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NewsTrack - Science

Wikipedia studied to build reading lists

BOSTON, Jan. 2 (UPI) -- U.S. software that generates a reading list of material tailored to a person's interests has been developed by a Harvard University Ph.D. candidate.

Alexander Wissner-Gross, a physics student who teaches an undergraduate course at Harvard, wondered about a way to automate a reading list as he prepared a list for his course, NewScientist.com said. Wissner-Gross says he noted similarities between his course's structure and the way information is connected by links in Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia written and edited by volunteers.

He experimented with algorithms to find the "most important" pages and how they ranked for a particular topic. He said he found an algorithm similar to one used by Google was particularly effective because it assessed a page's popularity by the number of pages -- and their popularity -- that link to it.

Wissner-Gross said he thinks the software could help researchers who want to quickly brush up on a particular topic.

Jon Kleinberg, an expert on information networks at Cornell University, said the project has legs.

"Analyzing the structure of Wikipedia is definitely a promising general way to help users keep up with its enormous information content," he told NewScientist.com.

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