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Transforming Learning: The Power of Blogs, Journals & Wikis – Web 2.0

by Jennifer Austin, Instructional Designer, Graduate School of Education

"Schools cannot be made great by great teacher performances. They will only be made great by great student performance."

- Dr. Philip Schlechty

Why Web 2.0 Works for Students

Instructors set the stage for student learning by creating meaningful work for students in the form of assignments. The assignments and value placed on them focuses the students' time and attention on important course content, concepts, and/or skills. This work challenges students to think beyond what they already know to incorporate new ideas and transform their learning. Web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs and wikis, can help instructors create more engaging and meaningful work for students.

Using Web 2.0 Technologies in Instruction Enhances Student Learning by:

- Taking student work beyond the classroom
- Giving everyone a voice in the conversation
- Taking ownership of their work, creating a greater sense of participation
- Expanding topical and content specific expertise
- Teaching new literacies (research, organization, and synthesis of ideas)
- Supporting multiple learning styles
- Creating exemplars, raising the bar of student achievement
- Archiving learning, creating a record for both you and the students

The following table illustrates some newer Web 2.0 terminology and features, as well as how they are used. More ideas are available by enrolling in the [UBlearns Campus Pack Learning Community](#).

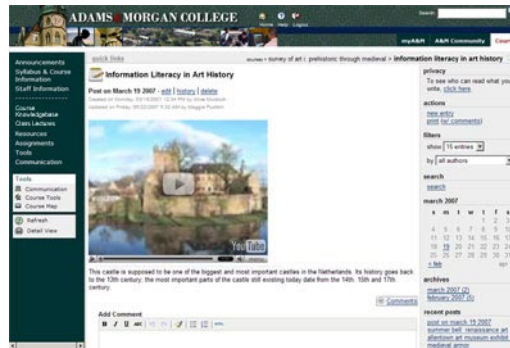
Tool	What it is:	Potential Use:
Blogs	<p>"Blog" is short for "Web Log"</p> <p>A website where the author posts content to a larger community (from a group to a class to the world at large) that they can read and comment on. New content gets posted on top. Can include links, text, images, audio and video.</p> <p>Groups can receive and track blog entry updates by subscribing to an RSS feed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response to class discussion questions • Book/article discussions can engage author and experts • Host an "art" or "media" show • Track stories and reflections on a topic (from presidential campaigns, global warming, to genocide in Darfur) • Students can debate points of an article, a photograph, or responses to a video

Tool	What it is:	Potential Use:
Journals	<p>A private blog, limited to student-instructor only access.</p> <p>Student can write a journal entry that can be viewed and commented on by the instructor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal response journal • Class feedback • "Important things I've learned" journal
Wikis	<p>Collaborative web space.</p> <p>Can be edited by multiple people via a simple word processing-type editor, with revision tracking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create student guides • Peer editing – papers and presentations • Collaborative literature reviews and annotated bibliographies • Brainstorming • Collect and/or share data • Create e-Portfolios

Two New Web 2.0 Tools in UBlerns Campus Pack

Journal LX

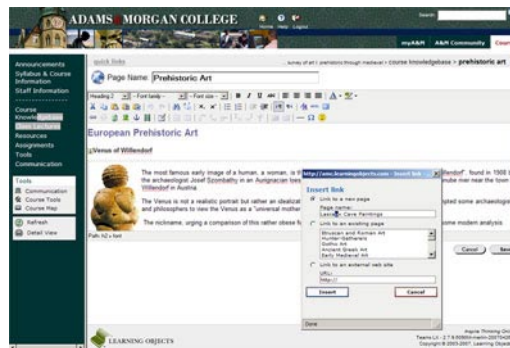
Provides the tools to help you create Blog and Journaling assignments for your students. Select "Group Blog" to access the tool.



If you would like the journal entries to be a private journal between you and the student, select "Private Journal"

Teams LX

Allows individuals, groups, or your entire class to collaborate on content development using a wiki. The easy-to-use graphical interface enables rich multi-media content to be easily added.



Teams LX tracks participation and integrates with the Blackboard Grade Center, making the logistics of grading this assignment a breeze.

