

TECH TUESDAY

Blogging For Faculty

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condor.depaul.edu/jmoore/tech/

Chapter 1

Bloggging For Faculty

Version 1.03

Last updated: July 23rd, 2012

Blogging For Faculty

OVERVIEW

1. Identify the most appropriate blogging software to recommend to your students.
2. Avoid FERPA violations.
3. Employ rubrics to guide your students towards best practice.
4. Guide students in appropriate use of social media.
5. Monitor student postings.

Blogging is a powerful and efficient way of facilitating communication. It can be an effective means for your students to demonstrate literacy, to engage with media, to opine, to cite, and to remix.

The purpose of this presentation is to help you:

- Identify the most appropriate blogging software to recommend to your students
- Avoid FERPA violations
- Employ rubrics to guide your students towards best practice
- Guide students in appropriate use of social media
- Monitor student postings.

However, faculty intending to create their own blogs may also find these recommendations helpful.

The word “blog” is a contraction of weblog. A weblog is a kind of website in which information is laid out in a series of time-stamped postings. The most recent postings are found at the top of the page, laid out in reverse-chronological order. The effect is like reading a diary in reverse. Initially blogs were created using standard web-creation tools. In recent years specialized blogging software and

websites have allowed bloggers to quickly and easily create and update sites.

As blogging became easier, it attracted citizen journalists and political pundits—these users helped define the blogging culture. Many blogs are expected to have the following characteristics:

- Regularly updated
- Impassioned
- Honest (grassroots approach)
- Focused

Blogs do not have to be a one-way communication channel. Each posting can have an area for readers to add their own comments. These aspects lend themselves to use in academia.

When considering blogging software to recommend to students, there are six questions that need to be answered beforehand:

1. Is the software easy for students to understand?

If not, students are going to come to faculty with questions. Difficulty understanding the software is going to prevent students from completing (or even starting) their assignments.

2. Is the software easy for faculty to understand?

If not, faculty are going to have a hard time answering students' questions.

3. Does the software provide an appropriate environment for student learning?

If not, then a different tool should be employed.

4. Will the student blogs be easy for faculty to monitor and assess?

If not, faculty will spend more time looking for an activity than actually providing useful feedback and assessment.

5. Is the software of lasting value to students?

The aim here is to provide experience and skills that will be applicable beyond the life of the course.

6. How much does it cost?

Students have limited funds and would prefer not to spend money.

Faculty also have to decide between having their students blog publicly or privately.

With these considerations in mind, here are five software tools that I think are appropriate for faculty to recommend (one of which I will advise against using over the long term):

1. **Edublogs:**

<http://edublogs.org>

2. **Posterous:**

<http://posterous.com>

3. **tumblr:**

<http://www.tumblr.com>

4. **Blogger:**

<http://www.blogger.com>

5. **Wordpress:**

<http://wordpress.com>

<http://www.wordpress.org>

It is likely that other faculty may have introduced your students to blogging already, so you may want to consider allowing students to continue using the blogging solution that they have used previously. Otherwise you would want to either mandate the use of one blogging platform for your course, or the option of one of the five. Each blogging platform has certain benefits and drawbacks .



Edublogs will be the optimal choice for faculty who want their students' blogs to be private. Edublogs uses a customized version of the Wordpress blogging platform to offer a rich blogging environment to educators. Basic blogs are free, but if you want to hide student content from outside view, then there is a monthly cost. Edublogs content can be imported from other WordPress blogs, or exported to other WordPress blogs.



Posterous is arguably the easiest and quickest blogging platform to use. Posterous' prominent feature is its interoperability with other social services—Posterous can be used to autopost to multiple social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr and YouTube. Posterous was acquired by Twitter in 2012, which indicates that the service may not be around over the long term. You are probably safe using Posterous during the quarter, but you should look out for indications that the service will be shuttered.



Tumblr is at a similar level of ease of use to Posterous, but has a more enticing look, dedicated clients on mobile devices (Android and iOS), and ease of integration with the popular Instagram photo sharing service. This might be to most "fun" option for your students.



Blogger is a little more complicated to use than Posterous or tumblr (but is still relatively simple to use). Google acquired Blogger in 2003, and Google integration with services like AdSense and Google Analytics may be a factor in your choice to use this service.



WordPress is by far the best long-term choice for your students. The software is more complicated to use than the others I have suggested, but it is the gold standard of blogging platforms. Experience of WordPress in your courses may prove useful to your students in future jobs. One complication with WordPress is that there are two versions that may cause confusion: WordPress.com is the free hosted solution that uses the WordPress software but switches off the ability to upload plugins or custom themes. WordPress.org is the fully featured software, but it must be hosted on a paid domain. WordPress.com will provide some statistical data, but Google Analytics cannot be installed (which may be a reason to go with another solution).

