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This chapter discusses the use of blogs in higher education, including how students and instructors use blogs, the value of blogs in this setting, and privacy and security implications. The chapter also features an examination of the University of Minnesota's UThink blogging system.

Blogging in the Academy

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Blogs are a hot topic in academia. A search on *blog* in the *Chronicle of Education's* Web site returns nearly two hundred articles, covering such topics as the dangers an impolitic blog can do to an institution's leaders (Read, 2006) or the blogger's career (Tribble, 2005) and the mutual use of blogs by instructors to lambaste students (Lipka, 2006) and vice versa (Bartlett, 2005). Although the preoccupation with blogs as either self-destructive (Fogg and Arounauer, 2005) or divisive (Mendelsohn, 2005) would suggest academia is primarily wary of blogs, a few speak to the benefits of blogs to the intellectual community (Farrell, 2005) or teaching and learning (Krause, 2005).

Just as journalists think of blogging as a form of journalism (Grossman, 2004) and young women view blogs as a form of diary (Gumbrecht, Nardi, Schiano, and Swartz, 2004), the archives of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* show that many people in academia view—and judge—blogs as forms of academic production or a vehicle for scholars to become public intellectuals. Marshall McLuhan famously said that people force new media to do the work of the old, but it may be more accurate to say that people simply use familiar media to describe the new. A cross-disciplinary scan of the first ten years of literature on the phenomenon of blogging reveals a dozen such old-media metaphors for blogs: from the journals and op-ed pieces of the print era to the personalized Web indexes and vanity sites that cropped up in the early days of the World Wide Web (Knobel and Lankshear, 2003; Oravec, 2003).

Most of the resources cited in this chapter and many additional resources can be found at and linked to <http://del.icio.us/skutir/academic+blogging>.

One reason that so many metaphors come into play is that blogs, as tools, can be used to a variety of ends. Technologically blogs are simply Web logs: journal-style Web sites organized in reverse chronological order. Their popularity is in their ease of use: most blogs can be created in a few minutes and with very little technical know-how, and they are equally easy to personalize and update. Although describing blogs as tools is all inclusive, it is of limited use in understanding the phenomenon of blogging, which merges and conflates a variety of genres, motives, and audiences (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright, 2004; Miller and Shepard, 2004).

Bloggers of different ages and backgrounds tend to adopt different writing styles when they take up a blog (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright, 2004), to the extent that a professor may have a completely different mental model from students when it comes to blogging. In his *Chronicle* article, Krause (2005) complains that students in his class posted “long, rambling reflections” or “little more than links to other Web sites,” which are actually the dominant writing styles of blogs in practice. Blood (2000) refers to these writing styles, respectively, as the “notebook” and the “filter.” Krause’s disappointment is mild compared to the downright hostility Manjoo (2002) described in *Wired* magazine. His article quotes public complaints that bloggers are “wannabe writers” and features the inception of (now defunct) “antiblog” awards to single out the worst offenders.

From the perspective of one who thinks blogs ought to be a series of more-or-less finished pieces (as Krause does) or that bloggers ought not to say anything if they are not professional writers with interesting perspectives (like those critics Manjoo described), most students are doing it wrong. From another perspective, they are simply doing something else.

One thing that is clear is that a lot of young people are blogging. A recent *EDUCAUSE* report found that nearly 28 percent of college students are bloggers (Salaway and Caruso, 2007) as opposed to 7 percent of adults in the general population (Rainie, 2005). This chapter looks at why students are blogging, what they blog about and why, and who is reading these blogs. It concludes with information on how the University of Minnesota library system has implemented a blogging program to enhance its services.

Students Who Blog

In the spring of 2006, 125 undergraduates with blogs responded to a survey on their reasons for blogging, the nature and extent of their blogging efforts, the perceived audience of their blogs, and the degree to which blogging was a social activity (Scaletta, 2006). The participants were recruited through the front page of UThink, the University of Minnesota blogging tool, and through a number of discussion boards and communities for college students on the social blogging tools LiveJournal and MySpace.