Why use Blogs & Wikis in UBlearns?

With the addition of Campus Pack from Learning Objects™ to UBlearns you will have the toolset to harness the power of these Web 2.0 technologies from within your course environment. While the evolution of these tools is rapid and there are many alternatives and specialized tools available on the Web, using UBlearns provides three distinct advantages: 1) easier grading and course management, 2) control over who can participate and access content, and 3) integration within UBlearns, a toolset that students are already familiar with.

Name	User Name	Total Page Saves	Total Lines Modified
Maggie Plunton	mplunton	36% (17/47)	30% (16/42)
Estelle Chaney	echaney	9% (4/47)	21% (9/42)
Chava Kolar	ckolar	21% (10/47)	12% (5/42)
Alice Murbach	amurbach	9% (4/47)	10% (4/42)
Nisha Sanders	nsanders	12% (6/47)	10% (4/42)
Summer Bell	sbell	9% (4/47)	7% (3/42)
Oscar Dixon	odixon	4% (2/47)	2% (1/42)

Transform Your Assignments to Web 2.0

Using Web 2.0 technologies in your course doesn't have to be hard. Here are a few ways that you can transform assignments that may already be part of your course and boost the learning potential for students by employing Web 2.0 technologies.

Old Assignment	New Assignment	Benefit
<p>Create an Annotated Bibliography</p> <p>Find 3 journal articles, list the citation along with a brief annotation about the article.</p>	<p>Wiki Bibliography</p> <p>Find 3 journal articles, list the citation along with a brief annotation about the article. Add to the class Wiki.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted to the web can become a reference • Students work collaboratively; find more and higher quality resources • Model how to successfully complete the assignment
<p>Write an Essay/Paper</p> <p>Write a paper, turn it in to the instructor who will read, grade, and comment on your paper.</p>	<p>Wiki Peer Editing Papers</p> <p>Write the same paper, but post it to the class Wiki. Partner the students to review and edit each others work. Create groups to provide comments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses the writing process, helping strengthen student writing • Gives students more immediate feedback • Public performance typically raises level of performance • Practice working collaboratively with others on writing projects
<p>Create a Study Guide for Upcoming Test</p> <p>Create a one-page study guide you can use for an upcoming test.</p>	<p>Wiki Study Guide</p> <p>Create a collaborative online study guide, prioritize content, create sample test questions and answers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work together to figure out what content is most important • Students will think critically about the content • Create study tips for each other • Higher effort when their work is public

Old Assignment	New Assignment	Benefit
<p>Questions & Answers</p> <p>Ask questions you have about content last 5 minutes of class or come see me during office hours.</p>	<p>Ask 1 – Answer 1</p> <p>Post a question you have about the content to the Wiki, answer one classmate's question.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students gain mastery of content explaining it to others • A conceptual misunderstanding is usually corrected by the class • Students answer each others questions, freeing up faculty time • Quicker response time to questions

A Student's View

Here is a quote from one of our students, in this case, participating in an online course:

"I thought a lot about the concept of online education. I was concerned about missing out on the [face-to-face] discussion that you have in a classroom. I wondered about the lack of spontaneity and was unclear about how it would work. What I am discovering is that instead of some quick chatter, there's more thought that goes into creating these written postings, and as a result, I expect there will be a lot more substance."

- Janet, UB Student

Interested in Getting Started?

- TLC workshop "UBlearns: Campus Pack blogs & wikis" Friday, December 5, 2008, 10 am – Noon
- To register for this session, and for information about future workshops, go to: ubtlc.buffalo.edu/workshops.
- A video of the recent Campus Pack workshop is posted on the TLC site at: etc.buffalo.edu/resources/event_handout_archive.asp.
- Visit the Building Blocks section on UBlearns Help website for support information for faculty and students: ublearns.buffalo.edu/help.
- Participate in the Campus Pack Learning Community in UBlearns (see the [last page of this issue](#) for details).

Useful Links about Campus Pack...

