be K-12 and college students, which raises concerns over Folgerpedia’s “citability” and potential use as a scholarly resource. In the initial layout of the needs for a digital

tool, Eric Johnson specifically described it as a resource “not intended for citation.” However, we suspect that the first citation in an undergraduate paper will show up shortly after the Folgerpedia articles on Shakespeare’s plays and characters are fully populated. Perhaps even sooner, depending on which play or early modern topic a student is Googling. Some teachers, particularly at the high school level, may approve our wiki as an acceptable source. We find this unlikely, as blanket warnings such as the one found in Purdue’s OWL resource are pervasive: “Please note that the *APA Style Guide to Electronic References* warns writers that wikis (like Wikipedia, for example) are collaborative projects that cannot guarantee the verifiability or expertise of their entries” (2015). While we hope college level classrooms emphasize peer-review for secondary sources, Folgerpedia *is* a good place to discover lists of primary and secondary sources. We are at the time of writing in the process of developing content which will make us a solid resource lecture podcasts, theatrical videos, and other primary materials related to performances and objects. Clearly, we cannot control the types of sources that teachers require of their students, nor can we control what sources the students end up using. All we can do is make sure we are presenting the most accurate information possible with links and citations as needed.

We may, in fact, be overly optimistic about the use of Folgerpedia by reading-only users. Although we will hopefully become a tempting information source for students and enthusiasts, we simply won’t have the exposure of Wikipedia. Not being able to edit our wiki may signal reliability to some, but could very well be a turn-off to others as they are not able to manipulate the text themselves. “If you Build It They will Come” may work for baseball fields, but collaborative, crowd-sourced digital humanities projects are a harder sell.

Finally, the overarching concern for this project is sustainability. Currently our staff makes up the largest group of contributors. Wikis work best when they hit a critical mass of both information and contributors. After ten months, we still feel like we are working to ramp up both. A worry remains over how much time and effort will be required to build a community of contributors outside of staff. While some aspects of Folgerpedia will continue to require staff contribution, such as recording new seminar titles, we are unsure at this point when—or whether—content contribution from readers will reach a self-perpetuating level. Folgerpedia will be considered a success, however, if it manages to reach significant numbers of reading users with the institutional history and discursive content not found elsewhere in the Folgersphere.



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