

# OSUWrite: A University Blog Solution Proof of Concept

NWACC 2005 Proof of Concept Grant

Oregon State University Principal Investigators:  
Vicki Tolar Burton, Writing Intensive Curriculum  
Lisa Ede, Center for Writing and Learning  
Jon Dorbolo, Technology Across the Curriculum

## **Proposal**

Blog technology possesses significant potential for academic use. This potential mainly consists in the ability of blogs to support communities of authors in a wide variety of configurations. Projects like Weblogs at Harvard Law, Crooked Timber <<http://www.crookedtimber.org>>, and UThink at the University of Minnesota <<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/>> are strong instances of community blogs in academic settings. We propose to produce a proof of concept project in order to demonstrate academic uses of blogs as tools for teaching and learning, research, organizational communication, and individual expression. The critical outcomes of this project will be specifications for a blog environment designed for widespread academic uses and a set of teaching strategies for course work uses of blogs.

A blog (a contraction of “web log”) is often thought of as an online journal produced by a single author. The rapid growth of blogs as a medium for journalism, punditry, science, and organizational communication is due to the success of community blogs (also known as team blogs and group blogs). Community blogs are online publications that are produced by multiple authors or are aggregates of the blogs of individuals. Successful academic, political, business, and topical community blogs are organized by site managers (often called “editors”). These managers do not edit the content of individual authors, but maintain the site so that the readers who come to it have ready access to quality content.

Our ultimate aim is to produce a blog environment at OSU in which all students, faculty, and staff will have access to personal blogs. Moreover, this environment will support the creation of course specific blogs, department blogs, campus club blogs, academic research group blogs, and many other applications. The presently proposed proof of concept project will allow for the implementation of 20 to 40 blogs that demonstrate a variety of purposes, configurations, and authors from the university community. We will seek to include instances that involve collaboration with authors at other northwest academic institutions. From experiences of the test authors using these test blogs we will be able to arrive at specifications and production models, which will be used as a basis for a university-wide blog solution.

## **Impact**

This proof of concept will demonstrate various uses of blogs for teaching and learning, organizational communication, and individual expression within the academic context. Possible examples include - collaborative writing projects by students for a course; a faculty group shares research or teaching ideas; a department produces a newsletter with multiple authors; a student

# OSUWrite: A University Blog Solution Proof of Concept

## NWACC 2005 Proof of Concept Grant

group posts minutes and articles; an alumni association solicits articles from alums, a campus lecture series contains posts by participants and comments by readers. Many variations are possible. At the very minimum (because the project PI's are faculty) we can be sure to have projects blogs working in several writing courses, one philosophy course, and one art course.

### **Innovation**

Blogware is a significant advance in internet technology. Up till very recently, the web has been fairly static with regard to multiple authorship. Web boards and email lists have provided for interaction, but do not function as informative web sites. Using the capabilities of blogs to connect multiple authors and many readers adds a new level of dynamism to the web. This dynamic power holds much potential for the uses of the web in education. Since blogs it is only in the last few years that blogs have become widespread, we are at the very beginning of the investigation of these capabilities for educational value. This project will demonstrate uses of blogs to enhance teaching and learning, as well as the university environment overall.

### **Feasibility**

OSU has the technical and pedagogical expertise and resources necessary to succeed in this project. The OSU Technology Resource Fee (TRF) committee has allocated \$5,000 to support this project. The programmers in Central Web Services have provided a letter designating that \$5,000 amount as sufficient to produce phase I of a blog solution for the entire campus. With an NWACC award, we will have sufficient resources to produce the organizational and pedagogical aspects of a *proof of concept*, as well as the basic technical implementation. This is an optimal condition because we will be able to base the technical implementation upon the specifications determined by experienced faculty, staff, and students.

One potent aspect of the present proposal is its leadership by academic programs. The Center for Writing and Learning (CWL) and Writing Intensive Curriculum (WIC) in concert with Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC) have the explicit objective of creating educational models of practice for students and instructors. In addition to implementing blog software, we shall provide models, examples, and direction for turning the OSU blog into a high-powered teaching and learning tool. Working with Central Computing we will seek to integrate the blog tools into the Blackboard environment in order to make the new tools readily available to students and instructors. Blogs are important technology for today's students to know about and to access. Strategic incorporation of this technology into the instructional environment will add educational value university-wide.

### **Transfer**

We will likely be using blog software that is widely available (open source or commercial). The technical modifications that we make will be documents. The teaching strategies, organizational strategies, and individual production strategies will be documented and available to the public.

# OSUWrite: A University Blog Solution Proof of Concept

NWACC 2005 Proof of Concept Grant

Educational contexts from K-12 to University instruction to academic seminars will be able to make use of the outcomes of this project.

## **Models**

This project has several successful models to draw from including University of Minnesota Uthink <<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/>>, Weblogs at Harvard Law <<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/>>, Seton Hall University <<http://blogs.setonhill.edu/nmj/>>, and Into the Blogosphere <<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>>. These models provide instances of centrally managed blog solutions for large academic populations. In those settings blogs are used for personal communications, scholarship, journalism, research, creative writing, course work, and a variety of other purposes.