Campus Pack Case Studies

A number of helpful case studies can be found at the Learning Objects™ web site:

www.learningobjects.com/casestudies.jsp

Clemson University has a brief description of each product for their faculty:

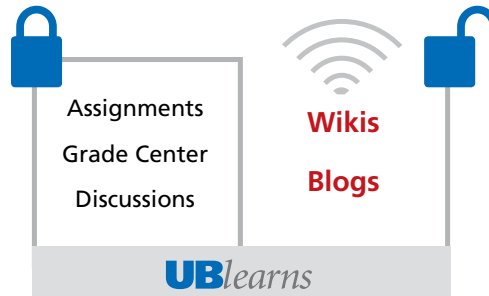
www.clemson.edu/ccit/crlt/articles/LearningObjects_FD06.html

Hal Herzog, Vice President at Learning Objects™, has a presentation describing how social networking tools such as blogs and wikis are being used in education. Real-life examples illustrate how these technologies can increase student engagement and enhance instructor effectiveness.

bbworld.wordpress.com/2006/09/10/blogs-and-wikis-in-action-ales-from-the-classroom/ ■

Operational Change Alert

The benefits of blogs and wikis are enormous, but their use represents an operational change in *UBlearns*. Students logging into their courses have an expectation of privacy working within the secure *UBlearns* environment. *UBlearns* Campus Pack blogs and wikis can be published to the Web outside of the secure environment, and once a URL is published, it can be shared outside the course. This graphic illustrates the difference between the secure course environment and use of "Web 2.0" tools in *UBlearns*:



Faculty will be reminded of this change with the following alert on the *UBlearns* Help website regarding setting up a blog or wiki:

"Blog and Wiki postings could be shared beyond course enrollments. By default, public access and RSS feed settings are disabled. Only instructors can configure these options. Use discretion when posting personal and sensitive information." ■

UBlearns System Update

Changes in Blackboard on UBlearns

by *Mary Soom, Senior Assistant Librarian, Roberta (Robin) Sullivan, TLC Instructional Designer, and Susan Michel-Giolando, Assistant Administrator for UBlearns*

Recent updates of *UBlearns* introduced new features and enhancements to existing tools. Many of these enhancements were detailed in the [last newsletter](#). Tips about using the new Grade Center are presented in an article [elsewhere in this issue](#).

Additional enhancements to *UBlearns* include:

Email Announcements

Instructors can create an announcement and email their students with one action. This improves communication with students and is especially helpful when informing students about critical and timely messages.

Discussion Board

Any forum can now be viewed in one of two contexts: Tree View or List View. The Tree View (in which the post titles and relationships to replies of a post are visible) is once again a display option. A thread and its replies can be expanded and collapsed by using the plus/minus icon next to each message. The Tree View Expand All option allows easy navigation within threads and from one thread to another. The List View presents the list of threads in a tabular format. In List View, threads can be sorted based on dates, author, status, etc. by clicking the arrow at the top of each column. List View remains the default view.

A processing graphic lets you know your discussion board is loading. No more blank pages wondering if your click was received.

Self and Peer Assessment

The Self and Peer Assessment is designed to enhance the reflective learning skills of students. The instructor creates an exercise with a set of evaluation criteria for each question. Options allow for the evaluation to be done by the student himself/herself, or by peers or both. The tool randomly assigns students to review a certain number of peers, and allows this to happen anonymously.

Reviewing the work of colleagues through criterion-based reference evaluation promotes constructive feedback. Feedback that students receive from their peers can provide valuable insights into their own efforts.

Browser Information

Be aware that new browser releases such as Firefox version 3.0 and Google's new Chrome browser are not browsers supported by Blackboard on UBLearn. Students are unable to upload assignment files using Firefox version 3.0. In addition, there are some browser settings causing inconsistencies with the new Grade Center functionality. Access to a list of supported browsers and recommended browser settings is available in the Faculty section of the UBLearn Help website at: ublearn.buffalo.edu/help. ■

Perspectives

Incorporating Blogs and Wikis Into Teaching

by Kevin Lim and Derek Lackaff, PhD candidates, Department of Communication

With UBLearn incorporating blogs and wikis, branded as Journal LX and Teams LX respectively, the question now becomes: "What can I do with them?"