FERPA (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974) is probably the main reason why some faculty are reticent to use blogs in the classroom. The idea behind FERPA is to provide students with control of access and visibility to their grades and work done in a course. The common example of this is preventing

grades (and names) from being publically posted in hallway for all to see. The fear of some faculty is that since blogs are public, this will automatically be a FERPA violation. This is not the case—FERPA only applies to student records that are directly maintained by the University. However, faculty should be aware of best practices to follow:

Using a private blogging solution (like Edublogs) may be the more comfortable option for some faculty, particularly those blogging with students for the first time. However, there is value in pushing students to blog publically, where their posts and comments contribute to the blogosphere. My personal perspective is that a private blog starts to look more like a discussion board.

Your syllabus should clearly indicate that blogging is a required aspect of your course. Make sure your syllabus is clearly available to prospective students, and make a point of emailing your syllabus to your students a week or two before the course starts. This allows students the opportunity to get in contact with you prior to the course beginning, if they have concerns.

In class, and perhaps in your syllabus, articulate why blogging is a required part of the course. Some students may be cautious of engaging in social media, but hopefully your explanation will help them overcome their discomfort. Educate your students as to what you consider appropriate conduct. I would highly suggest carefully sharing some blogging risks—the book “Human Resources Guide to Social Media Risks” by Jesse Torres is a

good place to start, but you can also share examples of employees who have lost their jobs due to blogging about their employers. On a more positive note, IBM's Social Computing Guidelines can be a very useful resource to demonstrate how businesses can provide appropriate etiquette guidance.

At the start of the course you also can employ a blogging consent form, which can help underscore that you are aware of privacy issues and plan to properly protect the rights of your students, whilst balancing the value of the assignments that push students into engaging with social media.

You should advise students that the default state of blogs should be anonymous, with no identifying information. Students may choose to publically identify themselves and their relationship to DePaul and/or a particular course, but this should be their informed decision. If you need students to use tags to indicate which assignment a blog entry pertains to, then do so in a way that provides a degree of anonymity—for example, “**Week 1**” rather than “**DePaul MKT 595 Week 1.**”

Students have control over their blogs, and should be reminded that they have the ability to hide or delete blogs at the end of the course.

Lastly, keeping to the spirit of FERPA, you may want to consider not providing student feedback via blog comments. It could be

argued that positive or negative feedback on the quality of a graded blog post via publically available comments is equivalent to grade information. My suggestion is to provide feedback privately through the Learning Management System and rubrics.

In my classes, I use a simple rubric that is integrated into Desire2Learn. At the start of the course, I demonstrate and model what I consider to be an ideal blog post structure:

- Meaningful title, containing keywords
- An engaging image (or images) that draws the reader into the post, and provides context or illumination
- A web-optimized structure (headings, sub-headings, short paragraphs, bulleted lists, emphasis, and appropriately linked text)
- Attribution via blockquoted text and links
- Added value (providing summaries, alternative perspectives, synthesis and thesis)
- Appropriate tags

The rubric references these values, and that of the content, in a way very similar to how I assess discussion board posts. I award a maximum of five points for each weekly blogging assignment, but at least six points are available to the student:

Points	
3	Precise, well-reasoned post. Citation (link) of source material. Supports position with factual information.
2	Offers relevant information. Makes note of outside source material.
1	Participates.

Bonus Points	
+1	Uses relevant images to enhance post.
+1	Uses relevant tags (keywords).
+1	Provides relevant response to blog comments.

The Desire2Learn rubric calculates that weekly grade and provides feedback to the student via the gradebook.

To keep abreast of how students are using blogs, my suggestion would be to use an RSS aggregator like Google Reader (<http://www.google.com/reader/>). In my courses, I add a folder for each

class that I am teaching and subscribe to each of my students' blogs. Every time that a student publishes a new post, my Google Reader folder is updated with the details. I can read the post via Google Reader, and then grade the post in Desire2Learn.

I hope you have found the information and suggestions here to be of use. Best of luck blogging!

Resources

Recommended resources to use in your courses.

Websites

IBM's Social Computing Guidelines

<http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>

A Better Blogging Assignment

By Mark Sample

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/a-better-blogging-assignment/>

Teaching With Blogs

By Lanny Arvan

<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/07/27/arvan>

Books

The Cluetrain Manifesto: 10th Anniversary Edition by Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, David Weinberger

Human Resources Guide to Social Media Risks by Jesse Torres (CreateSpace, 2001)

Naked Conversations: How Blogs are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers by Robert Scoble and Shel Israel (Wiley, 2006)

Blogging Software Tools

Edublogs:

<http://edublogs.org>

Posterous:

<http://posterous.com>

tumblr:

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Rubrics

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Bonus Points	
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+1	Uses relevant tags (keywords).
+1	Provides relevant response to blog comments.