One of the major findings of this survey was confirmation that students do not imagine they are blogging for a large, anonymous public. Most students (77 percent) believed their blog received fewer than thirty readers; a few (7 percent) reported one hundred or more readers. Most students reported e-mails, face-to-face communication, comments, and “friends lists” offered by the software as the main way to determine readership. The reliance on personal exchanges to tabulate readers over anonymous hit counters and Web tracking tools suggests that the audiences are not only small but principally people known to the blogger.

The survey also indicates that most bloggers read about the same number of blogs as they have readers: 79 percent reported a difference of ten or fewer between their estimated number of readers and the number of blogs they read themselves. By far, most student bloggers also maintain a small readership: 80 percent reported thirty or fewer readers. This suggests that student bloggers do not work with a broadcasting or publishing framework, where they disseminate their blog to a large, anonymous public; they are communicating in a loose circle of friends who read one another’s blogs.

The notion that students prefer social blogging is emphasized by the decisions student bloggers make about blogging platforms. Most respondents use blogging platforms with social networking capabilities like LiveJournal and MySpace rather than blogging platforms such as Blogger, WordPress, and Movable Type (the engine of UThink), which lack such capabilities. Mena Trott, cofounder of SixApart, the company that owns LiveJournal and Movable Type, describes LiveJournal as “participatory media,” with no distinction between creators and consumers of content. She describes Movable Type as a tool for “heavy-duty” or “celebrity” bloggers, working more within a traditional publishing framework. (“It’s the Links, Stupid,” 2006). Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated a preference for the participatory model of blogging: 88 percent of respondents were LiveJournal users.

LiveJournal offers advanced social networking features including friends’ lists and sophisticated privacy settings that allow every entry to be released to a specific group of readers. Lists of interests and shared blogs (called communities) allow LiveJournal users to quickly build networks of readers. Unlike most other blogging tools, LiveJournal also threads comments to blog entries in the style of a discussion board, supporting more robust discussion among bloggers and their readers.

More indication that undergraduate bloggers do not crave fame is that many lock down their blogs from the public eye: 38 percent indicate that they password-protect most of their entries, and another 50 percent indicate password-protecting at least some of their entries. In an open-ended question about motivations for blogging, 59 percent indicated contact with friends and family was their main motive, about 20 percent indicated that building community was a motive, and only 5 percent indicated expressing public opinions as a motive.

The notion of blogging as a social activity is also supported by responses to a question about how many readers are considered “friends” by bloggers. Sixty percent reported that most (or all) of their readers were “friends.” The definition of *friend* itself was taken in different ways: 40 percent of respondents indicated they knew few (if any) of those “friends” in real life, while 60 percent knew all or most of their readers in real life.

Students use blogs as social planning tools, announcing or learning about social gatherings and face-to-face events. Most students (75 percent) indicated using blogs to learn about or announce at least one social event, and 40 percent reported doing so at least five times in the past year. Whether they are maintaining contact with established friends and family members or maintaining a network of online friends, it is clear that only a few student bloggers perceive themselves as blogging for the public. Rather, they are blogging directly to people they know.

What students blog about varies. As might be expected, nearly all respondents at least occasionally blog about their everyday life (only one respondent in the Scaletta, 2006, study indicated never doing so), and over 80 percent of the 125 respondents did so once a week or more. A majority (66 percent) reported blogging regularly about their academic and professional interests.

In the “Why We Blog” survey on motivations for blogging, respondents indicated a slight preference for personal blogging, and blogging as a form of social commentary was also a strong motive (Gumbrecht, Nardi, Schiano, and Schwartz, 2004). Far fewer students indicated they regularly use their blog for social or political commentary: only 25 percent report doing so once a week or more, and only 28 percent reported they typically post link-driven entries such as links to news stories with commentary (Scaletta, 2006).

