ELI Discovery Tool: Guide to Blogging

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Colleges and universities have begun to use blogging in a number of ways, including in classes as a tool for teaching and learning. The Guide to Blogging explores what blogging is and how it might support teaching and learning at your institution. Its simple, accessible information walks you through important areas to consider before adopting blogging:

- Examples of how blogging can be used for teaching and learning
- Firsthand student perspectives on blogging
- Advice on key implementation considerations, including planning issues, engaging stakeholders, and faculty support
- Approaches for assessing class blogging

The guide also offers a practical collection of annotated resources on blogging, including blogging software, legal issues, examples, and implementation considerations for higher education. You are invited to add your own information about blogging in the guide’s own blog (see the “How Can I Contribute” section).
Scenario

Professor Thomas has been looking for new ways for students in her International Politics course to connect—with her, with one another, and with the material. Knowing from experience that reflecting on concepts and writing about them helps crystallize her thoughts, she decides to experiment with blogs. Blogs are personal online journals that serve to capture thoughts and comments and post them to a public Web site for others to read and respond. Blog entries can be informal and are posted without the approval of a moderator or editor.

She gives a brief demonstration of the blogging application, showing the students that it’s quick and simple to create an entry. Going to her blogging application, she types in her comments, includes a link to the related article online, and adds minor formatting. With a single click, the entry is posted to her blog online.

Each student creates his or her own blog. Dr. Thomas instructs the students to set aside regular time for blogging, encouraging the students to write about topics discussed in class and how events in the news inform their understanding of global politics. She tells the class to read each other’s blogs, as well as her own, and to comment on the postings. In her own blog, Dr. Thomas models the kinds of blog entries she hopes students will write, and many of her entries are her responses to student blog posts.

As the course proceeds, she finds that most students take to blogging. When she uses a student blog entry to seed a posting on her own blog, she generates much more interest among students than had been possible in previous years. The trackback feature allows Dr. Thomas and the students to reference individual blog posts, similar to an informal literature citation. She also enjoys the community dialogue that results from others’ commenting on her postings—or challenging them.

By the end of the course, Dr. Thomas sees that introducing her students to blogging is a straightforward and interesting way for them to generate, share, and keep up with timely and topical class information. They form rich connections with one another and the content and—because of the reflection and sharing—find great relevance in the material. Several students continue to blog after the course is over. Dr. Thomas plans to include richer media, such as photographs and short audio segments, in the blogs in her next class.
7 Things You Should Know About Blogs

What is it?
A blog—a shorthand term that means “Web log”—is an online, chronological collection of personal commentary and links. Easy to create and use from anywhere with an Internet connection, blogs are a form of Internet publishing that has become an established communications tool. Blogging has evolved from its origins as a medium for the online publication of personal diaries to a respected vehicle for editorials on specific topics. In their latest incarnation, blogs represent an alternative to mainstream media publications. The personal perspectives presented on blogs often lead to discourse between bloggers, and many blog circles generate a strong sense of community.

Who’s doing it?
Although online journals have been around longer than the term “blog,” they gained momentum with the introduction of services that allow users to publish blogs easily, without needing to code HTML. Today, thousands of people use services including Blogger and Moveable Type to simplify, automate, and accelerate the online publishing process.

Blogs are showing up in venues ranging from entertainment and commerce to news and politics. Many blogs are the musings of a single author; others focus on a particular topic and feature the voices of several authors. There are group blogs, family blogs, community blogs, and corporate blogs. WarBlogs (a product of the Iraq war), LibLogs (library blogs), and EduBlogs (targeting education) are just some of the emerging types of blogs. In educational settings, faculty are using blogs to express their opinions, to promote dialogue in the discipline, and as an instructional tool, and students are increasingly using blogs both as personal commentaries and as a required part of certain courses.

How does it work?
A blog can be thought of as an online journal, and maintaining a blog is as simple as using an online e-mail program. Bloggers enter posts into a blogging application, add formatting or hyperlinks, and save the post. The application adds the entry to the blog, making the content available online and alerting users who have subscribed to that blog’s content. Entries can include text, hyperlinks, images, or multimedia. Visitors can read postings, submit comments, find blog entries by date, and search the site by keyword. Most blogs allow visitors to subscribe using an RSS feed or another service. Effective blogs tend to be updated on a regular basis.

Most bloggers solicit feedback, fostering two-way communication between readers and authors. Readers can provide feedback by leaving comments on the blog page itself or by posting a response on their own blogs and linking back to the original post—a feature called trackback. Trackback notifies bloggers when one of their posts is referenced by another blog, making it possible to determine the popularity of a post based on the number and diversity of incoming links to a post. Through linking, commenting, and feedback, good (or at least popular) ideas spread quickly through the informal network of blogs (the “blogosphere”), while unpopular ideas are simply ignored. Being referenced by a popular blogger brings instant attention and often credibility, and repeated linking enhances the reputation and authority of a blogger. Through this system of recommendations and referrals, a collaborative filtering capacity has emerged in the blogosphere.
What is it?

**Why is it significant?**

Because blogs engage people in knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, they often attract a large and dedicated readership. Blogs are becoming an important component of the Internet landscape, providing authors and readers with an avenue for unedited expression, reaction, and connection, without the censorship of mediated chat rooms or formal media outlets.

The simplicity of creating and maintaining blogs means that open discussions can be established almost immediately, making blogs an ideal venue for far-reaching discussions among the Internet community on new or timely topics. Blogs foster the growth of communities, and the dynamics of collaborative filtering and recommending/referring may provide new ways to evaluate, vet, and critique student-created knowledge.

**What are the downsides?**

Because blogs are often produced and maintained by individuals, they can include biased or inaccurate information. Users visiting a blog might see it as factual or authoritative when, in fact, it is the online equivalent of a soap box: a place to speak and to be heard. Unlike chat rooms, blogs are unmediated and therefore offer a different type of venue for individuals to express themselves and air their opinions, ideas, and attitudes. While this may be acceptable for a personal blog, it might be inappropriate for a blog hosted on an institutional server. Intellectual property is another area of concern for higher education, given the implications of hosting blogs that might include content that has been used without proper attribution.

Blogs are also highly volatile. Bloggers can edit or delete posts, and this transient nature can make blogs difficult to archive or index. In addition, the time-limited relationship of students to institutions influences the length of time a student blog should be hosted, yet removing posts from the blogosphere once a student has graduated could confound those who linked to the post.

**Where is it going?**

Blogs are proliferating at an exponential rate. Estimates suggest as many as 50 million people are now blogging. Because blogs are easy to create and modify, they occupy a unique niche in cyberspace—that of highly personalized discussion forums that foster communities of interest. Blogs are public and long-lived, and they weave themselves into close relationships with other blogs. As such, they may serve as an educational tool for reflection, knowledge building, and sharing.

Blogs continue to benefit from several years of experimentation and evolution, both within and outside of education. By carefully evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, educators are learning to set guidelines and expectations to maximize the benefits of blogs. Structured exercises and clear goals are further enhancing the value of blogs in education.

**What are the implications for teaching and learning?**

Put into practice with an understanding of their benefits and limitations, blogs are an increasingly accepted instructional technology tool. Blogs can be used for reflection about classes, careers, or current events; they can also capture and disseminate student and faculty-generated content. RSS feeds make blog content accessible through newsreaders, allowing bloggers to increase the sharing of this information among interested individuals.
Blogs offer students, faculty, staff, and others a high level of autonomy while creating a new opportunity for interaction with peers. Blogs provide a forum for discussion that goes beyond coursework to include culture, politics, and other areas of personal exploration. Students often learn as much from each other as from instructors or textbooks, and blogs offer another mechanism for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and acquisition.
Blogging Case Study: Central Queensland University

Rationale

The master’s-level Systems Development Overview course at Central Queensland University (CQU) is taught three times a year at seven of the university’s campuses—as well as online—to a total of more than a thousand students. The number and diversity of the students (many of whom are international), class sizes, and delivery modes presented a number of challenges for course delivery, tracking of student progress, and feedback.

One means of addressing these challenges was student journaling. Students would keep ongoing journals of what they learned, compiling entries into Word documents that were submitted at the end of the term. While this practice helped, it still did not encourage the desired levels of engagement in and reflection on the course material.

CQU staff began to see the potential of blogging to make the journaling technique work more effectively. In 2006, David Jones, CQU faculty member and coordinator for the course, led the way for transforming the journaling activity into a blog-based one. Among the aims were:

- Providing an ongoing opportunity for student reflection on and writing about what they learn
- Giving students (and instructors) authentic experience using Web 2.0 technologies
- Helping instructors more easily monitor student progress and mark student work
- Reducing instructor workload and making their efforts more efficient
- Reducing plagiarism

Description

The blogging project was launched at the start of the second term in 2006. Two months before the term began, the course coordinator began preparations to integrate blogging into the course, introducing the faculty to the idea as well as developing blog aggregation management (BAM) software that could pull student postings into existing institutional systems and allow instructors to monitor them.

At the start of the course, instructors asked the 278 students enrolled in the course to set up a blog for themselves on one of the Internet’s free blogging services, such as Blogger or WordPress, and to “register” their blogs using the BAM software. In doing so, the students
were provided with assistance from instructors as well as a Web page offering detailed instructions. For 9 of the 12 weeks of the course, students were assigned a reflective question relating to their class activities and asked to respond to it in their blogs. The questions were worth 10 percent of the final grade.

The BAM software offered the term’s 14 instructors a window on the blog activity: For any given student who had registered his or her blog, the system displayed the number of posts that had been made, whether the assigned questions had been answered, the postings themselves, and a means for marking them. The BAM software integrated with CQU systems that supported online submission, management, and marking of assignments as well as plagiarism detection. Instructors thus were able to monitor progress and offer feedback as the course progressed.

**Implementation**

CQU had no institutional blogging application, and none was pursued for this project, because free Internet blogging services were perceived to be adequate. Many high-quality free services were available, and using them would allow CQU’s technical staff, who had no special expertise with blogs, to avoid spending resources and time developing an in-house product. This approach would also allow them to move toward a Web 2.0–style framework of agile integration of multiple applications and away from a traditional single, CMS-style application. It would also give students authentic experience with a real-world blog application of their own choosing.

To this end, CQU developed the BAM system to integrate blog postings from external blog services into existing university systems for grading, online assignment management, plagiarism detection, and student records. It also provided an interface for instructor tracking and grading of posts. As expected, very few resources were required to develop the program because it relied on existing code and infrastructure as well as, of course, the use of free blogging services. Grant monies were applied to what little costs there were.

More difficult was smoothing the way for instructors and students to succeed with blogging, particularly staff acceptance and training, student training, and overcoming institutional inertia with existing models for teaching and learning.

Evaluation was planned for the end of the course, including an online anonymous student survey, focus groups with instructors from the campuses with heavy international student populations, and comparison of blog performance with overall course performance.

**Results**

Contrary to concerns about instructor resistance to the blogging activity, many instructors did affirm its value. However, some were unsure how blogs could be used to identify students having trouble. Many were also leery that the project would increase rather than lighten their workload. Given these reservations and the fact that the grading interface was completed after the term had begun, many of the blogs were not marked until the end of the term. Few instructors monitored the posts and took action when problems arose—an element identified as needing further attention in subsequent trials.

On the other hand, even though few students were very familiar with blogs at the beginning of the course, most ultimately were able to create, register, and use the blogs successfully (258 of 278). One particularly promising outcome was that performance on the blog assignment...
proved a predictor of overall course performance. Those who scored relatively high had parallel high scores for the course. The students who had low scores on the blog assignment (roughly one-third of the students) generally either did poorly in the course or failed altogether. The handful who did not even set up a blog failed not only this course but other courses as well.

As a result of the blogging, the incidence of plagiarism declined but was not eradicated. Also, based on instructor feedback and focus groups held at the end of the term, reflection and engagement did increase somewhat, but room for improvement remained. The international students in particular faced challenges, not only with expressing themselves in English but also overcoming culturally based assumptions about how to answer the open-ended blog questions.

The public nature of the blogs was both a boon and a peril. On the positive side, a few student posts garnered comments from people outside the class. However, although students used anonymous blog names to minimize ethical and legal concerns about compelling students to make their work public, many students did not take advantage of that option and identified themselves in their blogs.

The results of the project were successful enough that the blogging activity has been fine-tuned and retained in the two subsequent terms of the course to date. Blogging and the BAM system have also now been adopted by two additional CQU courses.

Reflection

Although modest, the project did show some success, and its costs were low. Considering the challenging setting—with the great number and diversity of the students and the overtaxed state of the instructors—that success is perhaps remarkable.

Finding ways to further increase student engagement with the blogging activity will be a challenge, especially given that instructors have little time to spare. To this end, however, CQU plans to add some of the more community-based features of blogs into the BAM system, such as comments and tagging, which have the potential to spark peer-to-peer communication and learning.

One of the most compelling aspects of the project was the simple way it married Web 2.0 applications with institutional systems. This approach has the potential to give institutional teaching and learning systems greater efficacy and agility by making use of the many free or
inexpensive—but useful—tools like blogs proliferating on the Internet and to liberate institutional computing staff and resources for other efforts.

**For Further Reading**

Blogging Case Study: Middlebury College

Rationale
Barbara Ganley has been writing a personal blog for many years (http://mt.middlebury.edu/middblogs/ganley/bgblogging/) and has been using blogs as the online complement to her courses for several terms. Based on her experience, she saw blogs as a good tool for encouraging student reflection and discourse in her first-year seminar Exploring Contemporary Ireland through Writing and Film.

Description
Barbara Ganley teaches in the English department at Middlebury College (http://www.middlebury.edu/) in Vermont. Ganley expects her students to be adept at expressing themselves and critiquing others through their writing by the time they complete her course. Blogs have proven to be an ideal tool to teach these skills, and Ganley uses them for the online communication in her courses. The blogs supplement face-to-face activities and avoid the limitations that traditional learning management system discussion forums place on organizing and sharing individual student posts.

Ganley promotes “slow blogging,” which takes inspiration from the Slow Food movement. She encourages her students to avoid rushing, taking the time to craft thoughtful and deep posts. She compares the practice of creating blog entries to the academic tradition of writing scholarly letters to colleagues. What emerges is an environment in which students are able to learn to reflect on, critique, and debate ideas related to the course. By using blogs to read, write, and comment on topics related to the course, students are able to create an exquisitely detailed record of the class.

