

## Kevin Young's Wiki Textbook Teaches More than Physiology

All students understand the pain of paying hundreds of dollars for textbooks each semester, but few likely realize the effort their instructors put into choosing a quality book.

When Kevin Young, lecturer at Utah State University's Brigham City campus, couldn't find a book he liked for the physiology class he taught during summer 2006, he decided to work with his students to create their own wiki textbook using Wikibooks, a companion site to Wikipedia that allows users to create a free library of textbooks anyone can edit.

Young's idea to incorporate wikis into the classroom was fueled by Brigham City Executive Director Andy Shinkle's enthusiasm for innovation and new technology.



"I believe technology has the capability to improve the quality of education, especially for our nontraditional students because it offers flexibility with both time and location that isn't available traditionally," Shinkle said. "Kevin has been very enthusiastic and innovative with his teaching. He has been successful with taking a difficult subject matter and ensuring that students excel, and he's used technology to make it fun and exciting at the same time."

The class was taught remotely through IP broadcast technology to students enrolled in Provo College's pre-nursing program. The students needed to take several basic courses from an accredited institution before continuing with the program, and USU stepped up to fulfill that role.

"It was an interesting experience having students who were there to learn, taking the role of textbook writers," Young said. "But the students learned physiology through this collaborative project, and they all progressed into the nursing program and passed their nursing exams."

Young created the basic outline for the textbook by establishing 18 chapter headings. Then he divided the class into 18 teams and assigned each to research and write one chapter. By involving the students in their education through creating their own textbook, they learned more than just physiology.

"It taught me to not only research, but to verify the information I use for my classes," said Stephanie Greenwood, a student from Young's spring 2007 class and certified nursing assistant at Utah Valley Regional Medical Center. "I learned to find multiple sources for any subject I research."

Greenwood said she devoted a lot of time to researching and checking the information for the book, so by the time she was finished, she truly understood the material. "It wasn't just a memorize-and-regurgitate-for-the-test type of class," she said. "The things I learned from that class stuck with me."

Today, the textbook, Human Physiology, receives 2,000-3,000 visits per day and holds the prestigious title of "Featured Book" on Wikibooks. Young has used the book a few times for his own classes, but he hopes students in other universities will also use and improve upon the book.

As a testament to Shinkle's commitment to developing the most technologically advanced campus at USU, he gave the faculty members at Brigham City video iPods and told them to use the iPods for something educational.

Young started listening to a podcast sponsored by Stanford University called "Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Seminar." One morning, the guest speaker on the podcast was Gil Penchina, former vice president of eBay, speaking about his recent decision to leave eBay to become CEO of a company called Wikia, a commercial company started by the founders of Wikipedia that provides a place for people to create wikis about anything.

This sparked Young's interest in wikis, and he said he'll never stop using them, whether it's for classes, hobbies or other organizations to which he belongs. Not only did the project get the students more involved in their coursework, it also gave Young the opportunity to get to know his students better.

When teaching from a distance, it can be difficult to personalize each student's experience, he said. But through wikis, he can learn about and interact with each student through their profiles and contributions.

He was concerned about vandalism to the wiki. But he remembered Penchina saying most cases of vandalism at Wikipedia are corrected within four minutes. This seemed unbelievable, but then he experienced it firsthand.

One day during class, students started reporting that their pages had been deleted or filled with profanity. He started to compose an e-mail to a wiki-enthusiast who had been helping, but before he had even sent the e-mail, everything had been fixed. He looked at his watch and it had been less than four minutes.

Young's fascination with wikis extends beyond the classroom. In November 2007, he won a weeklong trip to Australia with his wife through a contest promoting the new Australia Travel wiki on Wetpaint.com.

Meanwhile, he has transitioned his class to using Wetpaint's wiki site because it is easier to insert images and videos, which students enjoy. He created the "physiwiki" site for students to write class notes and practice questions for each other.

"I once heard someone say, 'If you never fail, you're not trying enough new things,'" Young said. "That's what I try to instill in my students as I aim to prepare them for an uncertain future. I want them to learn how to take risks and how to discover in new ways."

To view and contribute to Human Physiology, visit [http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Human\\_Physiology](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Human_Physiology).