

Bloggs and Other Collaborative Tools in an Online Classroom

The use of Web Logs, or **Blogs** for short, as a tool for collaborative education is gaining in use among colleges and universities. Boulos, Maramba and Wheeler (2006) detail several avenues where blogs can effectively harness web based technology to create communities of users interested in a common topic. Richard Miller of Rutgers University discusses in a presentation to the Rutgers Board of Governors, how all students, regardless of major, will need to have networked multimedia composition skills in order to be effective in the modern workplace (Miller 2008).

Access to this type of open and readily available learning environment is becoming more prevalent due, in large part, to the spread of cheaper, better supported personal technology. This makes "anytime, anyplace" learning more transparent and ubiquitous to both the creator and collaborators as well as end users. The ease of learning and use of blogs make them a popular venue for disseminating information to large groups.

Oomen and Burke (2008) describe 13 different ways to integrate blogs into an online classroom. Some of these include:

- Provide a forum for students to reflect on weekly readings
- Develop and share resources related to a course or course topic, collaborate on case studies
- Create an advocacy campaign and build online coalitions
- Conduct interviews with community members
- Discuss current issues relative to a field of study
- Pilot Web 2.0 tools and critique them
- Critique case studies
- Write a book review
- Lead a study session
- Facilitate a debate
- Extend a face-to-face— or an online discussion
- Construct a departmental newsletter
- Analyze a journal article

This same ease of use can also make blogs, and other web based technologies such as Wikis and Web Casts, vulnerable to vandalism and mis-information attacks. However, due to the almost Darwinian

nature of collaborative peer review and editing, inaccurate information is quickly rooted out and corrected. The term "Darwinism" has been coined to describe the process that can be seen to mirror nature where "Unfit" postings are ruthlessly edited or replaced by items that are considered to be "Fit" by the community of users. As this process continues over time, the result is a overall more accurate and reliable page (Boulos, Maramba and Wheeler 2006).

Components to consider in developing an effective blog for use as a distance learning tool include (Yan 2008):

- Structure the blog to make it as easy as possible for contributors to add content
- Set guidelines and monitor the content before it is posted to the blog
- Use logins and passwords are suggested to prevent vandalism and spammers from gaining access to the blog
- Use pseudonyms to help maintain security for user identity

Blogs and other web based tools can make eLearning a content rich, collaborative experience which help produce high quality educational outcomes for the students.

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Sources:

Boulos, Maramba and Wheeler. Wikis, blogs and podcasts: a new generation of Web-based tools for virtual collaborative clinical practice and education. *BMC Medical Education* 2006, 6:41[<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6920/6/4>].

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Yan, J., Social technology in the classroom, *New England Journal of Higher Education*; Winter 2008,

Formative Surveys (Online Courses)

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are required to complete a formative survey approximately two weeks after the beginning of the term. These surveys serve to inform the instructors as to the experience of students regarding the start-up of the course(s). Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and department heads is provided in table below:

Term	Dates Surveys are Administered to Students	Results to Faculty/ Department Heads
Summer I 2008	June 12 — June 16	June 18— August 18
Summer II 2008	July 17— July 21	July 23 — August 18

Summative Surveys (Online Courses)

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are also required to complete a summative survey approximately two weeks prior to the close of the term. These surveys inform the faculty assigned to the course and the department head of how the students evaluated the course. Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and department heads is provided in table below:

Term	Dates Surveys are Administered to Students	Results to Faculty/ Department Heads
May Mini 2008	May 23 — May 26	June 4 — August 16
Summer I 2008	June 25 — June 30	July 11 — August 18
Summer II 2008	July 25 — July 29	August 18 — November 18

Announcements

Students may now enter their Summer I, 2008 courses. They will have access to Summer I courses up to two weeks beyond the last day of the term.

Summer II, 2008 courses are currently being copied. In order to handle this course copying process with the greatest efficiency and accuracy, we request your assistance. If you have not requested that your Summer II 2008 course(s) be copied as of this date, **please complete the online course copy request form located at www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/copyrequest.asp.**

Summer II 2008 courses are scheduled to be populated with students on June 25th.

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