Blogs and wikis have gained popularity in recent years as pedagogical tools. Duffy and Bruns (2006) explained how blogs can be seen to promote active and engaged learning, since they afford "digital literacy" toward collaborative and (co)creative purposes, as well as for critical assessment and evaluation of information. Although the ease of participation could come at the cost of quality and reliability, Boulos, Maramba and Wheeler (2006) suggest that the "Darwinian type 'survival of the fittest' content" would help ensure competition for the production of quality content. Befitting of Ray Oldenburg's notion of the "third place" (1991), blogs also situate students in a broad communication environment that reaches far beyond the sociological confines of their traditional classrooms and home.

When we taught our Internet communication courses, we learned first-hand how blogging could support a truly active and collaborative learning experience. We felt that the printed "essays" and "response papers" used in many classrooms traditionally promoted a closed dialogue between a student and instructor. In contrast, class blogging allowed for a multi-logue among students, peers, the instructor, and potentially, the public. The possibilities of interaction that ensue from this open writing process serves several pedagogical functions. Students are presented with another channel for engagement and participation, creating a discussion sphere that is more controllable and potentially less threatening than speaking in a classroom. As students blog, they create an archive of thoughts and discussion that can be easily revisited as the class progresses.

One challenge of using blogs and wikis as educational tools is encouraging students to engage in these public forms of active participation. While many instructors mandate interaction through such devices as weekly comment postings, these regulations often guarantee only minimal learning and interaction outcomes. For students to receive the full benefits of the class blogging experience, they must internalize the goal of the intellectual interaction. Because blogging places students' work in their own public spaces, there is an intrinsic sense of ownership and recognition of their personal production. Students are thus likely to produce higher quality work if they are motivated to engage with their lessons and colleagues in a more social fashion.

To encourage positive forms of online social interactions, we used an innovative approach from Amy Jo Kim's Game Mechanics (2006) as a viable framework to motivate student blogging communities. This framework also allowed us as educators to achieve both specific and emergent learning outcomes. Kim outlines five elements of social gaming environments: collecting things, earning points, feedback, exchanges and customization. Kim originally directed these five factors toward software developers, but the same factors are applicable to a variety of social systems, including class blogging communities. While earning points might be the sole motivating factor behind traditional class assignments, Kim's other factors present an innovative model for encouraging participation. For instance, collecting things might include adding friends on a blogroll and achieving "Best of the Week" awards, customization might include the adding of interactive blog widgets, and feedback can be provided in the form of links, comments, trackbacks, and even leaderboards implemented using Technorati rankings.

Earning Points – Amy Jo Kim’s idea of points was presented as a scoring mechanism. Our feedback was provided using Technorati’s authority ranking algorithm as a way of showing a blogging leaderboard. Although more holistic web ranking systems are available today, Technorati.com provided our students a rudimentary measure of how they were doing against one another. In-class grades were hidden for student privacy, but students were made aware of the overall class performance with weekly audits.

Collecting Things – Students exhibited collecting behavior on their own (e.g. adding friends to blogroll); one of the ways we motivated students to write quality blog posts was to give out a limited number of awards each week.



Course instructors would pick the best postings to earn relevant awards, which students would typically display proudly on their blog post. As the semester progressed, these awards also earned students extra credits or the ability to gain "immunity" from extra assignments. The last class of the semester was dedicated to an exciting "Blog Awards Ceremony" where top achievers in each category won trophies determined by class vote.

Feedback – MySpace is an example of a non-game application that gives lots of feedback, including notifications on messages, comments, and just about anything that goes on there. In our class blogging community, comments and trackback allowed the students to recognize the quality of the blog and wiki contribution and gave them the opportunity to improve on entries. This feedback encourages students to accelerate mastery of each week’s theme.

Customization – Young students adapt to online environments quickly, as evident when most students instinctively personalized their blogs by the first week of use. Besides swapping blog templates, students also often added sidebar widgets, which allowed them to display personal photos, stream their favorite music, or chat with friends (via Shoutbox).