Ganley uses blogging in Exploring Contemporary Ireland through Writing and Film, a course in which she challenges her students to become familiar with alternative media for expression. Just as the course uses multiple types of contemporary media to explore Ireland, Ganley encourages her students to experiment with expressing themselves through a variety of media, including pictures, sounds, and even digital stories and post these creations on their blogs.

Using their blogs, students explore and document their topic of interest by collecting appropriate links and referencing them in their posts. Ganley encourages students to build upon referenced works by stating opinions, finding opposing viewpoints, and exposing the context around them.

For part of their final grades, Ganley gives her students the opportunity to help decide how they should be evaluated. Rubrics are collectively developed to help determine effective and appropriate use of blogs as tools to improve writing. Students are asked to reflect on what excellence means for them and what it would take to achieve it. At the end of term, students formally defend the flaws and strengths of their work and argue for their final grade.
Implementation

Middlebury College uses the Movable Type environment for blogging. Participants in the class attend a workshop in the first week of class to learn the environment and then set up their own blogs. Students are also given permission to post on the class blog, or “mother blog.” The mother blog serves as the primary information source for the class. In the center section of the blog screen, a collaborative space is available for all class participants, including Ganley, to post insights and reflections. In the left margin are links to the syllabus and other administrative information. The right margin contains a blogroll, or list of links, to all the student blogs.

The Middlebury College IT unit runs the freely available Movable Type software on its servers. In addition to the first-week workshop to learn the environment, students have access to Tech Tutors for help. Tech Tutors are students trained by the IT department to answer questions ranging from basic to advanced queries about movie-editing tools like Flash and Final Cut Pro. Movable Type supports the use of rich media in blog posts, giving students many ways to express themselves.

The blogs are publicly accessible and, once indexed, appear in results from standard Web search engines. If they attract the attention of the blogosphere, timely or insightful blog posts have the potential to generate a lot of traffic. The blogs also remain available on the Internet after the semester ends. With some blogs incorporating images, sound, and moving pictures, ongoing hardware and bandwidth costs may require a review of this practice.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

For Ganley, blogs enable and promote public writing. By openly sharing thoughts, critiques, and questions on their blogs, students get the experience of asking questions and giving critiques in front of their peers. Through written responses to peers posts, students practice written discourse in which others can observe or participate. Ganley guides the students through the writing and critiquing process by actively modeling through entries on her own blog and by leaving comments on student blogs.

The public nature of the class writing also permits students to participate in the blogosphere as contributors as well as consumers. By referencing, commenting on, or just linking, students and teacher can bring materials from elsewhere into the class. These reflections can in turn be referenced by others. Archives from previous years’ classes often serve as
essential reading for current students. The choice of using public blogs emphasizes the principle of openly sharing content and gives students insight into the possibilities of the types of discourse possible through Web 2.0 tools.

Finally, the incorporation of a variety of media in addition to writing provides students with the experience to critically evaluate a wider range of modern expression than they might be exposed to elsewhere. Through experimentation with different media and shared reflection, students gain experience with the promise of additional ways of communicating meaning.

**Reflection**

Ganley uses her blog to emphasize the academic values she expects students to acquire in her class. In addition to being able to think critically, communicate, and critique, Ganley’s students take responsibility for their learning. The use of blogs pushes students to develop new practices and provides the experience to begin to critique new tools.

While Ganley remains a strong personal supporter of blogging and the practices embedded in it, she is more interested in ensuring that her students are engaged and take responsibility for their learning. For Ganley, blogs are simply the tool used to achieve this. Ganley gets great satisfaction when students demonstrate they can actively participate in public discourse with confidence.

Through their use at Middlebury, blogs help Ganley model good practices and showcase essential skills. Blogs are used to critique, argue, and ultimately defend thinking. They are also used to fit student writing into the context of existing thought by linking to existing resources and references on the Internet. With blogs, students gain experience participating in and contributing back to the blogosphere.
Blogging Case Study: The University of British Columbia School of Journalism

Rationale

Using blogs to teach students in a journalism school seemed like a good fit. Alfred Hermida in the School of Journalism at the University of British Columbia turned to blogs when he wanted to teach his students modern beat reporting using Web tools. A typical beat reporter collects and editorializes stories related to a particular topic. Whether the beat is city hall, health care, or education, the focus is on synthesizing and linking rather than deep investigation. Hermida felt that blogs were a good tool for this due to the ability to regularly update content and the ease of hyperlinking. Due to the public nature of blogs and the communities of interested amateurs in the blogosphere, Hermida knew that his students could get valuable insight by engaging a community around their beat.

As an added bonus, students found that they developed skills that were of interest to employers. When students looking for summer internships could demonstrate familiarity with blogging and podcasting, employers took notice. Students unsure about the fit of new tools in journalism found a new appreciation for the experience. In a few cases, students’ blogs attracted attention, helping land them summer jobs.

Description

The School of Journalism at the University of British Columbia offers a two-year master’s program, after which graduates expect to join the profession. The program offers instruction in traditional as well as newer aspects of journalism including practices like podcasting, online journals, and blogging. Hermida used blogs to put a modern spin on beat journalism. Students picked an area of interest, or a beat, and produced stories to cover different aspects of their topic twice a week for a 10-week period.

This exercise was designed to develop a set of proficiencies different from the traditional journalism skills of investigation and writing. In this class, value was placed on surveying, filtering, and making sense of materials likely to have been covered in greater depth elsewhere. An emphasis on selecting relevant material, interpreting the material, and linking back to primary sources made blogs an ideal tool.

The structure of this exercise was quite deliberate. Rather than simply assigning blogging and evaluating the resulting blog at the end of term, Hermida chose to evaluate the blog over the course of a 10-week period. Students were required to keep up with the deadlines of regular publishing in addition to their other coursework. Blogs worked well to support the pace of the publishing deadlines as well as to provide an environment for the practice of professional journalism skills.
Implementation

Despite the availability of blogging tools on campus, including a learning management system (WebCT), Hermida used Blogger as the home for his class’s blogs because it had the lowest barrier to entry and required no setup on his part. Moreover, Blogger challenged students to explore an unfamiliar system. He felt it was important students learn how to use an environment on their own.

Students were directed to the Blogger Web site to set up their blogs and asked to share the URL with the rest of the class. Students were expected to investigate how to set up their blogs on their own. While students may not have felt comfortable doing a completely new task, all were able to master the blog setup.

Entries were posted semiweekly. Because beats were interest-based rather than tied to geography, students often were able to find and tap into communities of interested amateurs in the blogosphere. Gaining recognition from and being accepted by these communities provided some students with additional feedback and resources in covering their beat. In one case, a student covering writings from The New Yorker was welcomed into the community of bloggers interested in the same topic. This beat reporter was able to establish himself as a promising rookie, giving him access to some of the most knowledgeable sources available.

Hermida evaluated the entries himself every two or three weeks. Stories were assessed based on choice of topics, mechanics, and linking; commenting and feedback on peers’ blogs were not part of the evaluation. While students were aware of their peers’ blogs, they were under no obligation to read them. Some took it upon themselves to add the rest of the class to their blogrolls—collections of links to other blogs—while others spent only the time necessary to complete their posts.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

Students used blogs to publish beat stories twice a week. By emphasizing the disciplined approach to producing two stories a week rather than simply writing when the muse visited, Hermida challenged students to develop the discipline to meet production deadlines while simultaneously applying critical thinking skills in gathering and assessing potential stories. Students were challenged to find ways of relating stories to their beat in a concise manner and were asked to provide enough context for their stories through carefully chosen links.

Hermida graded the entries for content (40 percent), mechanics (30 percent), and links (30 percent). When grading for content, Hermida looked for timely, interesting content that would captivate the audience. The mechanics portion of the grade emphasized professional quality spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Students received marks for links based on quality rather than number.

Hermida took some satisfaction from the fact that one or two students were able to showcase their extraordinary talent through their blogs. On the strength of her blog, one student was able to get a summer job with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Canadian Public Radio) to create one of the first blogs for a radio show.
Reflection

Hermida’s use of blogs to train journalism students illustrates the value of existing tools like Blogger for discipline-specific applications. Hermida noted that blogging was a multipurpose tool that could help with many disciplines. His course simply put it to work to teach journalism.

Student use of blogs was variable. One or two had fantastic success with their blogs. Others used blogs only when necessary for the course. Hermida hoped that students would see the utility of the blogging tools and perhaps find uses for blogging in their other assignments including their graduate theses.

Fitting a rigorous blogging regimen into an already busy class and assignment schedule proved to be difficult. Hermida noted that he might reduce the number of required postings in a future iteration.
Additional Examples of Blogs

Blogs are a multipurpose tool that can be used for sharing information with others. Their reverse-chronological display of content, easily embedded hyperlinks, and RSS feeds make them highly flexible. By adding passwords and incorporating other media, blogs can quickly evolve into an all-purpose utility.

Perhaps because blogs are easy to set up, you can find blogs on almost every conceivable topic, using a variety of media types. For example, there are dozens of blogs about education known as edublogs. Blog genres include education, politics, travel, fashion, and law (blawgs). Blogs can also be categorized by the type of media used, such as vlogs (video), photoblogs (photos), and linklogs (list of links). Some are as specific as sketchlogs and artlogs, focusing on art work rather than text. If a blog is written and posted via a mobile device (phone or PDA), it is a moblog.

Common Categories of Blogs

Slice of Life

Blogs often present an authentic, unfiltered perspective on the life of the author. Many institutions use such blogs to provide a perspective on life within the institution. Snapshots of campus life are often orchestrated by the recruitment office to share the experience of being part of the campus community.

- University of Regina encourages visitors to read student journal blogs and ask the students questions about life at the institution: http://www.uregina.ca/newstudent/connect.html.
- The MIT admissions office publishes blogs where student and staff talk about specific services, courses, and programs: http://www.mitadmissions.org/blogs.shtml.

Topic Blogs

Covering a topic of interest—football, gardening, history—is another popular use of blogs. Linking to and commenting on others’ blog posts is a good way to find an audience of like-minded enthusiasts. Some popular blog themes include politics, library issues, and even parties.

- The Learning Technology Centre at the University of Manitoba maintains a good example of a blog that reviews current trends in learning technology: http://www.umanitoba.ca/academic_support/ltc/.
- It’s Getting Hot in Here is a student-run blog about social issues around climate change: http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/.

Marketing Blogs

While most blogs promote something (a point of view, for example), some blogs are specifically designed to market a product. Marketing blogs go beyond advertisements, providing extra material that explores, enriches, and enhances the topic or product. Often these blogs are sponsored by a business with a vested interest.

- The legendary Portland bookstore Powells has a literary blog covering reviews of books, authors, and readings: http://www.powells.com/blog/.
Examples of Blogs

- Virgin Radio (U.K.) uses blogs as a way of reinforcing community and personalization of material. They encourage users to spread the word about Virgin Radio through their own Web sites or MySpace accounts: http://www.virginradio.co.uk/about_us/tech_blog/

Event Blogs

Using blogs to cover events can be a good way to share what happens at a conference or meeting. With a set beginning and end, event blogs can serve both to archive the formal presentations as well as to capture the essence of hallway conversations. Adequate coverage of the sessions at an event often requires prior coordination to ensure that bloggers cover separate sessions.

- University of Toronto students provided timely coverage of a G8 summit in the G8 Live blogs: http://g8live.ca/G8-Blogs.

Learning Journals

Learning journals—blogs that gather student reflections—help students become aware of their learning as it is happening. Learning journals may be tied to a specific topic in a course, relate to a discipline, or discuss learning in general.

- Access to Osteopathy is a record of one student’s progress in a specific course: http://davidosteopath.blogspot.com/.
- Catherine Kurkjian assigns learning journals in her course Technology in Reading and Language Arts Instruction at the University of Reading: http://www.reading.ccsu.edu/Kurkjian/RDG579_04/blog.htm.

Scholarly Blogs

Scholars use blogs to share ideas related to their field. Very rich blog communities have emerged in several disciplines. Blogs cover issues related to research, careers, and the profession. Others serve as modern seminars or journal clubs, often taking a collaborative approach to solving problems.

- Economics scholars share their thoughts about economics: http://www.delong.typepad.com/.
- Mathematics and physics scholars have a healthy community of well-developed blogs used for working through problems and surveying the field: http://www.math.columbia.edu/~woit/wordpress/.

How-To or Best-Practice Blogs

While it may be trivial to set up a blog, learning how to tweak it and use it effectively can be tricky. The unlimited degrees of freedom permitted by blogs can yield unfortunate results in the hands of the inexperienced. Best practices, style guides, and codes of conduct are starting to emerge to guide appropriate use of blogs to avoid legal or other complications.

- Tom Johnson on the I’d Rather Be Writing blog shares 20 usability tips for bloggers (along with references): http://tinyurl.com/29z4vk.
As blogs become ubiquitous, a Google search is likely to uncover blogs on almost any topic. If you are thinking of using a blog in your class, an example likely already exists as a model.

**Share Your Own Blogging Examples**

If your institution is using blogging, please consider posting examples, best practices, lessons learned, instructional and assessment strategies, or additional resources in the guide’s Community Contributions Blog. Instructions for accessing and posting to this open forum are located in the “How can I contribute?” section.
Reflecting, Writing, and Responding: Reasons Students Blog

By Carie Windham, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland

I pause, my fingers resting on the keys, and reread what I just typed. It’s become clear in the last week or so that the “Irish problem,” as my politics professor calls it, could be summed up in one word.... I bite my lip and sink back into my chair in the library computer lab at the University of Ulster. Behind me, six rows of students click away at their keyboards, writing papers, checking MySpace, and chatting with friends. The cursor on my screen blinks impatiently, waiting for me to continue. Surely my fellow students aren’t peering over my shoulder, curious to see what the American—arrived just a few weeks earlier in their country—has to say in her graduate school blog about Irish history. But what if they are? Or worse, what if one of my professors stumbles across my rudimentary analysis, posted exactly three weeks—six class sessions—into my master’s program?

As the scenarios race through my mind, my anxieties grow, and I click “Save” on the my blog’s dashboard. I promise myself that one day soon I will feel comfortable enough to hit “Update” instead, sharing my post with anyone who read my blog.

My nervousness and hesitation reveal something that professors—and students—at colleges and universities around the world are discovering: posting information online makes the author think twice about its content and perception. What would my Irish classmates make of my musings? What if a knowledgeable reader came across my blog and pointed out my amateurish assumptions? Could I really be sure of any of the assertions I was about to make?

