

# Blogs for Teaching and Learning

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Web logs, more commonly referred to as blogs, have become commonplace for online communication. A blog is a type of website that includes entries made in the same fashion as a diary or journal, only in reverse chronological order. The individual who posts to the blog (aka: “blogger”) is able to quickly make new entries without any advanced knowledge of HTML scripting. Blog posts can be configured to permit comments, whereby readers are able to respond to the content of the postings. In early 2006, over 50 million blogs are reported to be in existence, with at least one new blog created every second of every day. A Pew Internet study found that 8% of current U.S. Internet users are actively using blogs as a means of creative, personal expression (Lenhart & Fox, 2011).

So why all the interest in blogs? Some faculty members have turned to blogs as a means for personal self-expression and self-publication, while others have incorporated blogging into their class activities. The ease of use for both contributors and readers coupled with the ability for the content to be syndicated to others through the process of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) are among the many contributing factors leading to the prominence of blogging among the various modes of computer mediated communication. RSS makes it possible for readers to use an aggregator to check for updates from numerous blogs simultaneously and view the content of new postings without physically having to revisit the source blogs.

Those interested in blogging have a wide array of approaches available for blog creation. Many free or low-cost hosted services are emerging that cater to instructional applications of blogging within higher education. Using one such free service, edublogs (<http://www.edublogs.org>), faculty can easily register for an account, create a blog and begin contributing to it within a matter of minutes. A sister service under the same name (eudblogs.com) but different URL (<http://www.uniblogs.org>), provides university students with similar blog creation and contribution capabilities. If one has a server and the ability to make some technical configurations, the open source software powering many common hosted solutions such as WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.org>) or bBlog (<http://www.bblog.org>) can be downloaded for free.

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Blackboard, NIU’s course management software, now provides a blogging tool for further communication and collaboration opportunities with your students. Visit the Faculty Development website for more information on how to use blogs in Blackboard at <http://www.niu.edu/blackboard/communicate/blogs.shtml>

While blogging is becoming increasingly popular within higher education contexts, it is important for those engaged in blogging to be cognizant of the full spectrum of associated issues. Here are a few important considerations to keep in mind when deciding whether to use a blog for personal or academic purposes:

**Access**

The content of blogs is typically available to anyone online. While this may be desirable when attempting to broadcast your message to a vast number of individuals, the information is in fact available to anyone, anywhere with an Internet connection.

**Syndication**

RSS makes it possible for blog contributions to be read in a variety of different contexts, including directly within another Web page. All one needs is the URL of the RSS feed for a blog to syndicate the content of that blog to any other Web site.

**Credibility**

Anyone with Internet access can setup a blog and post to it. Therefore, the credibility of content found on some blogs can be questionable and should not be considered comparable to peer-reviewed publications.

**Longevity**

Online communications, via blogs or other electronic media, are convenient ways to communicate with students and others. However, online communications, no matter who the sender or the receiver, should be considered permanent and may be difficult, if not impossible, to delete in the future.

**Summary**

Once a blog has been posted it can provide a wide array of viewpoints on a given topic. Blogs may provide the impetus to encourage students to hone their writing skills. Also, blogs can also help those students who tend not to participate in class a way to discover their inner voice. Blogging is one of the many emerging online technologies that can be utilized today to enhance the learning experience of students.

**Resources**

Lenhart, A., & Fox, S. (2011). *Bloggers*.

[http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/186/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/186/report_display.asp)

**Suggested Resource**

Perlmutter, D. D. (2005). Blogs as a tool for teaching. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(42). <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i42/42b03301.htm>

Richardson, W. (2006). *Blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other powerful web tools for classrooms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.