This creates a generalized picture of blogging by students, but it is important to note that blogging, by nature, defies generalization. All bloggers are different (Miller and Shepard, 2004), and most blogs are themselves varied, so attempts to categorize blogs by type are inevitably blurred, as op-ed-style bloggers (those who take up blogging as a way to express political opinions) go off topic into personal entries (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright, 2004), while diary-style bloggers (those who take up blogging to report day-to-day activities) may one day be motivated enough by an event to become a journalist or commentator (Blood, 2000).

Respondents to the Scaletta (2006) survey who have been blogging for less than two years indicated they posted an average of .92 posts per week that are more reflective than mere reporting of day-to-day events (the distinction being left to respondents of what constitutes a more reflective entry). Students who had maintained blogs for two to four years posted an average of 1.8 reflective entries, and students who had maintained blogs for more than four years posted an average of 1.94 reflective entries. This information can be interpreted in different ways, but it does lead us to at least ask if the habit of blogging itself leads to more reflective writing.

It should be noted that the differences are slight, or at least not immediately measurable, between people who have recently taken up blogging and those who have been blogging for years. A blog may not lead immediately to reflective writing, but it may give students an experimental writing space where it becomes more likely with time. One prospect for future research is a longitudinal study following a single group of bloggers through their college careers, with occasional interviews or surveys to establish how well the practice of blogging helps students become more thoughtful or more capable writers.

Scaletta's survey (2006), like the EDUCAUSE report (Salaway and Caruso, 2007), focuses on undergraduate work. The inclusion of graduate students would likely present quite a different picture. For example, whereas UThink is generally not favored by undergraduates, it is quite popular with graduate students. Goetz's commentary, "Do Not Fear the Blog" (2005), confirms a graduate student's disposition to find a middle ground between private diary and public commentary. This indicates that throughout their academic career, bloggers may have a growing sense of themselves as public authors. Here, Goetz describes the transition from private to public blogging:

Initially I was semi-pseudonymous. I blogged under my own name but hid my affiliation until a blogger at another university referred to Harvard as a bastion of grade inflation. I defended my university enthusiastically and thus blew my cover. The sky did not fall. I don't think my small but growing audience even noticed. I did enjoy my status as a graduate-student pundit in history: It was a happy day when "(a)musings of a grad student" became the first thing that popped up when I Googled myself.

Blogging in the Classroom

The ease of blogs make them attractive tools to some instructors for posting announcements, facilitating discussions, or linking to class resources (Downes, 2004; Oravec, 2003); that is, they are used as teacher-driven administrative tools. Other instructors may require students to post to their own or a shared blog, with required (or recommended) structure and content for entries and grading rubric (Krause, 2005). Such assignments seem to be in conflict with the nature of blogs as most students understand them—that is, as personal and experimental writing spaces. Moreover, the Scaletta (2006) survey suggests that the real benefits of blogging are gained slowly, over several years, as students find their voice and become more comfortable with public writing. The desire to measure outcomes after a semester will probably result in the frustration Krause expressed: the learning process is simply slower and more cumulative than that.

This is not to say that instructors should not use blogs in the classroom. As Oravec notes, blogs present a vehicle for students to develop "an autobiographical Internet presence" and "a critical intellectual voice" (2003, p. 22), an opinion that is supported by the data showing students posting

more reflectively over time. Teachers can tap this potential by giving students blogs as a place to “think aloud,” post drafts of papers and get feedback, post links to news stories and other Web content with critical annotations, and practice writing persuasively for a public audience (Knobel and Lankshear, 2003; Oravec, 2003).

As with e-mail (Morrison and Ross, 1998), chatrooms, and bulletin boards (Bauer, 2002), students may flounder in uncertainty without clear expectations and explicit scoring criteria such as rubrics. Teachers also need to be realistic. Students new to writing might need more time than the class allows to become confident and capable with the form.

