Lesson Plan : Exploring Works Cited Websites

Rationale: I consider the point of Outcome 2.5—"The responsible use of the MLA (or other appropriate system) of documenting sources."—not to teach students the rules of MLA myself but rather to *introduce* students:

(1) to the idea that there even *are* whole systems of documenting sources;
(2) to the idea that professionals in a field will be familiar with and expect these systems;
(3) to the fact that they will most likely have to be self sufficient in learning and employing those systems;
(4) to the fact that some online systems that "do it for you," do it better than others.

(This last point was motivated by my own students' persistent use of low-quality websites to produce their Works Cited pages. Upon that realization, I tried teaching to the source problem, and met with satisfying results.)

Materials Needed:

- **Computers with web access**: I've used the following lesson plan in computer-integrated classrooms, but it could pretty easily be arranged if enough students (a third, a fourth) volunteer to bring laptops.
- **Sources**: I usually run this activity a few weeks into the quarter, after I've introduced students to a few essays and they've done some of their own outside work to gather other materials—books, websites, interviews. They will have used those sources—but not cited them—in short assignments already; and there will be a high degree of overlap in sources cited by students. On the day of the activity, it's nice if they have a short assignment in-need-of-a-works-cited, but that's not entirely necessary.

Plan: You probably need 30 to 50 minutes to do this, depending on how much work you want students to get done on their own works cited and how much you want to debrief about things afterward. I like this activity for the end of peer review days in 2 hour classes.

(1) **Explain Reasoning for Lesson**: I usually begin by telling students some of the above: That MLA is part of the Outcomes, why it's part of the Outcomes, how they can expect to encounter "MLA and other appropriate systems of documentations" in their adult lives, that they will need to cultivate their own means of writing within the source regulations of their fields, that I'm giving them an opportunity to try that out with some friends today…
(2) **Cater to Student Needs**: I also ask if students intend to or have been asked to use other systems of documentation. If there are some students in the group who know they'll be expected to use Chicago, for example, I group them together and let them work on that.
(3) **Get them Started**: I divide students into groups of 2 to 3 people, and tell them to choose a short assignment draft from one person to create a works cited for. Then I give them 15-20 minutes to work on creating it, using whatever online sources they like. (I really *love* wandering around and watching where they go for their information. It is sometimes really crazy.)
(4) **Regroup and Assess their Sources about Sources**: I choose one or two sources and have students post their citations of them to GoPost or write them on the board. We look to the board for differences, and we try to pin those differences to the kinds of cites they were consulting. (.edu almost always wins.)
(5) **Consider Outliers**: I also ask students to post their citations of strange sources—interviews and such usually come up here…
(6) **Summarize the Findings**: Ask students to explain what they've learned in the process—about where they will look for documentation help in the future, how much time they will need, etc.