

Seminar on Instructional Technology:
Blogging Across the Curriculum

Co-sponsored by the Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute and BCTC
November 1, 2006

Welcoming Remarks

Mikhail Gershovich, *Director, Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute*

Statement of Purpose

Luke Waltzer, *CUNY Writing Fellow, Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute*

Show and Tell

Luke Waltzer, *CUNY Writing Fellow, Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute*

Roslyn Bernstein, *Professor of English*

Kate Moss, *Communication Fellow, Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute*

The Support Structure for Blogging and Wikis at Baruch College

Jim Russell, *Director of Instructional Technology* and Patrick Ackerman-Hovis, *College Web Site Administrator, BCTC*

Discussion

Presenters' Email Addresses

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Jim Russell: Jim_Russell@baruch.cuny.edu

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Meeting Minutes

Mikhail Gershovich: Notes that adjuncts will be compensated for time of this meeting. Passes around paperwork and gives instructions for procedure for getting paid (bring paperwork to Hem).

Mikhail: Welcome to what hope series of discussions on instructional technology. Before turn over to Luke Waltzer, intros

Luke Waltzer: Overview of purpose of meeting; definition of blogs, including differences from Blackboard; definition of wikis. Demonstration of Amit Ray wiki. Demonstration of Tomasello blog, noting the active involvement of the professor and the large participation demanded of students, as well as the types of posts (lengthy text entries, audio, video)

Audience: What copyright restrictions apply to this material?

Luke: Will be passing around something later that addresses this. Not a legal expert on this and the definition of fair use is not totally clear here. Note that embedded video/audio (e.g. YouTube) gets around copyright restrictions.

Jim Russell: This blog is not hosted at Baruch, and if so, this type of usage would not be something he would condone

Roslyn Bernstein, Presentation of blog for class on The Arts in NYC, a required course for honors college freshmen. Overview of class (students attend artistic events and then criticize. In this semester's class, the theme is collage. She uses the blog to integrate different disciplines related to this theme, and most importantly as a way for students to practice acting as critics and commentators. Students comment on all aspects of the art, responding to graphic posts. She received extraordinary comments and very high level of performance by the students. Had one incident with an outside commenter but solved the problem by password protecting the blog. Now using another blog for a current course with the theme of history.

Luke: Recounts conversation in Ros' class about what lost in digitizing images.

Jody Rosen: Notes the importance of images embedded alongside text in a blog. This can't be done with Blackboard.

Kate Moss: The way a blog is set up can dramatically change the shape of the conversations that take place by users of the blog. Gives a simple taxonomy of course blogs: (1) type A: only the instructor posts, and students exclusively comment in response to the professor; (note: unlike a discussion board, it makes a big difference in terms of power in directing the conversation who posts vs. comments). An example of type A is Matt Kirchinbaum's "Computer and Text" course. (2) Type B: e.g. Williams/Loewe at Florida State; Students can post freely; this site also example of site with numerous

categories, with student posting under different themes; (3) Type C: student groups each have their own blog, e.g. art design site, note that there are very few comments because students are so absorbed with working on their own blogs; there are ways to get around this, but this is a general tendency.

Luke: Notes that these blogs are all RSS enabled, which makes it much easier for a professor to aggregate information from multiple student blogs.

Kate: Heavily favors public course blogs so students have the whole world as a potential audience. Notes that it is possible to password protect any sensitive areas without making the entire site private.

Luke: All of the examples discussed so far all have in common that they are shaped by a distinct purpose.

Jody: Notes that multiple categories may be assigned to single posts. Asks whether blogs can potentially be used in very large classes.

Luke: Yes, blogs can be used for large classes—e.g., a history class with primary source material for students; space can be segmented using a multi-user setup; it is up to the professor how to organize this.

Luke: Introduce Jim and Patrick to talk about support structure.

Jim: BCTC is responding to a marketplace in which blogs and wikis are growing rapidly. They will be acquiring and making available both of these technologies. Any professor can now request a blog to be hosted at blog.baruch.cuny.edu. BCTC also has a faculty web server for professors who want web pages. Also have listservs. Also have a server dedicated to wikis. If you are confused about the choice between wikis and blogs, recommend talking to Patrick. Generally, they are handling this on a one-on-one basis; will start adding courses on this in the upcoming Faculty Workshop Series, and are looking to expand the implementation of blogs. Asks Patrick how many blogs have up and running.

Patrick Ackerman: About 20, including an English course with all students having a blog, and 2 departmental blogs; the usage is still very limited; most of them have been set up during the last three weeks. Please follow up with me and I can help you set up a blog for your course.