Despite frequent trips to the library and the time spent deliberating over the briefest phrase or simplest piece of diction, I was hooked on blogging the moment I set mine up. I can’t remember the first time I stumbled across a blog, and I doubt I would have recognized it as such if I found my way there from a search engine, but I first considered starting a blog when I left for a year of graduate school in Northern Ireland. As I sat down to send my first e-mail with an Irish IP address, a striking Web page on my roommate’s computer caught my eye.

“What’s that?” I asked as he typed away.

“It’s a blog,” he said, gesturing to various features of the page. “I set it up for my family to keep up with my trip. And it’s free.”
With his help, I set up my own page (http://cariewindham.blogspot.com) and typed my first message to friends and family. Over the succeeding weeks, my blog became my journal, my family newsletter, my therapy session, my creative release, and my photo album. I posted funny stories, pictures from my travels, and any rambling that my studies or my life in Ireland might inspire. Anything I might otherwise have sent as an e-mail seemed perfectly acceptable as a blog post. While I couldn’t be sure how many people read it, I was delighted to learn that my family, their friends, and even friends’ co-workers had subscribed to my blog. For them, it was a window into my life, a chance to escape their worlds and take a journey into mine. For me, it was a chance to flex my writing muscles and examine the events happening around me. Each time I wrote, I took a moment to process what had happened that day and reflect on the people I had met or the sights I had seen. Some days, I sat down to bang out a strong rebuke of someone who had done something I found inappropriate, but by the time I began typing, I found myself instead trying to understand that person’s actions and learn some lesson from the experience.

Not surprisingly, personal blogs, those that resemble online journals, dominated a recent survey of blogging by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP%20Bloggers%20Report%20July%2019%202006.pdf). Based on the telephone survey, Pew estimated that about 8 percent of Americans keep a blog, while nearly 40 percent regularly read blogs. The majority of those blogging their lives or their views are not published authors or even accomplished writers. Instead, the "blogosphere" is opening up a new group of writers and creators. In the Pew survey, more than half of bloggers (54 percent) were between the ages of 18 and 29. In a 2006 study of undergraduate students by the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERS0607/ERS06074.pdf), more than a quarter of respondents reported that they blogged, though less than 10 percent reported using blogs in an academic setting.

With my blog analysis of Irish history on hold, I delve into the campus blogosphere to find out who is blogging on campus and what they’re posting. More important, I want to know how faculty are using blogs in the classroom and what results, if any, they are starting to see.

**Blogging “Just Because”: Social Experiments and Campus Rivalries**

North Carolina State University student Bernard Thomas was crossing the campus “Brickyard” when a red-and-white banner hanging from the library stairs caught his attention: WolfBlogs: blogs.lib.ncsu.edu. Thomas admits that keeping a blog never really crossed his mind. But when he read the banner, he remembered hearing that people sometimes kept blogs as personal journals. A rabid Wolfpack fan, he thought that blogging might be a fun way to talk about ACC football and other sports.

Since creating his blog, called For the Life of Me: Life on the Fence, Thomas confesses that things haven’t really progressed like he thought they would. These days, anything—and anyone—is fair game as a blog topic, from football rivals to a columnist in the student newspaper. Sometimes his page reports more than 100 hits, and he has no clue where all of them come from (although he admits that he sometimes clicks on his blog 10 times a day to up the count).

Thomas is a blogger “just because.” Taking advantage of a campus-wide infrastructure called WolfBlogs that allows students to maintain their personal blogs on university Web space, he
keeps posting because a blog gives him a place to share stories, entertain his friends, or get feedback from readers. In a month, he might blog about Broomball, Jessica Rabbit, campus politics, or the Masters Golf Tournament. And he’s not beyond calling out someone who comments on one of his blog posts.

“I’m always trying to get people to say something and interact,” he says.

Students at campuses nationwide are interacting in the same ways. Like WolfBlogs at NC State, the University of Minnesota hosts UThink, and Case Western University hosts Blogs@Case. In each case, the university site offers tours of blogging features, tips for blogging, and ideas for integrating other platforms, such as tagging with del.icio.us or photo sharing with Flickr. The university-hosted blogging system drew Thomas into the process, but for students already interested in blogging, signing on to university Web space addresses some of the fears associated with registering with an off-site host. University sites seem safe, free from hidden fees or online scams. Topher McCulloch took advantage of UThink to replace e-mail club announcements about the Honors Student Association with blog posts. “When you look at all the e-mails that are sent out these days, it gets really annoying. You just start deleting them,” McCulloch says. Members now log in to a central blog to read announcements, respond to requests for information, and vote on items such as a club motto or a logo.

Student newspapers were some of the early blog pioneers on campus, reflecting an industry shift toward more online content. The Orion at California State University, Chico, began blogging three years ago, leading the pack for college journalists. These days, blogs are managed by Zuri Berry, the newspaper’s online editor. In the blogs, campus journalists write about news that might not be included in the printed version. Or they might share behind-the-scenes stories from campus events or athletic games. The sky is the limit, Berry says, as long as students respect copyright laws and keep their entries clean and free of libel.

Berry blogged from the NCAA women’s basketball tournament last year when Chico went to the Elite Eight. Besides game coverage, he tried to capture the pulse of the city, and for a few days, editors allowed him to dominate the blog. The blog gave readers a chance to read more than what they might see on the printed page. “Blogging is definitely ‘citizen journalism,’” Berry says. “It gives a wider array of material for our readers to give feedback to. They can post comments or get commented on. It’s a very rewarding thing in itself.”

One of his most popular postings, about the 49ers leaving San Francisco, garnered 14 comments. Because of the blog, he could write about the news as it happened instead of
waiting for the print edition days later. But he says that he and other writers also like the fact that blogging gives them a chance to move outside the news and just use their opinions to write about their interests. “To have that outlet—as a writer, there’s nothing better,” he says.

For aspiring writers, blogging offers a free and accessible platform for sharing their writing and their voice. Marie Cannizzaro started StanfordSingle.com when she wanted to practice her writing skills. That, and—suddenly single herself—she wanted to connect with classmates to dish about life as a single girl on the California campus. “I wanted to find people who were interested in talking about dating and why it doesn’t exist at Stanford,” Cannizzaro says. The conversation grew when the Stanford Daily picked up her blog as a regular column. Using Sex and the City–esque wit and charm, she blogged about pickup lines, marriage proposals (not her own), dates gone disastrously wrong, and the strange culture of nondating that existed at Stanford. One of her proudest moments occurred when she walked into a party and a guest identified her as “Stanford Single.”

After graduating, the blog’s success helped her decide to ditch her background in biotechnology in favor of a writing career. The blog led to a freelance assignment and an internship with the campus alumni magazine and then a career as a freelance journalist. “I’m still amazed at how many people Google my name and read the blog,” she says. It’s a risk for any job applicant, but, Cannizzaro says, as a writer it paid off.

Jessica Rabbit, botched pickup lines, women’s basketball, and Honors Student Association news have one thing in common: they found their outlet in blogging. For students who blog “just because,” the medium provides a forum for interaction with other students, an outlet for creative expression, and a way to reach beyond their normal network or their usual audience.

Creating E-Community: Blogs as a Class Forum

In Bill Endres’s freshman composition class at the University of Arizona, students learn about literary devices each day in class. Afterward, he requires that students post a paragraph response to the class blog, perhaps using the device or just responding to a class debate. Veronica Proctor confesses that she rolled her eyes when she heard about the blogging component of the course. She’s not a big fan of writing or English, and the thought of having to write a post each week was not exactly enticing.

To her surprise, Proctor discovered that the paragraph-long responses weren’t much different from the mile-a-minute typing she did each day communicating with her friends using e-mail and instant messaging. The blog posts didn’t take very long, calming her worry that the exercises would be boring and monotonous. Proctor found that she actually liked the class blog. “It was so easy, it took me two seconds,” she says. “We could also read other people’s stuff, and that was cool. The views were really different. It was interesting to see the spectrum of the class and how other people interpreted things.”

Enabling class interaction has spawned many classroom blogs as forums for learning. Students might log into a “mother blog” for class announcements or postings from the professor about assignments. Or, as in Proctor’s class, they might be required to post assignments on the blog so they can read and comment on their classmates’ work. The benefits, according to students and faculty, are the openness and the chance to interact with their peers. It’s also nice to have class discussions and assignments saved in a central location so that students can return to the blog when exams or final papers loom.
Tom Nelson, a graduate student instructor at the University of Texas, added class blogs to his courses in 2003 and has used them in a variety of formats. Initially, the site was a class forum—a place to post course announcements and summaries of his lectures from class. He would also post prompts so that students could respond. Sometimes, he posted follow-ups to discussion in class. As an instructor, Nelson says that the blog helps him stay engaged with the course. He has to post each day, and it helps maintain a record of where the class is headed. Occasionally, students will dispute his own recaps, stating that they got something different out of the class that day. “For me, that’s been the big benefit.”

The most important thing, he says, is to create a link between the class and the blog. He makes a point to bring up the blog during face-to-face time and to reference specific postings. “You’ve got to keep up with what people are posting,” he says. “I wouldn’t have it just be something you announce and go over and then don’t mention again for several weeks.”

A Journal for All to See: Letting Students Blog Their Personal Experiences

In her first posting to her blog “Cyberia,” Elizabeth Geballe, a student at Middlebury College in Vermont, wrote about her upcoming self-imposed exile:

Already, I am ready. When I plan my year in Siberia, I plan my conception as an artist. After all, artists suffer. So do Russians. Artists are misunderstood and alone. As I will be. Forced to live off myself in self-imposed exile. A la James Joyce. How can I explain that I want to suffer? That I want to walk the streets, enshrouded in the sky’s cold blanket, crying to myself? In the streets, people will be severe. They won’t smile reassuringly as I pass, acknowledging my right to happiness. And what kind of a pursuit is that? Happiness? I have to punish myself. But it will be sadly beautiful to walk wet streets, damp and vulnerable.

Her outlet to the English-speaking world was a personal blog, part of a campus-wide Blogging the World project led by Barbara Ganley. After a 40-minute bus ride to the nearest Internet café, Geballe could read her professor’s blog, browse the blogs of other students abroad, and post her own entries about her adjustment to life in Siberia. In an early entry, she writes about her frustrations learning and using Russian:

I’ve clung to my moments in the study abroad office, the college bookstore, and at my computer reading e-mails. Do you know how much we take mother tongues for granted? Every time I speak, I’m backed into a corner. Every time I open my mouth to tell a joke, a story, ask a question, utter one comment, I’m short a word. Or more. I haven’t found a new identity, it’s just that my old one’s being compressed into a smallish box of clichés and childlike reactions. Hand clapping, thumbs up or down, pointer fingers and middle fingers are all a welcome relief. And I won’t begin describing phone calls.

Her entries are lyrical and reflective. She didn’t want them to be recitations of the day’s events—mere descriptions of the things she did and the people she saw. Instead, she processes the community around her. “I think having a blogs makes you much more aware,” she says. “Like little conversations on the street. You think about them, reflect upon them, and write about them.” As she wrote, Geballe says she was always aware of her audience and the fact that others would be reading her work. “It gave me a sense of authority that you don’t get writing in a journal.”
For students abroad or engaged in out-of-classroom experiences, blogs are an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to process their interactions. Students say that the public nature of the Internet makes them think carefully about what they might be posting before committing it to the Web. That accountability is one of the things that impresses Laurie Morrison, a PhD candidate in English at the University of Arizona who works as a writing coordinator for the Office of Minority Affairs in the College of Medicine. This semester, she’s working with Fostering and Achieving Cultural Equity and Sensitivity (FACES), an elite internship program for health sciences students. The students had access to controversial speakers and were having transformative experiences in their clinics, and Morrison wanted to make reflection an integral part of the course. The backbone of the course is a personal journal that students are asked to keep. Traditionally, the students maintained paper journals and turned them in to the professor to read.

Morrison decided to try blogging to reduce the time spent reading the journals and to encourage the students to read and comment on their classmates’ experiences. To get things started, the class went to the computer lab and learned the basics for posting and responding to a blog entry. This semester, students were required to post two entries each week—one following their clinical work and another following the speaker—and to respond to their classmates’ blogs five times throughout the semester. Even so, one student still turned her assignment in as a hard copy for the first week.

Britni Mollihan admits that she wasn’t sure how she felt about the blogs when the class began. She’s a math and science student, she says, not a writer, and she wasn’t entirely comfortable having her classmates read her writing. As the class progressed, however, she discovered that rather than increasing the pressure, blogging relieved it. “With [a blog], you get feedback from your fellow classmates, and you can look at what’s going on in their world,” she says. “It has more of a creative feel. I don’t feel as pressured to make a perfect paper.” She really likes reading her classmates’ blogs to hear about what they are seeing or what they think about a particular speaker. And it helps, she says, that Morrison doesn’t interfere too much. Morrison might encourage someone to explain a situation or use concrete examples, but overall, she lets the students express themselves on their own.

As an instructor, Morrison has been “blown away.” She continues, “Their entries have a lot of personality. Some students just go so far above the requirements. I told them that each blog should be the equivalent of one double-spaced page, but some of them just write and write every week.”

Whether it’s reaching out from a semester abroad or sharing a day in the emergency room, personal blogs enable students to share their experiences with classmates while encouraging bloggers to reflect on their writing before making it public.

Learning Through Doing: Using Blogs to Practice Language and Composition

When Evie Levine returned to classes at Oberlin College after a semester abroad in Mexico, she knew that her Spanish speaking skills would start slipping away if she didn’t find a way to immerse herself in the language. She signed up for a Spanish Communications class to keep her skills alive. In the course, students were required to post their assignments and comments—entirely in Spanish—to a mother blog and to maintain their own Spanish-language blogs as part of a final assignment. Inspired by her time in Mexico, Levine explored the femicides, the murder of more than 400 women in Mexico over a 10-year period. Using
Interviews and research, she routinely posted her findings and thoughts. Writing about the femicides required vocabulary not routinely found on the pages of a Spanish textbook. “I had to teach myself and learn vocabulary that I would never have to know otherwise,” she says.

By the end, she wasn’t just running Spanish drills in her notebook. She was interacting with Spanish-speaking people from Mexico to Argentina, routinely responding to her classmates in Spanish, and even chatting with Spanish speakers abroad over Skype. One of the biggest advantages was the way that the blog allowed her to use her Spanish to interact with people outside her class. After she finished blogging, the mother of a femicide victim wrote to her asking for help. A human rights publication asked to use her photos, and readers frequently asked where they could learn more or simply, How did this happen? The experience made her language studies jump off the page. “In a textbook, you flip and read something about Argentine culture. We had the opportunity to talk to students our age about anything we wanted,” she says.