Field Trips to the Blogosphere. Instructors can make use of the blogosphere by encouraging students to find other blogs by experts in the field and become part of a public conversation. Three technical features of blogs make it quite easy for students to become part of a network of blogs on a particular topic.

First, almost all blogs feature “comment” tools, which allow readers to post feedback to the blog author. These comment tools have a field for the commenter to leave the URL of his or her own blog, so both the blog author and other readers can click to visit the commenter’s blog. Hence, a student who creates a blog on a class topic—say, environmental issues—can find other blogs on environmental issues and post comments on those entries, entering his or her name and blog URL. This may prompt a virtual discussion. Herring and others (2005) illustrate how the interconnectivity of comments on blogs creates clusters of blogs that indicate the truly conversational nature of blogging: “It is notable that in no case did a blog reference another blog only once—all the pairs that engaged in reciprocal referencing did so on multiple occasions, suggesting the existence of a relationship between them, not just a one-time exchange. These findings support the existence of interconnection and conversation in the blogosphere” (p. 10).

Second, if bloggers want to compose a longer and more thoughtful response to another blogger’s entry, or allude to other blogs in a post, they can simply post links to those other blogs in their entry. Bloggers receive “pings,” or notifications, when other blogs link to their own. Bloggers often respond to such notifications, meaning that students who blog in response to experts have a high possibility of inviting that expert back to read and comment on their thoughts. Blood (2004) writes that trackback features “emphasize the conversational nature of the Weblog form” by “making invisible connections visible” and “inviting instant response” (p. 55).

A third feature of blogs that makes it easy to build a network of associations is the “blog roll,” usually a list of similar or related blogs that appears in the sidebar of a blog. For example, a student who starts a blog on a specific environmental issue can find similar blogs and post those links to her blog roll, while requesting those blogs add her own blog to their blog roll. Many bloggers are happy to comply, though the most popular blogs may not be as responsive to these requests.

Participating in real-world networks through comments, trackbacks, and blog rolls may be a motivation for students to invest more energy into their blogs, while more experienced and knowledgeable bloggers will model the kind of intellectual public discourse teachers would like to see their students replicate. Such mature blogging may not be achieved by the end of the class, but the authentic network of associates and the entry point to real-world conversation may be a better long-term outcome than one finished entry.

Value of Weblogs. Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright (2004) published “Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs” in blog form within *Inside the Blogosphere* at the University of Minnesota. Because the form allows comments, an interesting follow-up discussion emerged in which the authors responded to reader questions. Although the original article noted that public discourse on blogs privileges “interesting, important, and/or newsworthy” blogs (“An Apparent Paradox”), it is within these comments that the authors were compelled by readers to consider what measures of success should be used. “Are they valuable as the thing-in-itself,” coauthor Elijah Wright asks, “or is the social interaction between author and reader what is actually being valued? . . . Are blogs valued for their content, or for the connections to a larger social network?”

Wright’s question was meant to apply to personal blogs, but it is no less valid for learning blogs. Instructors may need to revise their outcomes and expectations to help their students enjoy the benefits of blogging. As Oravec (2003) speculates, such outcomes might be “the sustained and continuing interaction among bloggers in critique of [one another’s] efforts,” and the “positioning [of one’s] work in relation to others’ expressions,” in a “highly collaborative” form (p. 26). Such outcomes not only suggest exciting possibilities for blogs in the classroom but align well with blogging as students already understand and practice it.