Exchanges – Seen as structured social interactions, the grades we gave were based on the level of intellectual interaction online and offline (in the classroom). This included tracking the content of student blogs, the comments and trackbacks they gave one another, and the level of contribution they made to class wikis (such as a collaborative exam study guide). To track these layers of interaction, we visually aggregated RSS feeds of their blogs and wikis using web services such as YourMinis.com and Netvibes.com.

While newer generations of information communication technology afford educators the ability to engage in more sophisticated learning environments, the appropriateness of use is still imperative in reaching specific learning objectives. Amy Jo Kim’s Game Mechanics framework provided us with one such engaging method to induce passion and active learning in and out of the classroom. Blogs and wikis provide educators an opportunity to encourage student proficiency in an important technology and to promote social and collaborative inquiry into course topics.

References

Duffy, Peter and Bruns, Axel (2006) The Use of Blogs, Wikis and RSS in Education: A Conversation of Possibilities. In *Proceedings Online Learning and Teaching Conference 2006*, pages 31-38, Brisbane. (See eprints.qut.edu.au/archive/00005398/)

How Game Mechanics Can Make Your App More Fun (March 8, 2006) by Bruce Stewart in ETech. (See www.oreillynet.com/conferences/blog/2006/03/how_game_mechanics_can_make_yo.html) (See this for a deconstruction of Amy Jo Kim's points: www.we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/008152.php)

Oldenburg, Ray (1991) *The Great Good Place*, New York: Paragon House, 1991. New York: Marlowe and Company. (The Third Place: See www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/placemakers/roldenbug)

MN Boulos, I Maramba, S Wheeler (2006). Wikis, blogs and podcasts: BMC Medical Education. (See: www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6920/6/41/) ■

UBlearns System Update

UBlearns New Grade Center: Quick Start Tips

by Kathleen Byrnes, TLC Instructional Support Assistant, Mary Soom, Senior Assistant Librarian, and Roberta (Robin) Sullivan, TLC Instructional Designer

UBlearns version 8.0 contains significant upgrades regarding the management of student grades. The Gradebook has been almost entirely redesigned and has become the "Grade Center" which has many new capabilities and improvements. Here are a few tips to help take advantage of the new features.

Smart View

Smart View allows instructors to create custom views within the new Grade Center based on a variety of student criteria. Student listings can be organized and displayed by lab or recitation sections making grading large classes much easier. Smart Views can also be used to identify students who are struggling in a course so they can receive extra help if necessary (Figure 1).

Custom Smart Views can be saved which enables easy navigation between views using the "Current View" drop-down menu within the Grade Center. Any Smart View can be saved as the default view of the Grade Center.

Calculated Columns

Calculated Columns perform functions such as weighting grades, and can also create averages and totals on sets of grades. Calculated Columns can be set up to automatically calculate grades according to the categories and weights set forth in the syllabus. When custom categories are created (i.e., weekly quizzes, exams, attendance) and used along with weighting, the weighted column automatically averages items from the categories to the weighted grade according to the preset weight.

Reports

Instructors can take advantage of the Report feature in the Grade Center to help keep students informed of their progress. Reports can be created that include information such as student mid-term progress or final grades (see below). Reports can then be printed and distributed. Reports make it easy to alert students about their progress in a course and help determine when a meeting with a student may be necessary (Figure 2).

Current View:	Full Grade Center (Default)	Sort
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Last Name	Full Grade Center (Default)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jane Doe	Smart Views
<input type="checkbox"/>	John Smith	Final Grade View
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tom Tomson	Preview of My Grades
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sally Wo	Recitation 1
		Recitation 2
		Recitation 3

Figure 1: Smart View

Mid Term Report for John Doe		SUNY UB
		October 15, 2008
Grade Information		
Item	Grade	
Quiz 1	80.00	
Quiz 2	75.00	
Quiz 3	25.00	
Mid Term	69.00	
Plant Cells Assignment	75.00	
Running Total	548.00	
Weighted Total	64.80%	
Signature: _____		
Report Generated: October 15, 2008		

Figure 2: Reports

Navigation Tip

Navigating between columns and cells within the Grade Center can be streamlined by using arrow keys on your keyboard in addition to using the vertical and horizontal scroll bars within the Grade Center.