It helped that students had to use particular dialects and tenses. The professor frequently commented about their use of Spanish grammar to keep them on their toes. Besides maintaining their own blogs, students were required to read and respond to their classmates’ posting on the mother blog. Although it was time-consuming, Levine says the experience was valuable: “It was worth it so that I could maintain my Spanish skills.”

Maite Correa, a PhD candidate at the University of Arizona, uses blogs so that students in her 300-level Spanish course can get extra practice using Spanish informally. She posts a topic or two each week, and the students are required to comment once a week. Correa likes the fact that the blog emphasizes that language can be used differently in different settings. “I think it helps them just to realize you have one register depending on what you do,” she says. “If you’re talking to your friends, you use informal because if you use formal, they’re going to laugh at you.”

It’s not just foreign languages, either. David Blakesley, an English professor at Purdue University in Indiana, integrates blogs into his classes so that students can get practical experience communicating and writing. “They get a lot of experience with it. They learn how to keep discussions going, how to document sources,” he says. “There’s a tendency to think that you don’t have to cite sources when you’re doing an informal blog thread.”

At the start of the semester, the classes discuss rules for interaction. An excerpt from the page on Responding in Networked Communications advises:

- Read through all the messages in a particular thread before posting a response.
- Provide enough context in your message (by quoting from a previous post, for example) so that all readers understand what you’re responding to or what you’re proposing.
- Return frequently to the board or forum to see how others have responded to your post or how the thread has continued.

The idea, he says, is to give students practice writing and responding. The more they write, the more comfortable they become. By the end of the semester, students have logged pages of text and, he hopes, critically considered how to communicate in an online forum.

**If I Were in Charge: Tips for Faculty**

- **Think about privacy—students might not:** NC State’s Thomas laughs when he says that he won’t be telling his mom about his blog anytime soon. When it comes to posting
to his personal site, he says that privacy isn’t really a concern. He did try to shield his friends’ identities in the early days by assigning fake names, but these days he keeps it up only because they like the pseudonyms. For the many students who routinely post their whereabouts on IM away messages and update their relationship status on their Facebook profiles, the public nature of a blog may not trigger questions about privacy and public persona. It’s important to discuss how students might want to guard their online identity—in class and in their personal lives.

- **Create rules:** Students might blog on their Facebook pages or post their daily musings, but few stop to think about what or how they should post. Purdue’s Blakesley lets his students make their own guidelines and regulations at the start of the course. They start a conversation about format and style, and they talk about common courtesy and Web etiquette. “For example, how do you kill a discussion?” Blakesley says. “They don’t do it on purpose. This is a whole new dynamic for them.” There are no universal rules to blog posting, Blakesley says, so it’s an important exercise for the students to take time to consider the format and what rules should apply. By stating the guidelines at the start, they can return to those discussions as the course requires it.

- **Don’t assume:** McColluch warns that “the computer literacy of students isn’t as high as some professors might expect.” Besides maintaining a blog for the Honors Student Association at the University of Minnesota, he has used blogs in a graphic design course. “Some people had never made a link before, and that seemed surprising,” he says. Students would get frustrated when postings didn’t work or when the process was difficult. Professors reported the most success when students were required to sit through a session in the computer lab to learn how to post. Don’t expect students to fess up if they’re feeling lost. It’s better to start everyone on the same level and keep FAQs or online tutorials handy if they get off track sitting at their own computers.

- **Be realistic:** It might be tempting to require long postings every day or to ask students to comment on every class blog, but it’s better to think realistically about what students can—and want to—handle. “Know that students might not necessarily be interested in reading all these posts,” says McColluch. “They probably see it as homework and not some new thing.” For her FACES internship students, Morrison required that they post to their classmates’ blogs at least five times during the semester, allowing students to post when an entry sparked their interest or when their other course load was light.

- **Beware the grammar wars:** Students are split when it comes to grammar and blogging. Mollihan argues that faculty should grade on content and reflection, not format or grammar. “I wouldn’t try to make it like an essay,” she says. “I would keep it more lax and up to the student’s creativity level.” But Levine believes that faculty should not lose sight of correct grammar. The difference may be the types of blogs. For Levine, blogging was a way to demonstrate and use Spanish skills, making professor feedback on grammar a central component of the blog. The bottom line is to be clear about expectations for format and grammar. Make class rules, and discuss how writing for the Web might be different from other media.

- **Establish comment rules:** Should faculty be involved? Opinions differ among students, but they agree that if faculty are involved, it shouldn’t be in a way that inhibits student expression. Geballe liked the fact that her creative writing professor stayed away from the class blog. The professor told students that if she commented on a student’s writing, the rest of the students would be more likely to accept her opinion and not form their own. Geballe said she always knew the professor was following the blog, but it was nice that the students were in charge. Likewise, Mollihan appreciated that instead of saying
Reasons Students Blog

whether students were right or wrong, her professor would ask for more details. When Mollihan wrote that a campus speaker made her uncomfortable, the instructor asked her to give examples of what made her uncomfortable. Getting that kind of feedback was great, Mollihan says.

- **Make it relevant:** Asking students simply to post to their blogs when they feel inspired won’t cut it, says Morrison. “If it’s going to [encourage interaction and critical thinking], it has to be a required, consistent element,” she says. For class blogs, students will stop accessing the mother blog if new information is not posted regularly. If the blog isn’t mentioned in class, students put less emphasis on its worth and may stop posting. It’s important to make expectations clear and to encourage interaction and participation by linking the blog to course goals or mentioning it in class.

- **Connect the dots:** Proctor appreciated her professor’s reading of blog entries in class to encourage discussion. The simple act created a bridge between the online environment and the face-to-face course. Students knew that someone was reading their work and that it mattered in the overall course design.

- **Find the secrets to participation:** Students agree that they aren’t likely to commit to blog posting if there’s nothing in it for them. When Nelson added a blog to his composition class, he quickly learned that some students might post early in the semester, but, if no one else does, they think that it’s uncool and stop posting. “If you require it, you get more participation, but it’s never quite as interesting,” he says. He tried different iterations of the blog to see which might encourage the most interaction. The best response came, he says, when he created small groups of students and asked them to maintain a group blog around topics of interest. It might be sports, food, or entertainment. “It’s not related to boring old stuff,” he said. “It’s stuff you’re interested in.” Most agree that requiring posting is important for success, but faculty should consider how to tailor blogs to student interests so that commenting moves beyond homework.

- **Let things evolve:** When Nelson experimented with group blogs, he set aside a class period in the middle of the course so the students could come together and discuss the blogs’ success. Afterward, he says he got much better participation from the students. “They care to have their own role in defining what it is and what it’s for,” he says.

**Conclusions**

Students aren’t only vocal within the comfort of their own blogs—most are also more than willing to point out what works and what doesn’t work when it comes to class integration. A lack of blogging experience does not keep students from jumping on board, but the proliferation of blogs on the Web also won’t guarantee adoption and pedagogical success. Professors report that it is sometimes difficult to get meaningful interaction, and students admit they sometimes find blogs time-consuming. Those that succeed appear to rely on the idea that blogging is not a perfected art. Students and faculty alike should continue to discuss its pedagogical use so the blog can evolve to enhance course goals.

For students, the benefits to blogging are clear:

- The chance to practice writing, whether in English or a foreign language
- The opportunity to see what their classmates are posting and to respond to their work
- The ability to access and turn in assignments, no matter the hour or location
- The chance to creatively control their own blog or blog postings in an informal setting
- The opportunity to interact with other students through comment mechanisms
In terms of teaching and learning, a number of concrete benefits of blogging are evident. Blogs allow students to review the evolution of a course by scrolling through past blog posts. Blogs also teach students how to interact in an online environment, including rules for posting and commenting and the basic skills necessary to maintain a discussion. The public nature of the blog encourages deeper reflection before posting. Blog postings often spark debate online and in class, encouraging more class discussion, and students can use blogs to showcase their experiences and opinions to the outside world, expanding the classroom to other members of the community.

In the end, most students, even eye-rolling Veronica Proctor, find blogs to be a useful part of the curriculum. Satisfaction is mainly based on the time required compared to the benefits gained, and blogs that allow students to explore their own interests or harness their creativity are generally more widely embraced. The bottom line, students say, is to harness blogs to encourage more interaction. As Geballe says, “Blogs are definitely an opportunity to open the windows of communication.”
The Campus Press Blogs

By Justin Crawford, University of Colorado, Boulder

Blogs. Lately, this overloaded term seems to be on the tip of every tongue. Media professionals wonder how blogs will affect the bottom line. Politicians wonder how blogs will alter their communication strategies. Educators wonder how blogs will change campus life. And students? Well, students are already blogging, reading blogs, and assimilating the cultural changes wrought by blog technology. At the University of Colorado, Boulder, we recently dived headlong into this phenomenon with an experiment at our student newspaper, The Campus Press.

The Campus Press Blogs started as my professional project, the final test required of a Master’s candidate in CU’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication. I proposed that I would become a publisher and product manager, adding blogs to the Web site of the student newspaper, which was itself transitioning from a weekly print paper to an online daily. I would invite all members of the university community to apply to be bloggers and contribute their original content to the site. I would write a paper about it, and, if they deemed this project worthy, my advisers would award me a degree.

I never expected the blogs to draw more audience than the paper itself, and I certainly never expected an order from the dean to halt publication. But the blogs surprised us all.

Before I go too far, I should explain some context and terminology. To blog generally means to write content in a personal, conversational tone and to publish it online immediately in reverse-chronological order. Gawker Media, a company that produces several commercially successful blogs, adds some cultural context to that bare-bones definition. Gawker’s Frequently Asked Questions section says, “We have no pretensions to objectivity—no editorial board, no assigning editor, and no delays. We publish in real time. Weblogs are biased, personal, and funky.”

Blogs are part of a digital publication phenomenon best described by the term social media. This is the popular embodiment of the worldwide conversation that was hyped during the 1990s Internet boom. A decade later, thanks to free, open source technology, almost anyone with a personal computer and an Internet connection can instantly be a thought leader, a publisher, a contributor, a teacher, or a critic. Social media describes a many-to-many, conversational, indexable, archived library of online content that is growing every day through the contributions of countless individuals, including tens of millions of bloggers. Clearly, the technology enabling social media changes the way we receive content. But it also changes who produces, directs, and owns content and how that content is used. Therefore, social media and associated technologies have the potential to impact any field whose primary product is information.

The media business was at the front of my mind when I started this project, but, viewing it in retrospect, I think the project’s outcomes are every bit as relevant to educators. After all, universities are in the business of disseminating valuable information, and the revolution that is transforming our communication mechanisms will certainly leave an imprint on higher education.

But last December I had more immediate concerns, such as getting the proverbial ball rolling on this blog project.
I made contact with key individuals at the journalism school, including Colin Lingle and Daniel Schaefer, graduate students with similar interests, and Michelle Fulcher, faculty adviser for The Campus Press. Together we formed a new media working group that would meet and discuss the blogs and other new media subjects throughout the semester. With their help, I secured the enthusiastic support of Andrew Villegas, executive editor of The Campus Press.

The holiday season came and went. In January, I prepared a detailed budget and applied for a grant to cover our expenses for software and promotion. I also sent the budget to Paul Voakes, dean of the journalism school, and he agreed to help with expenses beyond the grant. In the end, this support was vital because the grant did not come through.

I started investigating blog technologies. There are hundreds available, but only a handful met my criteria. I wanted an inexpensive, customizable, well-supported, and well-documented tool with multi-blogger and commenter capabilities. I soon settled on Drupal (http://drupal.org/), a general-purpose, open-source, free content management system written in a programming language called PHP. Drupal is a popular, industrial-strength framework for building content-heavy interactive applications.

In early February, I stood up at the weekly meeting of the editors of The Campus Press and asked them to lend me their brand, give me space on their servers, and allow me to publish a new kind of content under their name. I also asked for volunteers to help me manage the product. This was a critical moment. Although The Campus Press is funded in part by the school, its undergraduate staff retain full editorial control of content. In other words, there would be no blogs if the editors did not want them.

But they did. Two editors—Whitney Levine and Debra Thiegs—volunteered to help manage the blogs. The other editors were skeptical but intrigued. I was ecstatic.

Next, with help from the working group, I got a copy of Drupal running and began modifying it to suit my requirements and vision:

- I made substantial changes to the software's configuration. For example, I created roles such as “editor,” “admin,” “blogger,” and “recruit” and specified precisely what each role could do in the system.
- I customized the publishing layout. For example, I designed a new logo and several custom “skins” that bloggers could choose from.
- I wrote custom code. For example, I created a function to display the name of every blog in a list at the top left of every page. Later I enhanced this code to remove “stale” blogs, float prolific bloggers to the top of the list, and indicate which blogs had new content.
- I created custom tools. For example, I made a Web form that potential bloggers could fill out; the form included questions designed to ascertain the applicant’s interests and writing abilities.
- I wrote policies and procedures. For example, I drafted a publishing policy explaining the reasons content might be removed or a user banned.

During this phase I realized how essential the working group’s contributions would be. They helped me understand the baseline expectations of savvy blog audiences, managed my
relationship with the newsroom, kept the technology humming, and critiqued my design and copy. I could not have completed the project without them.

Much of the initial work was totally novel to us. Take the policy document: This document said (in many more words) that a blog entry or comment could be taken down, and its author could be banned, if posted content included personal attacks, hate speech, or anything likely to cause a lawsuit. I consulted Phil Cauthon, the editor of Lawrence.com, an online publication of the Lawrence [Kansas] Journal-World, about the policy document. I ran it by Dan Pacheco, a product manager for Bakotopia.com, an online community provided by The Bakersfield Californian. I e-mailed it to Steve Outing, a new media columnist for Poynter.org, the online publication of The Poynter Institute, a journalism research and training institute. I contacted Doug Connaroe, an instructor at CU and the blogs editor for the Denver Post’s Bloghouse (http://www.denverpostbloghouse.com/). And I spent hours going over the document with the working group.

Everyone thought the policies sounded reasonable. But we agreed The Campus Press’s relationship with the university required extraordinary diligence, beyond what would be required of a truly independent publication. And we found no precedent to guide us. Ultimately, at the urging of Bob Trager, a CU law professor, we submitted our policies to Dean Voakes, who submitted them to the university’s team of lawyers, and we all waited. And waited.