Jim: The question of which blog software to use is still on the table. Since it is a very new technology, we should not get obsessed with one technology. We should decide how it best works for you (faculty) learn based on your feedback what features are useful. For those wishing to go a step further with intensive communication in teaching, the BLSCI is a good resource. Mikhail, what capacity do you have for supporting departments?

Mikhail: We are working with four faculty. We haven't yet dealt with department sites beyond our own.

Jim: Regarding the copyright question: when hosted at Baruch, this will be a concern. Regarding public vs. private blogs, perhaps it will be better for early studs (freshmen and sophomores) to have a protected safe place for discussion, but best for juniors and seniors to have a more public audience.

Roz: The Knight Foundation has funded a substantial grant to develop educational modules related to blogs and the issue of privacy because of the increase in law suits.

Jim: There are fundamental changes now that blogs are so highly visible (more so than discussion boards); they are very easy to find in search engines, and as a result, getting much larger audiences.

Audience: Is there an easy way to have a gatekeeper look at posts before they go up?

Luke: Yes, this can certainly be done. For example, in Wordpress, this can easily be done through the admin panel.

Luke: Re: support availability. We are available to talk with you about your goals for blogging and to help guide you through the use of a blog during the semester. Next semester, we hope to possibly have a blog about blogging, or a listserv to continue conversation.

Luke: Open for Qs

Audience (Lin Ming): What happens to blogs after the semester ends?

Jim: Blogs are fairly permanent. They can be cleaned out, or deleted upon request. Another note about blackboard v. blogging: you can have blackboard pick up RSS feeds

Audience (Doug Lackey): Is anybody keeping track of how these new systems affect students time budgets, because if they are putting more time into this stuff, it must be taking away from other stuff. When he asked his capstone seniors whether they have checked out a book from the library during their time at Baruch, most said no. When he asked how many books they own, most said less than 10 books. The question is: is anyone keeping track of the pluses and minuses?

Audience (Robin Root): How about time demands on professors?

Jim: 30,000 new blogs go up every day; Refers to piece from NPR: users of tech have belief that anybody can post content, have it read, and may be famous because of it; Pandora's box has already been opened; the question is how to harness it, and teach with it.

Kate: It is up to you how you want to integrate blogs into your course; e.g. before she began blogging, had studs take five minutes during class to respond to a question; she replaced this with an exercise where students brought another student blog posting with them to class and responded to it.

Jim: Re: student workload, if the goal is to have students communicating, this is part of their learning.

Audience (Doug Lackey): What if you are trying to explain Plato?

Jody: The process of breaking down material is important; this is less time intensive for students to do on a blog because they are so agile with computers.

Luke: Let's shift the conversation to the faculty side – it does take more time. Blogs have less of a learning curve than putting up your own website; but it translates into more reading; more work integrating with general course goals.

Jim: In discussion boards, conversation usually devolves toward very short posts. Blogs, on the other hand, drive users toward longer posts; if students can start posting more on Plato at beginning of semester, comments and responses can give them better understanding ...

Audience (Doug Lackey): Convinced that a blog is better than a discussion board, but the question is about the whole idea.

Jim: A number of studs at Baruch already are very active with personal pages (e.g. Xanga, MySpace). Using blogs in a class can meet the students where they are.

Roz: When it comes to technology we should come to where students are; but when it comes to expertise and level of discourse in the content, the teacher needs to bring the students to his/her level. She makes it very clear to students that she reads everything they write and they should compose full sentences, write thoughtfully, etc.

Audience (Jill Rosenberg): Found that students write very little in general. In her experience with SEEK students in freshmen English, their writing is better when published online than essays received from class essays. You can control the quality of writing with the question posed.

Kate: Blogs can help manage workload: e.g. if students are making the same mistake over and over, you can intervene at times with a single comment/post.

Audience (Betty Wong): What % of students are actually blogging or using discussion boards?

Jim: 90% have some exposure to Blackboard; more than 1/3 of traffic to Blackboard comes from Baruch; Patrick has been monitoring MySpace, etc., there are thousands of sites on which students associate themselves with Baruch.

Luke: Brings us back point of purpose. The goals of using technology in a class should be explicit; students should know why they're going to a site.

Madeleine Fix: Important to contextualize these virtual spaces; these are interactive paper spaces; good opportunities to combine images and sound.

Audience (Thomas Teufel): Back to the question of budgeting faculty time: there are many things on Blackboard that are useful, some of which can also be done on a blog. It seems unwieldy to have to look at the blog and Blackboard, and other places.