UBlearns Grade Center Workshops/Training

UBlearns workshops, including sessions about the new Grade Center, are frequently offered through the Teaching & Learning Center. For a list of upcoming workshops see: ubtlc.buffalo.edu/workshops.

One-on-one assistance is also available through the Teaching & Learning Center. To schedule an appointment contact ubtlc@buffalo.edu. ■

Meet Your Support Staff**Jason Adsit**

Jason Adsit, the new Director of the Teaching & Learning Center, joins the UBlearns support team with a rich background in instructional technology, pedagogy, and assessment.

Jason earned his BA in Philosophy from American University – and his Ph.D. in Philosophy from UB. His professional path began with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education in Washington, DC, where he worked on issues related to education policy, technology, and theory.

In 2003, Jason shifted back into the academic arena, and took an appointment as an Assistant Professor and Director of Standards, Policy and Assessment at Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio. His work at B-W focused primarily on assessment, accreditation, and educational technology, where he helped lead several of the institution's specialized and regional accreditation efforts.

In 2006, Jason moved to Johns Hopkins University, where he served as the Assistant Dean for Institutional Research and Assessment in the School of Education. In addition to working with faculty and staff on assessment and accreditation, Jason also managed the School's external reporting and compliance efforts.

Jason rejoined the UB community last summer – when he became the Director of the Teaching & Learning Center (TLC). The TLC's mission is to help UB faculty members enhance their teaching effectiveness. The TLC offers a wide array of workshops and Web-based resources to help UB faculty learn about the latest advances in educational technology, pedagogy, the scholarship of teaching, and collaborates with academic departments to design, deliver, and assess new approaches to classroom instruction.

When he isn't immersed in research on teaching and learning, Jason enjoys runs in the park with his dog, large data-sets, and dusty, old philosophy books. ■

Workshops and Help

To view the schedule and register for upcoming UBlearns workshops, go to ubtlc.buffalo.edu/workshops

Software and technical support: ublearns@buffalo.edu or 645-2803

Course consultation and instruction: ubtlc@buffalo.edu or 645-7700

Online Help: ublearns.buffalo.edu/help ■

UBlearns Faculty Advisory Committee

The UBlearns Faculty Advisory Committee provides guidance on issues, policies and technology that impact the UBlearns course management service. The committee represents a broad range of academic interests across the campus community.

Current Committee members are Jason Adsit, Jennifer Austin, Kathleen Boje, Kenneth Ehrenberg, Richard Feero, Peter Horvath, Denise Krause, Teresa Miller, David Murray, Judith Robinson, Thomas Slomka, Lisa Stephens, Robin Sullivan, Athena Tsembelis, Tiffany Walsh, and Jennifer Zirnheld.

For more information, contact Lisa Stephens, Committee Chair, at stephens@buffalo.edu or 645-6522. ■

Campus Pack Learning Community

You are invited to participate in the Campus Pack Learning Community. This UBlearns course site provides a place for UB instructors to collaborate on ways to use the new Campus Pack tools, Journal LX (blogs) and Teams LX (wikis).

Ready to try things out? Follow the steps below to self-enroll:

- Go to UBlearns (ublearns.buffalo.edu) to get started.
- Click on the **User Login** button. Enter your UBITName and Password.
- Click on the **Courses** tab on top.
- Enter "Campus Pack Learning Community" in the Course Search box in the upper left corner and click **Go**.
- Click the **Enroll** button on the right of the course listed as Campus Pack Learning Community. **Note:** Do not click on the title link. If you receive an "Access Denied" error message it is because you clicked on the title link to the course instead of on the Enroll button.
- Click **Submit** and then click **OK**. This completes the enrollment process. ■

UBlearns update is a newsletter for faculty and staff to share knowledge about teaching and learning using UB's centrally supported course management environment. UBlearns Update is a joint publication of the UBlearns Advisory Group, the UBlearns Support Team, The Teaching & Learning Center and Academic Services, Computing and Information Technology. To submit articles for consideration, contact Lisa Stephens (stephens@buffalo.edu).