Meanwhile, the working group and I devised a plan to recruit bloggers. We thought the best bloggers would be active, engaged students—the kind of people who join student groups, such as the Black Student Alliance, the 4-Wheelin’ Club, and the Philosophy Club. So I found contact information for about 60 student group leaders. Lingle and I called or e-mailed every one. We invited them to become campus celebrities, to lead discussions about their missions or interests. Unfortunately, this strategy yielded meager results. I do not think any of our bloggers came from this first round of recruiting. However, I am convinced that students who are already engaged in a student group have great potential as bloggers.

Next, we paid about $50 to send four campus-wide notices—two to students, two to faculty and staff. The first went out to students on March 7:

BE A CAMPUS PRESS BLOGGER!

Become a campus celebrity! CU students who want to be bloggers for The Campus Press can sign up now. No experience necessary, just a point of view and a desire to be heard. Blogs will be linked from The Campus Press Online and the best posts each week could make the front page! Application, FAQ, and more at http://www.thecampuspress.com/cpblogs. Tell CU what’s on your mind!

Applications began appearing almost immediately, and we had more than a dozen by March 15. Students, it seemed, wanted to see their work in print. We promised to make it easy and, furthermore, to stamp their content with The Campus Press brand. A hitherto-unrecognized demand—namely, the community’s yearning to speak, to participate, to lead conversations—found in us a willing supplier. We were inches from publication.

Meanwhile, Outing had applied a little more heat to the project by mentioning us in his column on Poynter.org. The resulting spike in traffic came before we went live, and we knew we had to move quickly to keep up. Plus, we had a tight deadline: Spring break would start
on March 26, and scarcely a month after that, final exams. It was imperative that we open our blogs immediately.

The dean finally coaxed a reply from university attorneys, who signed off on our policy document. They merely required us to add a disclaimer to the bottom of every page. At 6:00 a.m. on March 21, I slapped the disclaimer into place and gave our first four applicants their very own blogs. The Campus Press Blogs were alive.

The first day’s activity was far more than we had hoped for. At the end of it, we had 11 posts and 11 comments. The posts were unique, some funny and some informative. We were thrilled. That afternoon, a blogger calling himself “Do Not Read” (which I will abbreviate to “DNR”) published a post including the words “faggot” and “queer.” In some contexts, such words would clearly violate our policy against hate speech. This sparked a discussion among the working group, the newsroom, and me. We agreed the words were not intended as slurs, and the post remained online.

Two days later, a blogger calling himself “Bíspanŋŋ” implied in a flippant post that Villegas, the executive editor of The Campus Press, was fabricating a girlfriend and hiding a secret gender identity. Villegas, who had never met Bíspanŋŋ, responded with an offer to punch him in the nose. Others in the community condemned the original post, too.

Bíspanŋŋ quickly followed up with an intelligent piece about homophobia and The Laramie Project, a play about the murder of a gay man in Wyoming:

Many of my colleagues and close friends are homosexuals, but an anti-homosexual remark still appeared in my blog, and I wrote it. It was a light joke, but I strongly believe the culture of homophobia leads to hate and hate crimes. Understanding and discussion leads to acceptance and tolerance. I am glad this was brought to my attention. Let’s discuss The Laramie Project.

Could it be that the community’s disapproval of Bíspanŋŋ’s original piece caused him to correct his behavior? I thought so. I was excited to see this mechanism—so crucial to a functioning community—at work on the third day of publication.

During that first week, the blogs accounted for an amazing 45 percent of the audience traffic on The Campus Press’s Web site. The second week was spring break, so nobody read the paper or the blogs. In the third week, the blogs accounted for 31 percent of audience traffic.

And then, in the blogs’ fourth week, tragedy struck the campus. Jesse Gomez, a CU freshman, was found dead in his dorm room on Sunday, April 9. He died early that morning after attending a fraternity party. It was the first major campus news event to engage our bloggers.

Bíspanŋŋ posted “Boo The Greeks” on April 11, in which he blamed CU’s fraternities for Gomez’s death. “Every time you see a known greek, by reputation or paraphernalia, boo them!” he wrote. “In the UMC. On the quad. In class. On the street. At the bar. At their houses!!!”

A link to the entry immediately rose to the top of the “Today’s Most Popular Posts” list we had recently added to the front page of the online newspaper. It was a prominent position for a provocative headline. The post drew 17 comments over the next day, more than any other post that semester. On April 12, the post was quoted and linked in the comments section of a
story about Gomez in the Boulder paper, the *Daily Camera*—someone in the *Camera*’s audience had read Bïspanğî’s piece, and they added it to the debate on the paper’s site. Soon after, commenter “ctheath” posted a response to Bïspanğî’s post on *The Campus Press Blogs*, in which he said,

> But to speculate (because your argument is PURELY speculation until the autopsy comes out) that this is automatically the fraternities fault in Jesse’s death is completely immature and unprofessional. As long as we are speculating, i have heard from several people close to him that he often did Oxycontin and other pain killers...If this ‘speculation’ is true and he indeed also had a couple of key lights at Theta Xi (which p.s. isn’t a very ‘hardcore’ organization) is it still the greek systems fault???

I thought ctheath’s comment was legally and ethically troublesome. I said as much in an e-mail to the working group and the editors, and most of us agreed that the comment should come down. But Villegas was silent on the issue. After three hours, I took down the comment.

When Villegas finally replied, he took an unexpected stance on the issue. First, he said, Gomez had mentioned painkillers on his Facebook.com profile, and this was common knowledge among undergraduates. Second, Villegas said, "*The Campus Press* is controlled editorially by the students (totally undergrad) and we will work independently of graduate student, TA, faculty or adviser influence."

Wow! Suddenly, we had unvarnished information—information that everyone below a certain age was already talking about—appearing first on the blogs. And suddenly, the editors of *The Campus Press* considered the blogs valuable enough to claim them. I saw this development as a significant milestone. Only three weeks after going live, the blogs were becoming a newsroom fixture. Still, my satisfaction mingled with reluctance; I didn’t want to give up my administrative and editorial omnipotence within the system. Villegas pulled rank, though. I republished the comment. Little did we know the Gomez saga was just beginning.

On April 15, blogger DNR published, but did not substantiate, an assertion that Gomez was under the influence of painkillers the night he died and that the painkillers were the reason he died. While ctheath’s speculative comment had fallen just within our rules, DNR’s assertive post crossed the line. The newsroom and the working group reached a consensus via e-mail. The executive editor pulled the post and issued a warning to DNR.

DNR was back a few days later with “Jehovah’s Witnesses Didn’t Witness Me :(. " This humorous submission was the most popular post of the entire semester, quadrupling the blogs’ normal traffic. Dozens of new users signed up to comment. Many of them came straight from Watchtower.org, the official Web site of Jehovah’s Witnesses, where an automated news search scans the Web for Jehovah’s Witness references.

*The Campus Press Blogs* attracted more visitors than the online newspaper for the first time during the week of April 16. But the blogs’ rising popularity did not diminish the paper’s audience. *The Campus Press* drew the same amount of traffic as usual during this time—around 300 views per day.

On April 20, thousands of CU students climbed over “No Trespassing” signs to participate in a marijuana party protest on Farrand Field. CU police photographed hundreds of people holding pot paraphernalia and blowing smoke rings and posted those pictures on the department Web site. Police offered $50 for information leading to the arrest and conviction
of any person pictured. This unique enforcement strategy made national news. Villegas published a controversial post berating police for not issuing tickets on the spot, and CNN.com later linked to that post.

Blogger DNR couldn’t resist having his say. He claimed in a post on May 1 that he was guilty of trespassing on Folsom and smoking marijuana; he said he was identified and called into the police department but escaped conviction with a good haircut and a fake alibi. The Daily Camera found his post and wrote an entire article about it, quoting directly from his blog. DNR’s blog post was the news. I never expected this.

The blogs’ popularity was increasing in exponential fits. Many of our visitors came from Google searches (searches for “immigration” and “4/20” were among the most common). Public Radio International interviewed me (off-air) for a broadcast called “The Death of the Newspaper.” CNN.com invited CU’s chief of police and Villegas on air (which later fell through). E-mails and comments from Canada and New Zealand reflected the worldwide scope of our publication.

Then came finals week. The site’s traffic dropped to almost nothing as our bloggers and primary audience hit the books. It was a good thing, too. That week, DNR claimed in a blog entry to have special knowledge relating to the death of Jesse Gomez. He said he knew the person who sold drugs that he said killed Gomez. He called that person a murderer. And he promised to withhold crucial bits of this information from police. There was no question—this post violated our policy. It threatened a very expensive lawsuit. I immediately e-mailed the working group and the editors. With their permission, I took the post down less than an hour after discovering it. I sighed with relief after verifying that Google had not yet indexed the post. Next, after substantial debate, we revoked DNR’s blogging privileges. But it wasn’t enough. DNR had put the fear into us.

With summer approaching, most news staff would leave town. The paper would stop reporting daily news. Most faculty would work from home. And Dean Voakes saw the potential for negligence if the blogs kept operating. “Once everyone scattered to the four winds,” Voakes later explained, “nobody would be obligated to monitor the blogs.” So he asked us to “pause” the blogs for the summer.

Editors of the paper questioned the plan. “Let’s not punish our bloggers, and stop our momentum along the way, because of a bad apple,” Villegas wrote in an e-mail to the group. I also objected to the dean’s plan, for two reasons. First, I thought the pause would set a bad example. “I think [the pause] disregards The Campus Press’ audience and community,” I said in an e-mail, “and I think it teaches journalism students that disregard for the audience and community is acceptable.”

Second, I worried that the dean’s plan underscored an institutional resistance to change, which I believe threatens the viability of traditional media operations and journalism schools alike. When I asked him about this, Voakes said the school does include “pockets of resistance” to technological change, but he assured me that his sole motivation was to prevent negligence in the platform. Still, he rejected my proposal to hire a student editor to monitor the blogs for the summer. We halted publication on May 23. The blogs had popped and fizzled. Their audience and community disappeared with a few mouse clicks.
Many of us were quite disappointed at the time, but today I think it was the right decision. Sponsoring blogs on autopilot truly would put the university at risk. Furthermore, I consider the pause to be a measure of the blogs’ success: their calamitous conclusion signaled the extent and force of their impact. During 67 days of publication, *The Campus Press Blogs* became a crucial component of *The Campus Press*’s online product. The blogs’ traffic steadily increased from their explosive first week until finals. By the end of the semester, the blogs were drawing more than twice as many visitors as the rest of the online newspaper combined—on an average day, the blogs served 474 visitors, the newspaper 210. At the very least, the blogs were entertaining enough to increase the online audience of *The Campus Press*. If the blogs and the online paper included advertisements, the blogs could be the most important revenue generator in the entire operation.

The blogs’ popularity taught us something about the appetites of future news consumers. Simply put, more people visiting our college newspaper Web site preferred blog-style content to traditional news. It is hard to predict whether this style of content will appeal to this same audience in 10 years, but it may.

I should point out that *The Campus Press Blogs* content was hardly “journalism” in the traditional sense of the word. Blog posts rarely included detailed reporting. Content was conversational, casual, personal, occasionally litigable, and frequently unverifiable. The blogs were mostly just talk, not reportage. But “what people are talking about” has always been an important component of the news business. When our bloggers talked about the 4/20 pot protest in their blogs, CNN.com and local newspapers based stories on those conversations. *The Campus Press Blogs* showed us how blogs can be a source for news leads, tips, and stories, a source that is archived indefinitely and indexed by the finest information-retrieval services (Google, for instance) that humans have ever known.

On a few occasions, blog content on *The Campus Press Blogs* approached the quality of a newspaper editorial. Bispanγng’s “Laramie Project” post is one example. Such posts hint at the journalism potential of blogs. Blog software is just a content container, after all; the nature of the content is entirely determined by blog authors. Blog technology potentially enables countless more authors to produce good journalism. I think future blog aggregators or nonprofit reporting collectives may pose a serious challenge to traditional media corporations.

We have a lot more to learn about the implications of social media. Luckily, the most valuable attribute of *The Campus Press Blogs* project may be its pedagogical utility. The students and instructors who worked on this project had an incomparable educational experience. We successfully introduced a major new media product into an existing newsroom on a shoestring budget, and in the process we engaged our campus and community in a fresh new endeavor. And, to my great satisfaction, our audience ate it up.

So, it worked. I received my diploma in May. Blogs are now a default component of *The Campus Press* online product (though any specific implementation of them is mired in a technical and/or political bog at the time of this writing). We all learned a lot about our audience. It should be clear by now how relevant these tools are to journalists and journalism educators.

I took away three lessons from this experience that may be instructive to educators throughout the academy: First, students are almost certain to surprise us. These new media technologies are called disruptive for a reason, and they do not become less so in the hands
of enthusiastic young people. We do well to exercise caution and diligence when planning such experiments.

Second, encapsulated in the above narrative is a model for assimilating technological change. As an erstwhile member of the younger generation, I brought some technical savvy with me to campus, and I discovered a school sorely in need of it. Many students in every discipline do the same. At a time when all fields are undergoing unprecedented technological evolution, such students can help higher education institutions stay current and relevant. That is, if universities can find these students and enlist them.

Third, technology is changing the way we communicate with one another, and the social impact of this change is likely to be at least as great as changes wrought by the invention of the printing press or the television. Members of the generation now in high school will expect to be treated as participants in a grand conversation rather than as passive consumers of education. They will expect their contributions to be incorporated, with attribution, into the subject matter. Some of them may expect to be paid for contributing bits of information or analysis to a body of knowledge. If the university’s culture does not keep up, future students will have countless alternative forums to consume and contribute to. And some of these alternatives may be entrepreneurial competitors in education—commercial endeavors, independent instructors, and other universities.

In the media business, technology has dissolved established boundaries between producers and consumers and—in the process—has severely shaken the industry. Educators should be prepared for changes of the same nature and scope—vast revisions to the roles and relationships defined by traditional educational models, driven by innovation in communication technologies. At this very moment, a service, widget, or protocol that will completely transform our campuses could be incubating in one of our dormitories. Are we prepared to seek it, recognize it, and embrace it?
If you are thinking about introducing blogging as a tool for teaching and learning, this section will highlight important considerations. It puts blogging into pedagogical context by showing where it fits in the spectrum of instructional technologies and pointing out issues of importance to faculty. It also simplifies the planning process by discussing how to present the idea to stakeholders and by highlighting critical implementation questions.

Position and Perspective

Blogs—shorthand for “Web logs”—are online, reverse-chronological collections of personal commentary and links. As simple to use as an online e-mail program, blogs are available to anyone with access to the Internet and an application on a hosted service or campus Web server. An easy form of Internet publishing, blogs have become an established communications tool for capturing and sharing ideas, opinions, and reflections through text, hyperlinks, images, and/or multimedia. But where do they fit in the contemporary course?