## **Educational value**

Blogs provide customizable writing environments that are easy to use and can be shared with general or targeted audiences. They may be configured to allow one author or multiple authors in collaboration. The ease of use of blogging tools, especially to create a well-formed web publication, makes the blog an excellent tool for courses and academic research. Some instructors, such as those at Seaton Hall, assign blogs as course work. The use of blogs as online academic journals, research portals, and commentary sites by students, faculty, and staff enriches the overall educational environment. OSU students will have access to OSU produced blogs, which will include work by their colleagues and instructors. (For academic blogging examples, see “Scholars Who Blog” <http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39a01401.htm>). As writers, OSU students will benefit by ownership of high-quality online publishing tools. As readers OSU students will benefit from immediate access to content produced by their peers, faculty, and staff.

## **Advisory Board**

A primary objective of this project is to engage the university community, particularly the faculty, in the process of developing specifications for a larger implementation. Early in the project cycle we will form an advisory board consisting of graduate students, undergraduate students, faculty, and staff. The advisory board will develop a set of desired features for the blog system. The OSU Computer Resource Committee (CRC) of the Faculty Senate will assist in nominating advisory board members. Preferably, the advisory board members will participate as authors of the test blogs.

## **Blog manager**

In order to add value for readers of OSUWrite, we shall hire and train a blog manager (under the supervision of Center for Writing and Learning and Writing Intensive Curriculum). The manager will maintain an entryway into OSUWrite that provides immediate access to the highest quality content from the available set of blogs. This role will not be responsible for any editing or

# OSUWrite: A University Blog Solution Proof of Concept

NWACC 2005 Proof of Concept Grant

control of the content of individual blogs. The content of individual blogs is the sole responsibility of the individual authors (so long as the content accords with the OSU acceptable use policy). What the blog manager will do is to put a useful and attractive face on the university blog system by bringing high quality blogs and articles to the visible front of the system, identifying a blog of the week, organizing archives, collecting blog entries under common themes, writing general commentary for the entire OSUWrite community, and pursuing strategic linkages with other blog communities. The blog manager will benefit readers by putting the strongest content in immediate reach. The blog manager will benefit OSUWrite authors by drawing readers to the site and adding value to the university blog system (thus increasing the value of belonging to this blog community). This sort of management is the way that successful blog communities operate and is a way to ensure the highest quality presentation of OSUWrite both within the university and to the world.

## Support

Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC) will provide support in the form of several online, interactive tutorials that will teach bloggers how to use their tool set effectively and how to maintain quality blogs. The undergraduate multimedia programmer will be hired to assist in developing these tutorials. Additionally TAC will produce at least four workshops for students covering the use of the blog tool set and quality blogging practices. TAC will include a blogging workshop for faculty in the regular schedule of workshops (offered every term). The faculty workshops will cover strategies for use of blogs in courses.

## Assessment

Assessment of the proof of concept will be made by both formative and summative survey of the all of the test authors. Test authors will produce descriptions of the teaching strategy, organization strategy, or individual publishing strategy used in the test blog. These descriptions will be used to produce production models that may be applied by other teachers, managers, and writers.

## Budget

*Application Development and Programming* 4300.00

*Center for Writing and Learning/Writing Intensive Curriculum*

Student Blog Manager

10hr/wk. @ \$10.00/hr for 9 mo.

3600.00

*Technology Across the Curriculum*

Undergraduate Programmer

# OSUWrite: A University Blog Solution Proof of Concept

## NWACC 2005 Proof of Concept Grant

10hr/wk @ \$10.50/hr for 5 mo. 2100.00

*Total* 10000.00

04/25/2005 Project begins

05/15/2005 Project advisory council formed

06/01/2005 At least ten individual and group test blogs initiated

08/12/2005 OSUWrite project website established

09/01/2005 Online support tutorials complete

09/15/2005 Blog manager hired

09/26/2005 Fall term 05 class blogs initiated (at least five)

11/21/2005 F05 Faculty and student blog workshops complete

12/05/2005 Assessment of F05 test blog authors complete

12/16/2005 Initial progress report submitted

01/02/2006 Winter 06 term class blogs initiated (at least five new)

03/20/2006 W06 Faculty and student blog workshops complete

03/13/2006 Project advisory council recommendations complete

03/27/2006 Assessment of W06 test blog authors complete

04/07/2006 Assessment of individual and group blogs complete

04/14/2006 Final report submitted and full results available on website

\*New funding will be sought to extend the knowledge gained from this project to implement a permanent university-wide blog solution.

# OSUWrite: A University Blog Solution Proof of Concept

NWACC 2005 Proof of Concept Grant

---

Jon Dorbolo  
Principal Investigator  
Associate Director, Technology Across the Curriculum

---

Vicki Tolar Burton  
Principal Investigator  
Director, Writing Intensive Curriculum

---

Lisa Ede  
Principal Investigator  
Director, Center for Writing and Learning

---

John Greydanus  
Director, Media Services

---

Curt Pederson  
Vice Provost, Information Services

---

Becky Johnson  
Associate Dean, Academic Affairs and Research