Blogging Consent Form

Blogging is a required component of this course, and your blogs are publicly available. Previous MKT595 students have used their blogs to establish a presence on the Internet, and to better position themselves for their careers (continuing to update their blog after the course finished). However, you are under no obligation to publish identifying information for this assignment. Anonymity is a precious resource.

You may also choose to hide or delete any feedback I provide in comments (without any penalty). I highly suggest that you configure your blog in such a way as to automatically moderate comments - you can then decide what is posted on your blog. In class, I ask all students to sign a consent form before beginning this assignment.

I understand that blogging is required for MKT 595. I give permission to James Moore to post comments on my blog, and to share my blog URL with other students in this course. I understand that the blog will be open and accessible to the public.

Name:

EmpID:

Signature:

Date:

About

Technology Tuesdays take place the last Tuesday of each month. These are informal, internal presentations focusing on educational technology and best practices for online and blended learning.

The presentations take generally place in DPC 7406 (seventh floor of the DePaul Center) from 10 - 11 a.m.

About Technology Tuesdays

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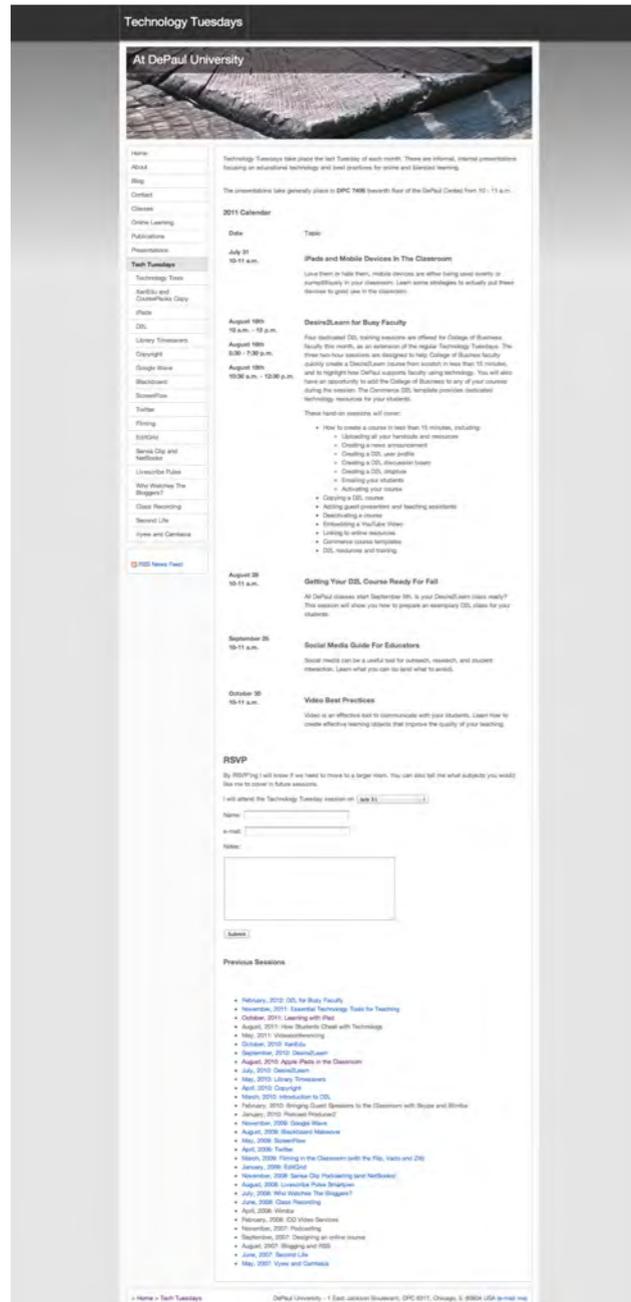
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For more information, or to attend the next presentation please visit:

<http://condor.depaul.edu/jmoore/tech/>

Videos, PDFs, and eBooks are available to download from the Technology Tuesdays website:

<http://condor.depaul.edu/jmoore/tech/>



About James Moore



James Moore is the Director of Online Learning for DePaul University's Driehaus College of Business. He teaches Internet Marketing classes in fully online, blended and face-to-face formats. He attempts to balance his love of technology and gadgets with the knowledge that quick and simple solutions are best. Unfortunately, creating quick and simple solutions often involves a long and complex process.

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