Think of blogs as digital journals with the same power of critical reflection found in traditional journaling but enhanced by the 24 x 7 Web-based ability for others to post feedback as well as “ping” to alert the author their work has been commented on in another blog. While journaling is a traditional practice in teacher education and other professions, the activity was often limited to instructor-to-student sharing. In contrast, blogging adds the dimension of student-to-student and student-to-outsider expert interaction. By design, blogs encourage communication and extend community around a common topic or set of ideas.

Blogging is about reading, writing, and reflection in the public domain. Perhaps their most significant attribute is the capacity to engage deeper learning through knowledge sharing, critical reflection, debate, and revision so students learn to develop voice, formulate opinions, and stand by them. Within that framework are opportunities to learn about plagiarism, copyright, privacy, and ethics.

Although audio and photoblogs have emerged in the blogosphere, generally blogs use text entries and links to resources or images, audio, or video. Whether students access blogs from a desktop/laptop computer or engage in “moblogging” (mobile blogging) through a cell phone or PDA, uses can be divided into individual and group/collaborative blogs.

Individual Blogs

- Journals for sharing thoughts and reflections or having discussions on a particular subject, or to chronicle the undergraduate experience, such as a semester abroad
- Portfolios for gathering evidence and demonstrating proficiency of specific skills
- Research diaries where students chronicle their research experience—trials, challenges, successes, and results—or where instructors document their research and allow students to follow progress

This section is part of the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative Discovery Tool: Guide to Blogging. The guide is designed to help you explore blogging’s potential and limitations, where it fits in the broader context of teaching and learning in higher education, and how you might approach implementation. Each section can be used independently to accomplish specific goals, or all units can be used together for a comprehensive process guide. Find the complete Guide to Blogging at www.educause.edu/GuideToBlogging.

ELI Discovery Tools are practical resources designed to support the development and implementation of teaching, learning, and technology projects on campus. They are available to ELI members only.

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Spaces to organize thoughts on class assignments, readings, and discussions or keep track of important Web sites or library database citation research for papers and presentations

- Metajournals for graduate students visiting new places where they blog about their specific area of study (such as archaeology) and the places they are traveling

**Group/Collaborative Blogs**

- Collections of student reactions to class readings and activities
- Forum to extend in-class discussions
- Common place for students working on a group project to share resources and have discussions

Colleges and universities are finding blogs useful for a range of nonacademic uses, also. Students use blogs to share club or student-organization news, events, and activities and to post opinions about classes, campus events, and local or world news. Blogs help faculty researchers working across time zones to brainstorm, update, and archive ideas. For services and administration, blogs are being put to use in a number of areas, including as an admission tool, where current students blog about their campus experiences; an extension of campus writing center activities; a space for commentary from campus leadership; a medium for departmental, alumni, or orientation-services newsletters; and a feedback mechanism for campus services.

In selecting a technology for a learning activity, it is important to address where blogs are positioned across the technology spectrum and how blogs relate to other technologies in terms of mobility, platform neutrality, instructional flexibility, and accessibility (see Table 1).

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<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Platform neutral</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>Readily accessible anywhere, anytime</td>
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<td>Easy to use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to create</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can be used for a variety of purposes (such as introducing content,</td>
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<td>documenting accomplishments)</td>
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<td>Supports universal design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to post to individual or group blogs</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to establish an institution-wide hosting service</td>
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The figures below represent a general categorization of blogging. Use them as a starting point for discussing the use of blogs at your institution.

Figure 1 represents where blogs fit in the overall technology landscape; the landscape is defined by how easy the technology is to develop (create) and how flexible it is for users to access and/or manipulate. Compared to other technologies, blogs are relatively easy to develop and provide a greater degree of user flexibility, especially when compared to more traditional development and delivery tools.

Figure 1. Blogging Positioned Relative to Other Technologies

Ease of Development/Creation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Flexibility</th>
<th>High Flexibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User</td>
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<td>Blogging</td>
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Guide to Blogging
Figure 2 represents some specific uses of blogging and defines those uses through flexibility as an instructional strategy (faculty-transmission to learner-created) to degree of learner engagement (passive to active).

**Figure 2. Blogging: Instructional Flexibility and Learner Engagement**

As you think about blogging and the figures above, the following questions may stimulate dialogue about where blogging fits at your institution:

- Is blogging a good match for your instructional goals? What kinds of instructional problems could blogs solve?
- Is blogging a good match for student skills? For faculty skills?
- Would you use blogs as a delivery technology or as an active learning tool?
- Do you have the necessary technology, expertise, and support to ensure that blogging is successful?
Decisions to Make About Blogging

Initial Considerations

A blog is a “Web log,” or diary, made up of small entries or “posts” that are displayed in reverse-chronological order. Blogs allow anyone to publish content on the Web quickly and easily. Many blogs come with built-in commenting tools that allow readers to respond to individual entries, establishing the basis for collaboration, discussion, and peer review.

When blogs are used as instructional tools, they allow students to:

• capture and share impressions of live lectures and events
• maintain a diary of personal thoughts
• post content in multiple formats, including text, audio recordings, and video clips
• continue course-related discussions outside class
• record and share responses to course readings
• collect, annotate, organize, and share hyperlinks to course-related Web materials, including the latest content (RSS news feeds) from online media outlets
• post works-in-progress for review by instructors and peers
• post comments and critiques of classmates’ blog entries
• send instructors and classmates automatic notification of new blog entries through built-in RSS feeds

Before You Begin

Before you advocate blogging, there are several questions you will want to answer:

• What do you hope to achieve?
• Are your users (students and faculty) receptive?
• Do you have the necessary infrastructure and support?
• What policies may be necessary?
• What options should you consider?

What do you hope to achieve?

Blogging might replace existing pedagogical practices, enhance those practices, or become the means through which students actively shape the course and its objectives. If you have decided to use blogging in one of your courses, think about which single project, lesson, or graded activity would benefit the most from the use of blogs. For example, if group work already forms an essential part of your course, would that work be enhanced by the introduction of blogging? Consider the following questions as you begin to define your approach:

• Am I looking for a digital drop box with interactive features? If so, is blogging a convenient way to have students post their work for review?
• Do I want to extend course discussions beyond the scheduled class sessions? If so, will I be monitoring student discussions or contributing to them?
Will students be blogging in order to emulate the way professionals in the discipline perform their research or practice their trade?

Is my goal to create an active learning community? If so, should students be invited to shape the direction of the course through a community blog? Am I comfortable with a course that evolves in this way?

Am I interested in connecting my students with communities of practice that lie outside the boundaries of the classroom? If so, do I want to create a public blogging space open to a wider readership?

**Are your users receptive?**

Two groups must be receptive to blogging for implementation to be successful: students and faculty. Although we often assume that students are blogging on their own and are comfortable expressing themselves in public forums through such social networking sites as Facebook and MySpace, it is important to test this assumption, especially for your user population. Remember that exciting extracurricular activities might no longer seem attractive to students when there is a grade attached.

Faculty may have their own misgivings, even when they are bloggers themselves. A blog is only as sophisticated as its author, and the blogs of students with little exposure to complex issues may devolve quickly into trivia unless their entries are carefully guided by course structure. Ultimately, a course-based blogging activity may bear little resemblance to the kind of freewheeling, self-fashioning Web sites of long-time blogophiles. Faculty may curtail some of the freedoms associated with the blogosphere, asking their students to keep their blogs focused on explicating and responding to course readings.

Initially, certain disciplines may be more receptive to blogging than others. In fields where journaling has long been an effective approach to inviting student participation and helping learners hone their critical-thinking and writing skills, instructors may be the first to recognize the value of incorporating student blogs into courses. Blogging has found its way into English composition, media and communications, journalism, and other writing-intensive courses because of the role that blogs increasingly play in the lives of professional writers, journalists, photographers, videographers, and marketers, as well as scholars of media, public policy, law, and government. In these and other contexts, blogs become an important way of bringing authentic real-world practice into the classroom.

**Do you have the necessary infrastructure and support?**

Universities are beginning to license enterprise versions of commonly available blogging applications in order to offer their own blog services for faculty, staff, and students. These services are intended to support teaching and learning, scholarly communication, and individual expression for the college or university community. Integrated with the institution’s authentication infrastructure, the blog service facilitates a secure, password-protected approach to academic blogging. With a college or university ID and password, a user may login to the service, request a weblog, and choose from a list of options to set their blog’s access control. An instructor can easily create a blog for a specific class and attach registered students to the blog as authors. In addition, each blog comes with its own search engine so that blog authors and readers can quickly find previous entries. Furthermore, the campus blog server will automatically e-mail specific people every time an author update’s her blog.
For those instructors whose institution does not yet offer a hosted blog service, the first place to turn for support is typically the campus center for teaching and learning, where educational technologists can help you decide on a blog application that suits your needs and create a plan of action should you need additional technical support once the course is under way.

**What policies may be necessary?**

Only recently have institutions begun to focus on campus policies covering blogging by faculty and staff. With the potential of lawsuits for defamatory remarks made in the blogosphere, institutions are issuing statements that let employees know they blog at their own risk.

Institutions should seek advice from their campus general counsel about potential liabilities associated with student speech and potential violations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). If a course is required for graduation, the instructor may be violating FERPA by insisting that students submit their work to a public site—giving up a privacy right—as a condition of enrollment. FERPA legislation does not explicitly address these and other questions involving emerging technologies. For this reason, it is important that institutions seek the advice of legal counsel to ensure that their student privacy policies take into account emerging technologies such as blogging.

Colleges and universities should also investigate policies to cover other considerations:

- Are blogs considered the intellectual property of the institution or of the individual faculty member or student who creates them?
- Do guidelines for copyright and fair use apply to blogs as well as other works?
- If a student makes a defamatory remark in his or her course-assigned blog, is the institution or faculty member legally responsible?
- If a course required for graduation mandates that a student submit postings to a public site in a personally identifiable way, would the institution be requiring the student to give up a privacy right as a condition of enrollment? If so, does this constitute a FERPA violation?
- Should students be given a list of precautions they should take for concealing identifying personal information from the world at large?
- Should student blogs be password-protected, limiting access to registered course members or the instructor alone?

**What options should you consider?**

Before you begin blogging, there are a number of options to consider. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it illustrates some of the choices available.

**Access**

- Will the student blogs be available only to students registered in a course? To any student at the college or university? To anyone (student, faculty, staff, or alumnus) at the institution? To anyone, irrespective of whether they are associated with the institution?
- Will the student blogs be available after the end of the term? To whom?
Required or Optional

- Is blogging a required activity for everyone in the course? If so, how often will students be required to compose a new blog entry? How will student entries be evaluated?
- How often will the instructor review student blogs? Will instructor feedback be included as comments on the student’s blog (and visible to all readers), or will it be confidential?
- Will students be required to read and respond to one another’s blogs? How often? How will student participation be graded?
- Will students use pseudonyms or write under their own names?

User Support

- Do faculty and students have the necessary computer skills to create blogs?
- If blogging is required, do all students have the technology needed?
- What accommodations are in place for accessibility?

What It Takes to Blog

You may choose to begin by creating a personal blog hosted for free by one of the many Web-based blog providers, including but not limited to:

- [http://www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)
- [http://edublogs.org](http://edublogs.org)
- [http://www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org)
- [http://www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)
- [http://www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)
- [http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype](http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype)

Visit any of these Web-based services or additional options listed in the “Where can I learn more?” section and follow the step-by-step directions to create an account:

- You will enter your e-mail address, choose a password, and use both to log in to the service each time you wish to access your blog.
- You will be asked to choose your blog signature (a user name that is commonly a pseudonym) and to accept the terms of service.
- Next, you will be able to choose a graphical layout for your blog from among the available templates, which might be customized with drag-and-drop tools.
- Without having to know HTML, you can use the blog editing environment to write and edit individual posts, categorize your posts, and create automatic archives.
- The interface will have buttons for uploading photos, videos, or podcasts to your blog. Some services support moblogging, in which you can send photos and text directly from your mobile device to your blog.
- Some services allow you to embed content and functionality from sites such as Amazon and Skype inside your blog.
- Google and blog search engines will be instantly notified about new content when you update your blog (a feature that may or may not appeal to you).

In addition to single-author blogs, some blogs are written by multiple authors. Selecting an appropriate multiauthor tool for team blogging can be tricky. Consider the following as a basic list of criteria in selecting a community-oriented blogging tool:
Decisions to Make About Blogging

- Must allow multiple authors (without insisting on separate accounts for each)
- Should allow the academic unit to host the tool on the institution’s own servers if the content or author information must be protected
- Should be searchable
- Should allow authors to make format changes (such as bold text and bulleted lists) and easily insert hyperlinks
- Should allow for the posting of drafts, which other editors approve
- Should allow for comments
- Easy posting from Macs and PCs using common browsers
What Faculty Want to Know

What is a blog?
A blog (or “Web log”) is a personal electronic journal created with the help of software that is often freely available. A blog gives individuals the power to perform many functions that traditionally fell under the purview of academic publishing houses:

Publication and Wide Dissemination of Personal Commentary
- New entries are published to the Web quickly and easily
- Limits can be placed on who may read the blog, but most blogs are, by definition, open to the public (and will appear, therefore, in Internet search results)
- Entries are organized in reverse-chronological order
- Entries are automatically archived
- Each individual entry (or “post”) is assigned a unique URL (called a “permalink”)
- Beyond text, blogs can also include audio and video

Citation Index for Tracking Personal Influence
Blogging systems like Movable Type include a “trackback” feature that turns every blog into a citation index. Bloggers can use trackbacks to monitor how influential they are in the blogosphere by requesting notifications each time someone else refers and links back to one of their blog posts.

Peer Review
Thanks to the built-in commenting feature in many blogging systems, a reader can respond directly to an author’s entry, posting his or her critique to the author’s blog page. Responses are displayed below the relevant entry in reverse-chronological order.

Knowledge Gathering, Classification, and Management
- RSS (Rich Site Summary/Real Simple Syndication) is a feature built into most blogging software that makes it possible for readers to subscribe to the content created on a particular blog. This way, instead of having to visit the blog itself to check on new entries, subscribers receive notice of new blog content. RSS features allow a learning community, for example, to keep track of new entries by its members and monitor “feeds” of interest throughout the larger blogosphere using so-called RSS aggregators or news-feed collectors. In courses, educators can keep tabs on student blogs by subscribing to their RSS feeds and checking their aggregators regularly.
- Blog publishing platforms typically offer customizable metadata schemes for tagging content by keywords. By hosting their own blogging services and integrating blogging software systems with bookmarking and digital photo management systems, institutions can provide faculty, staff, and students with an intriguing community-based knowledge management tool.

