Take Course Content, Sauté it with Blogs and Sprinkle it with Information Literacy

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Introduction

Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist and author of the bestselling *The World is Flat* blogs regularly. The *New Yorker* magazine and *Science*, the peer-reviewed journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, also publish via blogs. Given these and other examples, the question we asked ourselves three years ago was whether blogging would be an appropriate publishing platform for Longwood University student research assignments. Since their inception, blogs have grown from individual musings to academic blogs, multidisciplinary group blogs, and blogs sponsored by scholarly and academic publishers. Blogs are increasingly becoming an integral part of scholarly communication. In spite of this new publication medium, the traditional ten-page paper has remained the conventional norm for a research assignment in undergraduate higher education. We argue that blogging provides students and faculty with opportunities not only to reflect on and publish research but also to initiate and participate in informal scholarly conversations locally and globally.

We owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Jim Groom, Director of the Division of Teaching and Learning Technologies, at the University of Mary Washington (UMW), for the initial creation of the publishing platform and his continuing support throughout the successful implementation of the platform. Not only did he inspire Longwood Blogs, http://blogs.longwood.edu/ through his energized presentations about scholarly publishing

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via blogging, but he also provided us with our initial install and server space until we could build our own platform. Groom sparked our curiosity about the "public" nature of writing and how the style of academic writing, i.e., the "ten-page paper," can be transformed into an engaging conversation by using social media. He encouraged us to facilitate undergraduate research at Longwood and foster academic engagement on both local and global levels via blogging. Together with instructional faculty, librarians discussed the built-in communication tools of a blogging platform, such as writing for multiple audiences instead of just for an audience of one, peer-review, and potential comments from local and global communities. Both constituents debated the idea of what actually constitutes scholarly writing and if blogging could be considered an alternative type of academic writing. In collaboration with a few courageous and patient members of the teaching faculty, we first began to experiment to determine if blogging met the pedagogical needs of our faculty and students and, second, if blogging truly facilitated increased engagement with the both local and global audience.

Longwood Blogs

Our goal was to inspire Longwood's academic community, as Groom inspired us, to connect our faculty, students and the outside world in scholarly communication through blog publishing. Supported by research of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009), which provided evidence of the deeper level engagement among students when they used social networking sites to communicate with others about "academically purposeful activities," we started course blogs for several faculty members on campus who were interested in blogging as an instructional technology (p.7). The teaching faculty were also eager to explore whether the comment functions of blogs would increase student engagement with the

course content, whether the blog's potential for incorporating multi-media would enhance student writing, and whether writing in this conventionally conversational, informal medium could still involve the rigor characteristic of traditional writing assignments.

INFORMATION LITERACY AND BLOGS

The focus of information literacy instruction typically centers on traditional writing forms such as written papers. Instruction in this context means guiding students to find, evaluate, and ethically use sources for such papers. With the proliferation of Web 2.0 technology and social networking media, librarians have extended and reconsidered information literacy concepts in the context of new media formats. According to recent library literature, blogs are broadly used in information literacy instruction. In some instances, blogs serve a complementary function to face-to-face library sessions. Coulter and Draper (2006) propose that blogs are particularly beneficial for one-shot instructional librarians to maintain contact with students throughout the course by offering additional instruction and learning opportunities.

In other instances, blogs are employed as tools to engage students in a dialogue around information literacy concepts. Chan and Cmor' experiment (2009) revealed that students made use of the course-integrated library blog and found it valuable for their actual class assignments and helpful for the development of their information literacy skills. Goss's study (2010) discovered additional benefits of using blogs as information literacy learning aids, among which were higher scores, teachable moments, and relationship development, which was particularly valuable for students to become comfortable with approaching librarians for other course assignments and questions.

Finally, blogs are utilized to demonstrate information literacy concepts and to enable students to develop their understanding of scholarly communication. Deitering and Gronemyer (2011) argue that the participatory Web, particularly blogs, helps students witness the creation of scholarly knowledge and shapes their understanding of the conversational and collaborative nature of scholarly communication before it gets polished and published in peer-reviewed journals. The authors call for librarians to use a variety of discipline-specific blogs to connect students with scholarly research and utilize them as starting points for students' topics (Deitering & Gronemyer, 2011). At Longwood, as embedded librarians facilitating blogging for a course, we guided students not only to reflect on scholarly literature and/or public conversations but also to enter informal scholarly conversations by linking to other sources and commenting with the potential of creating scholarly knowledge in their own publishing spaces.

INFORMATION LITERACY AND LONGWOOD BLOGS

Because of the leadership role the Janet D. Greenwood Library has taken in blogging at our institution, faculty members expect librarians to teach blogging concepts, technology, and information literacy skills that meet the needs of the format. In this collaborative venture, faculty lead librarians and students in writing for various target audiences, which have changed from one reader (a faculty member) to many (the public). Librarians lead faculty and students in blog creation and then in finding, using, and citing a variety of sources appropriate to the target audience and the blogging format. Furthermore, librarians draw the big picture for the ethical use of multimedia in blogs with emphasis on Creative Commons' licenses and teach students how to find and embed copyright-friendly images rather than simply presenting the concept of appropriate attribution of intellectual property.

We argue that librarians have consistently been leaders in analyzing, recording, and developing information-seeking habits based on the scholarly communication cycle. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to develop the means to organize this knowledge, as we have for monographs and periodicals, and transform our current information literacy skills criteria to meet the needs of scholars who learn and publish using Web 2.0. We offer the following scenarios as examples of how we have been challenged to meet students' research and writing questions in their blog publishing experiences.

