WIC WINTER WORKSHOP I: INTRODUCING A CLASS BLOG

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Introducing a class blog is a relatively simple way to encourage writing in conversation, facilitate peer-to-peer learning, and introduce multimedia content into traditional assignments.

GETTING STARTED

The first step is to choose a blog platform. There are two widely-used, totally free, and generally stable providers to choose from:

WordPress -- http://www.wordpress.com
Blogger -- http://www.blogger.com

Each platform offers relative benefits. WordPress allows for a wider range of customization through themes (like P2, which is what I use) and widgets (like the chat box from Meebo.com). Blogger uses a Google account for access, which many students and instructors already have from using Gmail, YouTube, or any other Google service. If you think you will be posting lots of video clips--especially if they will be coming from a source other than YouTube--then you should use Blogger. WordPress.com blocks most embedded video, which means no clips from Hulu or Comedy Central, for example.

Once you decide on a platform, the process of creating a blog is familiar--a lot like setting up an email account or registering to leave a comment on a news site. Blog services want the process to be easy--but they also try to offer lots of customization for the tech savvy user. Over time, depending on the needs of a particular class, there is a lot that can be adapted from many successful models in nearly every discipline at a variety of different institutions.

INTEGRATING A CLASS BLOG INTO EXISTING INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

While it's certainly not essential that a class blog is accessed through Blackboard--because a link to the blog can be distributed by many means--having a single point of entry can make things easier for students and present the blog as an integrated part of a familiar interface. Integrating your class blog into a course page on Blackboard is as easy as adding an "external link" in a content area or course menu and selecting "no" on the option to "open in a new window." Keep in mind, if you choose this approach students will need to sign-in with a different browser window before opening the blog.

THE CLASS BLOG, YOUR STUDENTS, AND YOU

One drawback of class blogs is that they need to be explained, and in some ways justified, to students in order to be successful. Even though students are proficient with many technologies, not everyone will have posted or commented on a blog. In addition to this lack of familiarity, some students struggle with the idea of an "informal" conversation space in the context of a writing course.

These issues often can be addressed by implementing a variety of assignment types--some formal, some informal--and allowing for a period of low-stakes grading at the beginning. This helps to avoid compounding anxiety about writing with anxiety about new technology, and it helps to establish the blog as a platform for more than one kind of text.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Blog Guide" created in 2007 by the OSU Write project through Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC)
http://tinyurl.com/yjd3r6k

"Blogging Across the Curriculum" -- an article about blogs in WIC courses from Plymouth State University
http://tinyurl.com/ye6tozt