Will my work increase if I assign blogging in my courses?
Training students to use blogging applications is extremely simple, since most programs come with ready-made layouts and allow both writers and commentators to enter plain text
What Faculty Want to Know

into Web-based forms. Blogging requires minimal additional work, particularly compared with how cumbersome Web page creation was just a few years ago.

Grading student blogs should take no more time than grading any written assignment. Key to effective assessment is developing a well-defined rubric or set of criteria to address content and format and communicating those expectations to students.

No longer distracted by technical challenges, faculty and learners can concentrate on pedagogical and subject-specific issues. The amount of time that a faculty member devotes to integrating blogging into a course is a matter of choice. Often there are obvious uses for blogging, particularly in those courses that emphasize writing, reflection, and peer review. If they are willing to devote more time to class preparation, instructors can design authentic learning experiences around case-based scenarios and sustained investigations, in which blogging plays the same role that it would in real-world practice: facilitating collaboration and collective knowledge construction.

How do I evaluate a student blog?

Those who have experimented with course blogs suggest that students be required to post to their blogs at regular intervals, determined by the instructor, ensuring that participation remains consistent throughout the semester. As with any assignment, student participation in a class blogging exercise should be judged in relation to the original learning objectives associated with the activity. What do you hope to achieve by asking your students to blog?

- Content mastery
- Reflective thinking
- Practice in argumentation
- Research-skills development
- Team-based learning
- Peer review

Once you have defined the key purpose of blogging in the overall course design, determine what you hope to assess, and define measures of success. For example, if you are using blogs to help students master course content, you might assess student work according to certain criteria—organization of thought, analysis of materials, selection and annotation of resource links, usefulness of feedback to peers, and so on. For a more extensive treatment of assessment issues, see “How do I know it works?” in this guide.

How are other instructors using blogs in their courses?

The potential instructional uses for blogs are almost infinitely varied. Reinforced through cases and examples in the “What are others doing?” section, here are a few approaches to consider:

- **Teaching the process of peer-based evaluation:** Instructors in English composition programs are using blogging tools to teach their students how to critique one another’s work effectively. Students post works-in-progress to their individual blogs, and their classmates are invited to offer constructive feedback.

- **Fostering discussion through a single “class blog”:** Instructors are often dissatisfied with e-mail and forums as conduits for online group discussion because of the “lurking” factor: while most students read e-mail messages and forum posts, few respond to them in any meaningful way. But students cannot “lurk” when entire discussions appear within
How do I get started?

A single, persistent “class blog,” and each person’s level of participation is apparent to all. Moreover, writing under their own names, students tend to take more ownership of their commentary while strengthening their reading and writing skills.

- **Developing the finer points:** In lieu of weekly response papers to theoretical articles, instructors can assign each student an individual blog where each can tease out the finer points of theoretical discussion.

- **Promoting community:** This is particularly important for students in clinical practica who “meet” exclusively online and need to tell their fellows about the experiences they are having at their respective internship sites.

- **Extending learning beyond scheduled course time:** Blogs can help instructors address student needs before class meetings, offer just-in-time instruction, provide additional thoughts that relate to class material, discuss professional readings, and model authentic professional writing activities they want students to practice in their blogs.

- **Simulating real-world practices:** For those disciplines where blogging has become a fixture of authentic practice—journalism or media studies, for example—blogs can be used to advance role-playing simulations. At the University of Arizona, a history instructor incorporated blogs into a Middle East simulation scenario in which 65 students assigned roles as contemporary actors in the region were asked to vie for the attention of media outlets. Three students represented media outlets based on the real Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Al-Manar Arabic-language regional satellite television channels. The students maintained media blogs that updated all players with “news” during the simulation, with each blog reflecting its own political spin and posting updated reports at least twice a week. Players focused on getting publicity on the blogs and pushing their own agenda through press conferences and issued statements.

**Will the process of blogging actually change the way students think and express their ideas?**

Owing to the nature of the blogging process itself, students can develop particular habits of expression and organization that will serve them well in the 21st-century workplace:

- **Focused expression:** Since the native parlance of the blog is the short “post,” which is time-stamped, archived, and assigned a permanent URL, users become comfortable (often adept) at creating focused miniessays—small, self-contained units addressing a specific topic.

- **Participatory learning and multitasking:** Since blog entries offering personal impressions of an event can be written and published while that event is occurring, blogging can change the dynamics of a lecture or conference. Blog audience members grow accustomed to dividing their attention between three tasks: experiencing the event, publishing their impressions of it, and reading/responding to the impressions of other bloggers.
What Faculty Want to Know

- **Pattern recognition**: Web publishing systems that allow bloggers to create hyperlinks, perform searches, and develop customized metadata schemes introduce them to tagging, taxonomy, annotation, and other research skills designed to elaborate, organize, and integrate patterns of meaning over time.

- **Mixed-media conversation**: Depending on the particular blogging platform and the user’s production skills, written expression can be supplemented with audio recordings, images, video clips, and any other Web-deliverable digital content, underscoring the mixed media quality of 21st-century conversation. Moreover, through the automatic syndication capabilities included in most blogging systems, users can subscribe to one another’s blogs, monitor new postings on particular topics and themes, and feed that information back into their own reflections, creating a collaborative learning project in the process.

What will happen to self-expression if blogging becomes a graded activity?

Many longtime bloggers have questioned the very idea of assigning this form of Web-based self-publishing as a graded activity. By definition, they contend, the blog must be a voluntary and self-motivated pursuit. Instructors, they suggest, will rob the exercise of its pleasure and purpose the moment they make it compulsory.

Even if an instructor encourages her students to adopt blogging as a purely voluntary means of self-expression related to the course materials, certain precautions may need to be followed that could have a chilling effect on participation and engagement. There is always the delicate matter in student journaling of how much personal information students should be invited to share either with the instructor alone or with the class as a whole. Even when access to student blogs is strictly controlled—limited, let’s say, to all students registered in a specific course—protection of student privacy through the use of pseudonyms and self-censorship may defeat the purpose of the exercise if not handled with proper sensitivity.

Is there any advantage in keeping student blogs open to the public?

Some would argue that keeping blogs open to the public is vital to the medium. It could even produce an occasion for serendipitous connections forged between a student and a leading scholar in the field. A student who posts a critique of an assigned class reading may hear directly from the article’s author if he happens to monitor online references to his work. Such a moment links the learner with an authentic professional world of passionate debate that lies beyond the classroom. However, there are important privacy and legal issues to consider before asking students to put their thoughts and reflections into the public domain.

What about the institution’s responsibility to protect student privacy?

Faculty may be concerned about the legal issues surrounding the publication of student information through blogs. Students can be expected to share their personally identifiable coursework with other students as a condition of enrolling in the course. Therefore, if the blogging space is unique to a particular course and secured for students enrolled in that course, students have no “right to anonymity.” However, things get complicated when students are expected to submit their postings to a public site in a personally identifiable way.
In light of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), institutions would do well to consult with their legal counsel concerning the questions raised by public blogging spaces and other public electronic environments. FERPA requires that an institution—and, by extension, its employees—obtain a student’s permission before distributing any aspect of the “education record” (which includes coursework) beyond the immediate course environment. If a course is required for graduation, the instructor may be violating FERPA by insisting that students submit their work to a public site—giving up a privacy right—as a condition of enrollment.

The safest solution for educational institutions might be to ensure that instructors establish a secure blogging space unique to their particular course. Even in this secure environment, instructors might choose to take additional precautions to protect student privacy by asking class members to use pseudonyms, submitting their work with an anonymous alias known only to the student and instructor. In addition, students should be cautioned to remove any other personal identifying information from their blog postings.

FERPA legislation does not explicitly address these and other questions involving emerging technologies. For this reason, it is important that institutions seek the advice of their legal counsel on student privacy policies and emerging technologies.

**Am I legally responsible for what my students write in their blogs?**

Many institutions are adopting policies for faculty and staff that basically tell employees to blog at their own risk because they are legally responsible for their commentary and that the college or university will not indemnify an employee for anything he or she writes on a blog, regardless of whether the blog is hosted on the institution’s servers or not. The extent to which a faculty member might be held personally liable for comments published by a student as a result of a class assignment is not yet known. Once again, these legal issues should be taken up with your university attorney.

**What if I want to manage my course with the help of blogs?**

Dissatisfied with how difficult course management systems make it for students to actively participate in the shaping of course discussion, some faculty have begun to use blogging systems to manage their courses. Those who have experimented with this arrangement are looking forward to a time when blog-based online learning is wedded to the course management system. In the best of all possible worlds, students could comment on, react to, and debate any element contributed by anyone else in the course, while educators could perform all the bookkeeping chores involved in running a course, keeping students apprised of class expectations and upcoming events and protecting privacy (if necessary) with the aid of password protection—all within a tightly integrated environment.

**How do I get started with my own academic blog?**

Faculty need to experiment with these Web publishing systems on their own to discover promising new instructional uses for the new medium. Instructors may be able to turn to their institutions for support in aggregating RSS feeds and starting blogs of their own. If the campus does not provide a hosted service, instructors can be directed to one of the free online services as a first step. They can be up and running in just minutes with Blogger (http://www.blogger.com), the best known of the free services; opt for an expanded range of
options and tools at mo’time (http://www.motime.com) or tBlog (http://tblog.com); or test a more powerful system by registering for a free personal license to use Movable Type (http://www.movabletype.org) or TypePad (http://www.typepad.com). A list of free online services is available in the section “Where can I learn more?”

**How do I give all the students in my course their own blog accounts?**

Many early faculty adopters have simply chosen one of the online services that host personal blogs for free and asked their students to open their own accounts. We have already discussed some of the pedagogical, administrative, and legal issues that may make this option less than desirable.

In order to take advantage of the full-featured commenting and content management features offered by commercial hosting services, many instructors are asking their institutions to purchase site licenses from Movable Type, Manila (http://manila.userland.com), or one of the other Web publishing service providers that allow institutions to build hundreds of multimedia blog sites at educational discounts.

Finally, because institutions are concerned about entrusting their course-based educational materials to third-party servers, there is a growing trend among colleges and universities to run licensed commercial systems on campus servers or develop their own Web publishing systems internally. Depending on the size of that institution’s available server space, a college or university can create and maintain thousands of blogs for its campus community.

**Are other colleges and universities offering their campuses centralized service to help users create personal, educational, or administrative blogs?**

College and university units are beginning to host robust blogging services for credentialed members of their academic communities:

- **University of Minnesota Libraries** (http://blog.lib.umn.edu/): UThink is a hosting service based on the blogging software Movable Type; the service is integrated with the University of Minnesota campus architecture so that faculty, students, and staff can access their blogs using their university network identifier and password.

- **University of Warwick** (http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/): Warwick Blogs refers to the community of blogs at the university, all hosted on the
How do I get started?

campus blogging system (based on the university-developed “blogbuilders” software). The system uses existing university credentials and has been integrated with the campus single sign-on system. Nearly 40 departments are participating in the blog system to date, with individual blogs being listed under the owner’s name or department affiliation in the Warwick blog directory.

- **Case Western Reserve University** ([http://blog.case.edu/](http://blog.case.edu/)): Blogs@Case uses Movable Type, which the university has integrated with del.icio.us online bookmarks manager (allowing users to display their bookmarks on their blogs) and Flickr, an online digital photo management system, transforming the blog into a manageable photo album, if desired.
Making the Case for Blogging

As you make a case to adopt a specific technology, such as blogging, you should anticipate questions that address purpose, cost, value, and control. Below is a list of common questions you should be prepared to answer as you make the case for blogging.

Priorities

What problem does this technology help us solve?

Few people will adopt a technology unless you can convince them that it solves a problem they consider a priority. For example, rather than telling the provost that you want to use blogging because students at a competing institution use it, consider talking about how blogging allows you to help students develop skills in communication, critical thinking, and reflection. As you address the problem the technology helps solve, be prepared to convince listeners that this is a problem worth solving. If the problem isn’t an institutional priority, you may not convince anyone.

Remember that not all problems are instructional. Sometimes the problem to be solved is gaining media attention or convincing potential students that the campus is a cool place to be.

How does this relate to the institution’s priorities?

With ever-present resource constraints and accountability questions, a project has a better chance of success if it explicitly relates to the institution’s priorities. Is blogging part of ensuring that active learning is part of the student experience or helping students develop critical-thinking skills? Is it a mechanism for encouraging community and collaboration, even among distance learning students? Consider your institution’s priorities, and help stakeholders make the connection between those priorities and your project.

Effectiveness

Who else is blogging?

There are almost always questions that focus on due diligence—have you done your homework? Developing a list of others who use blogging, particularly among peer institutions, will be helpful. (However, if your institution wants to capitalize on being an early adopter, you may not find too many others on the list.) Beyond examples, be prepared to provide information about their experiences and lessons learned. For suggested guidelines, see the ELI Applying Technology to Teaching and Learning Tool (http://www.educause.edu/11816).

How do we know this works?

If you know what problem blogging is being used to solve, then you are positioned to provide evidence of effectiveness. For more on assessment, see “How do I know if it works?” in this guide.

How much will it cost?

All projects require resources, so be prepared to detail how much the project will cost, in terms of dollars, staff support, faculty time, and so on.
What are the other options for doing this?

Once you have defined the problem you are trying to solve, you should be prepared to address other options that might work. Looking at other options allows people to consider the trade-offs. As you consider other options, be sure to include implementation issues that may make other options more (or less) attractive.

Alignment

How does this fit in the curriculum?

For most teaching and learning activities, the assumption is that the technology will be integrated into a course (or series of courses). This means that it must be perceived to “fit” into the curriculum. Its fit may be determined by the learning activity it enables or by faculty adoption. If faculty won’t use the technology, it probably won’t fit into the curriculum.

Remember that not all learning occurs in classes; informal and implicit learning can occur at any time and in any place. If your use of blogging doesn’t hinge on the curriculum (such as students blogging about the student elections or service activities), make this clear.

Is this the way we want our students to learn?

Any time technology is introduced, there are questions about the value of an alternative approach and whether that aligns with the culture of the institution. An institutional culture that strongly values traditional instruction may not be as good a fit for blogging as an institution that promotes a tech-savvy image.

Are your assumptions correct?