Jim: One solution is to use RSS; topic of information architecture is a concern -- plot/predict a path that studs will follow to get to assignments, etc. If considering total rethinking of this, the Communication Institute is a good resource.

Luke: Don't know any features that can't be done with blogs.

Jim: grading ...

Luke: But plugins being developed every day to extend the functionality of blogs.

Jim: Blogs offer instructional technology as a menu; Blackboard as a combined price fix; wikis and blogs can run a la carte, or use Blackboard as centralized portal... publisher sites in past didn't work because didn't go there; need to get students there through Blackboard; can do this if implemented as seamlessly as possible, so students don't know when moving between Blackboard and blog, etc.

Madeleine: Blackboard is a learning management and content management system, not so much student interactivity, Blackboard has a uniform structure, you can load blog inside of Blackboard; also plugins for Blackboard that allow interactive writing; can look at two as interrelated and complementary.

Luke, Mikhail: Thank you ... please speak to us afterwards for more information. We will be in touch with follow up.

Web Sites of Interest

Cacophony.org (<http://cac.ophony.org>): The Bernard L. Schwartz Institute's weblog, devoted to the discussion of communication-intensive discussion, including the use of Instructional Technology. Fellows at the Institute post content to the blog on the topic of communication across the curriculum.

Using Wiki in Education (<http://www.ikiw.org/>): Instructional Technologist Stewart Mader's blog on the use of wikis for collaborative learning and knowledge construction. Also see the wiki-based book of the same name, available for purchase, at <http://www.wikiineducation.com/display/ikiw/Home>.

Electronic Frontier Foundation, Legal Guide for Bloggers (<http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lg>): Published by the Electronic Frontier Foundation... just what the title says, a legal guide for bloggers.

Bavatuesdays (<http://www.bavatuesdays.com>): Former CUNY Honors College Technology Fellow Jim Groom's instructional technology web site, which provides insight on new technologies being used in the classroom.

Blogs for Learning (<http://blogsforlearning.msu.edu/>): A new site hosted at Michigan State University, this site is devoted to the discussion of instructional blogging. The content is very young, but promising.

Instructional Blogging: Best Practices and Case Studies, University of Arizona (<http://elearn.arizona.edu/blogs/bestpractices/index.html>): The Learning Technologies Center at the University of Arizona supports instructional blogging, and produced this web site as a guide for faculty bloggers.

Stephen Downes' Web (<http://www.downes.ca/>): Stephen Downes is a leading Instructional Technologist who has written extensively on the implications of e-learning. His site is a portal into the major issues in instructional technology.

Professor Amit Ray (<http://honors.rit.edu/~wiki/index.php/User:ProfRay>): Amit Ray is an Assistant Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies at Rochester Institute of Technology, and organizes his classes around blogs and wikis. The above link will take you to his homepage, on which there is a linked list of classes. See especially the classes at the following links:

http://honors.rit.edu/~wiki/index.php/Arts_of_Expression:_Spring_2006,

http://honors.rit.edu/~wiki/index.php/Writing_Seminar:_Fall_2006, and

http://honors.rit.edu/~wiki/index.php/Honors_Literature:_Fall_2006.

Course blogs, sorted by type:

Teacher blogs, students comment: Matt Kirschenbaum's "Computer and Text" course at University of Maryland: <http://tinyurl.com/hlgud>

Students and professors each post to and comment on the same blog: Course team-taught by Terra Williams and Charlie Lowe at Florida State: Writing, Researching and Reading the World Wide Web: <http://tinyurl.com/vreog>

Each student has their own individual blog: Jane McGonigal's Game Design as Art Practice course at the San Francisco Art Institute: <http://artpractice.blogspot.com>

Sample student blogs: <http://imperfectinfo.blogspot.com>,
www.kittyparty68.blogspot.com

And... Creating History in New Media course taught by Paula Petrik at George Mason: <http://tinyurl.com/yg628f>

Sample student blogs: http://rharless.typepad.com/harless_weblog
<http://freedomnow.typepad.com>

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Other sites presented at Blogging Across the Curriculum... the first two are password protected. Contact Luke Waltzer for access.

(Lucas_Waltzer@baruch.cuny.edu).

Roz Bernstein's Collage Project: <http://collage.sahawaltzer.org>

Andrew Tomasello's Capstone <http://tomasello.blsci.org>

Amit Ray <http://honors.rit.edu/~wiki/index.php/User:ProfRay>