Case Scenario # 1

Imagine yourself embedded into Longwood SOCL 351, a course in sociology on family violence. You not only guide students on how to find, evaluate, and use sources for their family violence topics, but also lead students how to develop and publish blog pages for the course blog.

First, you start off with a traditional library instruction session, during which you guide students how to find relevant resources through library databases and the web. Each student follows your advice by incorporating sources they found via library databases into their individual research papers. After each student's individual paper has been graded, the students work in groups to create a blog page that incorporates all of the information of each paper. The assignment requires that each blog page must have a theme and give clear answers to the research questions for the public audience.

Therefore, you meet with each group of students to introduce them to technical aspects of blogging, such as hyperlinking and embedding images. You try to bridge citing of a traditional paper with citing a blog post or a page. Similarly, as students have been taught about in-text citations corresponding with references at the end of the paper, you try to make an analogy for hyperlinks inside of the blog posts/pages, which agree with the citations at the bottom of the post/page. Then, you remind students that the public is their targeted audience for their blog pages and emphasize the importance of hyperlinking their citations to sources everyone can access for free instead of library proprietary databases. Finally, you showcase a few ways of finding copyright-friendly multimedia for use in their blog pages.

After reviewing several drafts of students' blog pages, the majority of which used copyrighted images, and after several

emails from the faculty member, posing student questions about why they could not just Google for images and embed them into the course blog, you decide to have a class discussion about the ethical use of multimedia and the Creative Commons movement and its licenses. Together with the students, you grapple with the notion of image attribution and look for the examples from seasoned bloggers. Finally, together with the faculty and students, you decide to follow the example of the *ProfHacker* blog section of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, in which a blog author attributes images by hyperlinking in the blog text and by providing creator's name at the end of the blog page.

Case Scenario # 2

Imagine yourself as the embedded librarian in Longwood University's English 400 (ENGL 400) course, designed specifically to support the University mission of developing citizen leaders. Your students are asked to write for a new audience – the general public. Remember, this "general audience" is no longer the audience of one, a Ph.D. faculty member. Instead, students are now writing for a broad audience with diverse points of view and varying levels of educational attainment. This challenge also requires students to be strategic about the sources they use, as significant segments of their audience will not have the resources of an academic library at their disposal. In addition, in preparing your students to write and find sources post-graduation, consider this: can they easily access proprietary research databases for their research after they graduate? No. Can they access Google? Yes. So how do you prepare students to research, write, and cite for their community audiences who typically do not communicate as "scholars"?

Working closely with faculty, you create a course blog with the intention of having students actually write for a public audience rather than a classroom simulation of public writing. This is a new territory for both you and teaching faculty. Not only are you collaborating in teaching research but now in teaching blogging and course content. Because of your complimentary perspectives and concerns, the conversation between you and teaching faculty is rich and in-depth. Instructional faculty bring subject expertise and pedagogical strategies from an array of disciplines. The Library faculty's experience in collaboration with teaching faculty from other disciplines and their proficiency in instructional design put you in a solid position to facilitate these multi-disciplinary conversations, while your technical expertise with the blogging platform enable you to develop strategies for putting the group's ideas into practice. Together, you explore the potential for student writing in blogs, discuss strategies for moving students away from writing for faculty to writing for the public, and formulate expectations for students in rubrics for assessing blog publications.

Next, you determine what the appropriate sources will be for student research, particularly those that are freely accessible. For their assignment, students typically advocate for change in a local community, for example, creating a clothing drive for children. The assignment usually consists of a proposal and action plan submitted to the faculty member. Finally, students create documents intended for a public audience, ranging from pamphlets to brochures to videos. The proposal and the public documents need to be supported by outside resources that reflect the urgency and feasibility of the proposed change. For example, if a student wants to propose increased property taxes to support local public education, the student needs to provide evidence that taxes are low or that the schools are underfunded and that raising taxes is a feasible answer.

After learning about the importance of using "scholarly" journal articles to support research over the course of three to four years of their academic career, you need to reframe "scholarly" sources to "audience-appropriate" sources. For this assignment, you believe the best types of sources include demographic statistics (Census data), rules, regulations and/or laws (government or agency websites), local newspapers, and national magazines (to determine national trends). All of these are easily found in the public domain except for magazine articles. You decide to use library databases for finding magazine articles. Then, as in Scenario #1, you discuss appropriate citation for this format and audience with students and instructional faculty. Initially, you look to find what the citation standards are for newspapers and magazines, assuming that the Associated Press website would cover this, but it does not. So you are somewhat on your own, looking at *ProfHacker* and other examples of academic blogging. Finally, you come to a collective agreement about how you will grade citation use in the blogs. It is not the ideal situation, but you believe that as long as the credit is given and until a formal form of citation is developed, you are on your own.

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

After three years of building a community of bloggers at Longwood University, we are pleased to report that the number of bloggers increases exponentially each year. But quantity is not enough; we continue to work with faculty to create blogging assignments that require academic posting and commenting with public audiences using text, multimedia, and appropriate attribution. Our greatest challenge has been finding established standards for writing, the use of multimedia, and attribution outside of traditional sources such as MLA, APA, and Chicago style manuals. While we are still working through challenges, the increased level of enthusiasm and engagement in scholarly communication generated by our blogging platform amongst our faculty and students inspires us to pursue other venues for scholarly conversations. We believe that the role of librarians is to facilitate, organize, and preserve the scholarly communication cycle. We look forward to our next adventure in e-portfolios!

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