Certain assumptions are made without our ever being conscious of them. For example, when we talk about using a technology (such as blogging), we often assume that it replaces something else (such as writing term papers). In fact, one tends to augment the other rather than replace it. As you consider a project, are there assumptions that should be addressed (blogging must be used by everyone, or blogging will replace term papers)?

Risks and Returns

What do we gain if this works? What do we lose if it doesn’t?

As you answer this question, remember that different stakeholders will be listening for different responses: students might be interested in the ability to share their thoughts with anyone on the Web; the president might be looking for a PR advantage; faculty might be interested in sharing their scholarship with new audiences.
Who are the supporters? Who are the skeptics?

As you weigh the potential risks and returns of blogging, consider not just who is likely to support the initiative and who is likely to be skeptical, but their relative influence. If the faculty senate is adamantly opposed, for example, it may be hard to convince the provost to champion the initiative.

What are the PR implications?

Colleges and universities are very public institutions. What kind of coverage will blogging likely receive from the student newspaper? The alumni magazine? The local media? Will the initiative fly under the radar, or will it be seen as a risk for the college?

Remember that some of the most influential PR comes from satisfied (or dissatisfied) individuals talking to each other. Even if it never reaches the newspaper, TV, or radio, what will be the tone of the chatter? Will it lead to the president’s receiving a complaint from a trustee?

What are the organizational and policy implications?

Although technology may be the vehicle, content, institutional image, and policy implications may complicate a blogging project. For example, will support for blogging (technology and user support) be centralized in the CIO’s office, or will it belong to the department? Is the content owned by the students? The department? The institution? Are blogs accessible just by those in the class, or can anyone (parents, the public) access them?

Policy implications can include issues such as security or privacy. Do users need to be authenticated to blog? Are all students required to blog, even if they don’t have a computer at home? Are there limits on the kinds of sentiments that can be expressed in a blog? What are the guidelines for correctness of grammar or factual accuracy? Are there special considerations to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act?

What happens if we do nothing?

Remember that there are risks from action and risks from inaction. For example, will the institution be perceived as behind the times if it does not use blogging?
As with any instructional technology effort, it is important to set up mechanisms for measuring blogging’s effectiveness. This section of the guide discusses areas you should consider for assessment and highlights some valuable methods.

Assessment and Evaluation Strategies

Assessment can help you identify what a project has accomplished, what worked well (and what didn’t), whether there were any unintended consequences, and where to improve. As you design and execute your project, there will be several opportunities for assessing it and its impact on student success. This unit provides some suggestions.

Assessing the Overall Project

For the project to continue, it must provide value and be supportable. Consider using focus groups, observations, surveys, interviews, and faculty reports to better understand faculty and student perspectives. Your questions might focus on areas such as the value added, training, support, access, hosting solution, and so on.

Whether you use Web-based tools or use a campus-hosted blogging service, questions that explore faculty and student experiences might include:

- What worked? What didn’t?
- What were your challenges?
- Where can improvements be made?
- Did blogging add instructional value?

Questions for students who read or post to individual or group/collaborative blogs might include:

- Did using blogs help you reflect on your learning? Your experiences?
- Did blogs help you better develop your critical-thinking skills?
- Was the blog writing you did more useful than other writing assignments, such as term papers?
- How useful was reading others’ blogs?
- Did you have the support you needed to use the blogging tools?

Questions for faculty might include:

- What feedback have you received from your students?
- Did the use of blogs support your intended instructional objective(s)?
- Was the effort worth the benefits provided by blogs?
- Did you have the technical support you needed for the project?
- Do you have plans to use blogging in the future? If yes, how?
- Is there anything you would like to do next time that you are not doing now?
In addition to faculty and students, central and departmental IT units should be included in the project assessment. Noticeable increases in help desk calls or network activity may need to be addressed if the project continues or scales up. Some questions to consider include:

- Did the help desk experience an increase in requests for assistance from students participating in the project? From faculty?
- Did networking staff note any impact on the network?
- Did the computer lab staff observe an increase in requests for student assistance?
- What were the most common problems?

An obvious indicator of project success is how much the blogging service is used. With aggregation and Web-analysis tools, campus-based hosting services can document the number of blogs, entries, comments, tags, images, audio/video attachments, and authors, as well as aggregate the day’s current posts and create directories to campus-based blogs. For example:

- UThink (http://blog.lib.umn.edu/), the University of Minnesota Libraries blog service, provides statistics on the numbers of blogs, entries, comments, and authors, along with links to recent images, active blogs, and blogs with most entries and/or comments.
- Warwick Blogs (http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/) at the University of Warwick collects information on what people are writing about, photos they are taking, or media they are reviewing.

**Measuring the Impact on Learning**

As noted in the “How do I get started?” section, technology alone will not improve learning. However, access to technologies that enable new activities can support the learning process. As you consider what you hope to achieve, also consider how you will assess the impact of blogs in areas such as content mastery, technology skills, student skill development (such as communication, critical thinking, reflection), convenience, impact on learning, and impact on reflective thinking.

Before you began using blogs, you probably asked a series of questions exploring student technology skills, access to software and hardware, and comfort with blogging. You can gain additional information by conducting formative assessments as you go—questions that help you improve the project as it progresses. The simplest approach might be to periodically ask students if they have changes to suggest that could make blogging more valuable to their learning. Depending on your goals, you might also want to track changes in attitude, understanding, and comfort with the process of blogging and the software or blogging service used.

For summative assessment, or end-of-project measures, solicit faculty input on their observations of student learning, asking questions such as:

- What were your original learning objectives for using blogs? Were they met?
- What was the level of student engagement in posting to their blogs? Commenting on other’s blogs?
- How often did students enhance their text entries with links to other Web-based resources or image, audio, and/or video attachments?
- What were the strengths of blogging? Weaknesses?
- Were there any unintended outcomes?
Summative assessment is also useful for measuring student experiences such as ease of using blogs or usefulness/value for learning. A Likert scale can be helpful in gauging differences in student experiences. For example, the following questions could be posed:

- I posted to my blog [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- I commented on classmate’s blogs [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- I incorporated links to other Web-based resources in my blog posts [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- I incorporated images, audio, and/or video in my blog posts [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- Blogging was valuable to my learning [not at all] [somewhat] [very helpful].
- Blogging was a convenient way to enhance my learning [disagree] [neutral] [agree].

Consider using open-ended questions as well, such as:

- What did you learn from posting to your blog?
- What did you learn from commenting on others’ blogs?
- What are the strengths of blogging? Weaknesses?
- What aspects of the blogging did you find to be effective for your learning?
- How could blogging be improved to make your learning more effective?

**Authentic Assessment**

There are as many types of blogs as there are forms of writing—from research, book reviews, and news reporting to creative writing, journaling, and opinions. Regardless of how you might use blogs for instruction, the process can be intimidating for students. Therefore it may be helpful to ask them to read and reflect on existing blogs as an introductory activity.

In his blog, 2 Cents Worth (http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/), David Warlick assembles a list of questions called “Blog Whats?” that students ask of blogs written by someone else. These questions are designed to help them focus on the content as well as the process of blogging:

- What do you think is important about the blog entry?
- What are the different sides in this issue?
- What does the author want readers to know, believe, or do?
- What else would you say about this blog entry?

People posting to Warlick’s blog also suggested these questions:

- Is the author’s entry appropriate to the topic and the audience?
- Does the author clearly state his case?
- What sources are used, and are they properly linked?
- What do you know, believe, or want to do after reading the blog?

And, as students begin blogging, ask them to reflect on their writing:

- What experiences or insights have you shared that make this entry unique?
- How will you generate feedback from your readers?
- Are you upfront about your biases?
- How do you want to make your readers feel?
- What are you doing to make people come back to your blog? Do you care or should you?
Assessment and Evaluation Strategies

The same questions students ask of existing blogs could be restated for instructor evaluation of student blogs:

- What is important about the blog entry?
- Are both sides of the issue covered?
- What else needs to be said?

Rubrics can define the assessment criteria for student blogs. Determine the categories you want to assess (such as content, accuracy, visual appearance, resource links, and so on), and then identify the specific criteria for each category along with performance levels (see Table 1). Communicate your expectations by posting the rubric for students to review in advance of the assignment.

Table 1. Sample Criteria for Determining Effectiveness of Blogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Performance Levels (with examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Organization of thoughts, use of interesting details</td>
<td><strong>Excellent:</strong> Consistently maintains content focus, adding interesting details&lt;br&gt;<strong>Average:</strong> Reasonably maintains content focus with some interesting details&lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs attention:</strong> Needs to clarify content focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, adherence to copyright guidelines, appropriate length</td>
<td><strong>Excellent:</strong> Proofreading is thorough, with correct spelling and punctuation throughout&lt;br&gt;<strong>Average:</strong> Some distracting errors; needs more thorough proofreading&lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs attention:</strong> Frequent spelling, punctuation, and typographical errors; little evidence of proofreading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Appearance</td>
<td>Banner, images, background, font colors</td>
<td><strong>Excellent:</strong> Unique banner, images, background, and font colors representing a well thought-out design&lt;br&gt;<strong>Average:</strong> Good selection of banner, images, background, and font colors&lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs attention:</strong> Little evidence of consideration to design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Links</td>
<td>Integration of other blogs, Web sites, images, video, audio</td>
<td><strong>Excellent:</strong> Integrates links to relevant Web sites, other blogs, and media into blog posts&lt;br&gt;<strong>Average:</strong> Connects to other resources on occasion&lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs attention:</strong> Little evidence of links to other resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the design, implementation, and analysis of assessments takes time, the results will help you improve your project and extend the role blogging can play in teaching and learning.
This section provides a number of helpful blogging resources, ranging from background information to support considerations.

**General Information**

**Background**

These sites offer general discussions about the use of blogging for teaching and learning:


**Examples**

A variety of exemplary blogs in higher education and beyond are accessible through the links below. For more higher education examples, see the “What are others doing” section of this guide.


- Guardian U.K.’s Weblogs We Like, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/weblog/special/0,10627,744914,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/weblog/special/0,10627,744914,00.html): Links to blogs from across the world on a wide range of topics, from news to technology to culture.

**Implementation**

**Basic Guidelines**

These sites cover the practical basics of blogging, from setting up an individual blog to blogging services available for institutional use:
Resources

  http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/05/digging_deepeveryour_guide_to_bl.html: Basic information for blogging beginners, including a description of what blogging is, common terminology, how to get started, and how to find other blogs.

- Blogging to Enhance Learning Experiences, an online forum facilitated by SCoPE (February 12–15, 2007), http://scope.lidc.sfu.ca/mod/forum/view.php?id=400: Online moderated forum on educational blogging, with helpful discussions covering a number of practical topics and common questions, including getting started with blogging, blogging software, and student perspectives.


**Blogging Services**

The following are some of the blogging services commonly used in higher education and beyond:

- Blogger: http://www.blogger.com/
- Drupal: http://drupal.org/
- Edublogs: http://edublogs.org/
- Elgg: http://elgg.org/
- mo’time: http://www.motime.com/
- tBlog: http://tblog.com/
- Movable Type: http://www.movabletype.org/
- TypePad: http://www.typepad.com/
- Blog Software Comparison Chart, July 14, 2005, *USC Annenberg Online Journalism Review*, http://www.ojr.org/ojr/images/blog_software_comparison.cfm: Helpful chart comparing functionality, design tools, the publishing interface, spam-fighting features, and extras (like moblogging or photo galleries) across a variety of free blogging services.

**Blog Search Engines**

The following are two of the more prominent blog search engines for searching hundreds of blogs and blog posts by keyword or topic. Functioning the same as basic search engines, these services search the Web and index blog posts. Blog owners can also submit their sites to these services to increase visibility:

- Technorati: http://technorati.com/
- IceRocket: http://www.icerocket.com/
RSS Readers/Aggregators
RSS readers and aggregators are software clients or add-ons that facilitate subscribing to the posts of one or multiple blogs:

- Your Guide to RSS, http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/07/digging_deeper/your_guide_to_rs.html: Helpful basic information and tips on RSS.

Following are some of the more commonly used RSS readers:

- NewsFire: http://www.newsfirerss.com/
- Bloglines: http://www.bloglines.com/
- Google Reader: http://www.google.com/reader/view/
- Sage: http://sage.mozdev.org/

Readers are built into these personal portals and others:

- My Yahoo!: http://my.yahoo.com/

Blog Enhancements
The following pages list some blog add-ons that can expand the functionality and add to the personalization of blogs:

- Blogger Add-Ons: http://help.blogger.com/bin/topic.py?topic=8931
- Yahoo! Widgets: http://widgets.yahoo.com/gallery/

Photoblogging and Moblogging
These links demonstrate the shape that these two varieties of blogging can take:

- Photoblogs.org, http://www.photoblogs.org/: A portal that includes links to photoblogs (photo-based blogs) as well as how-to information.

Support Considerations
Faculty Perspectives
The sites below present views of several faculty on the use of blogging to support learning in higher education:

Resources


Student Readiness

These sites highlight student expectations, abilities, and needs regarding instructional technology, with a focus on blogging:


Examples of Institutional Blogging Support Services

The sites below show some of the different ways educational blogging services can be offered in a higher education setting:


- Tufts University, Spark suite of communication and collaboration tools that includes blogs, http://spark.uit.tufts.edu/index.jsp.


- Warwick University, Warwick Blogs getting-started page, http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/fits/servicessupport/web/blogs/.

Deciding if Blogging Is Right for Your Learning Goals

- Applying Technology to Teaching and Learning, ELI Discovery Tools, 2006, EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, [http://www.educause.edu/11816](http://www.educause.edu/11816): A set of guides to help select and integrate technology into teaching and learning (open to ELI members only).

Legal Considerations—General

U.S. laws affecting intellectual property, privacy, and other areas that relate to blogging are discussed on the sites below:

- Bloggers FAQ—Student Blogging, Electronic Frontier Foundation, [http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lg/faq-students.php](http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lg/faq-students.php): Touches on legal issues arising from student blogging; although focused on high school students, includes some information for college students.

Legal Considerations—Institutional Policy

- Non-Pseudonymous Student Blogging: Ethical and Legal Concerns, Blogs for Learning, [http://blogsforlearning.msu.edu/blog/archives/2](http://blogsforlearning.msu.edu/blog/archives/2).

The following are samples of institutional policies dealing with FERPA and other legal issues particular to higher education. As recommended throughout this guide, consult your legal counsel for guidance on specific campus policies.

- University of Minnesota, Blog Service Guidelines and Description, [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/uthink/service.phtml](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/uthink/service.phtml).