Safety and Security. The preferred blogging platforms of students provide safety and security features for more personal blogs. For example, LiveJournal allows bloggers to post privately within a circle of approved readers, as well as providing a “friends page,” which aggregates the blogs one chooses to read, helping students read the blogs of everyone in the class without following a series of links. Such private blogging does not make use of the real-world connections described above, but is useful to class activities that lend themselves to a more closed discussion. For example, a cohort of student teachers may benefit more from sharing their experiences with one another than seeking out a public platform, and the protected entries provide a layer of protection to discussions about K–12 classrooms that should be private (the student teachers should still abstain from using real names and other personal details of their students, of course). This password protection can also be used by students who prefer not to have their class work made public. While in some cases this may compromise the purpose of the blog, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA,

2007) indicates that students have a right to suppress all information about themselves, and a private blog (seen only by the instructor) provides a solution to instructors with such students if the outcomes of the blogging activity can still be achieved.

Another option is anonymity. Most blogging tools, even ones without password protection, can conceal the Internet protocol address and actual name of the blog author. Students who exercise their FERPA right to have their identity and association with the class concealed, but are not generally concerned about having their work on the web, can function as public bloggers using a pseudonym known only to the instructor.

Some students have good reason to be concerned about privacy issues, and instructors should be sensitive to those and willing to work around students' needs. That being said, the real-world associations and knowledge-networking opportunities blogs provide students with compelling reasons to consider the advantages of publicity along with concerns about privacy.

UThink: Blogs at the University of Minnesota

During spring 2003, the University of Minnesota Libraries were in a process of determining how to better serve the undergraduate population. As part of that process, they conducted a series of student focus groups where undergraduates were asked how they currently used the libraries and what frustrated them most about the university in general. As part of the feedback, we noted how thankful the students were for being given the opportunity to express their opinions. Based on this response, we started to think of ways undergraduates could easily share their opinions on a regular basis. Blogs seemed to be a perfect fit, especially given their growing popularity among students and the public at large.

Beyond giving undergraduate students a way to voice opinions, it also became clear that blogs could have other uses at the university. Blogs can complement a more formal institutional repository by giving university faculty, students, and staff a place to share both polished and unpolished opinions, research, and views on a wide variety of topics. University community members are already blogging using off-campus services such as Blogger, LiveJournal, and Xanga. While some of this content is of questionable academic value, a great deal of important material is being written on off-campus services that do not share the research and educational missions of the institution. By hosting blogs, the University of Minnesota Libraries could help keep this important content at the university and retain some of the cultural memory of the institution.

Blogs are also being used as a classroom tool to promote and enhance learning at universities around the world. There are many success stories concerning the use of blogs in classroom settings, and some instructors have reported high satisfaction with student interest, learning, and commitment when blogs are part of the classroom learning environment (Downes, 2004).

The University Libraries were excited about the opportunity to explore the connections between blogging and the traditional academic enterprise. In addition, blogs can provide an easy means of expressing an opinion or sharing an idea, and sometimes these ideas or opinions can be controversial. Throughout history, libraries have traditionally defended the principles of intellectual and academic freedom. Libraries have an important role as advocates for those freedoms. In fact, academic libraries have always collected, preserved, and defended controversial content. Within this context, the University of Minnesota Libraries became convinced that blogs would be an excellent opportunity to further demonstrate our role as defenders of intellectual and academic freedom on campus. In summary, UThink began with these goals: to promote intellectual freedom, investigate the use of blogging to enhance class-based learning, and help retain the cultural memory of the institution.

Technology. UThink uses the Movable Type publishing platform to bring blogging to the faculty, staff, and students of the University of Minnesota. Movable Type was selected based on two important needs: the software needed to be able to integrate with the University of Minnesota's central authentication mechanism, and the ability to host multiple blogs on a single installation. In addition, at the time of our selection, Movable Type was free for educational institutions, and it was open source, meaning we could modify it to meet our needs.

Blog creation on UThink takes less than a minute, and it happens on the fly with no administrator intervention, thanks to custom programming to the Movable Type code. Throughout the life of the project, over seventeen thousand users have been registered in the system. To register, a potential user needs a University of Minnesota Internet ID and password. This is the same Internet ID and password that students, faculty, and staff use to access their university e-mail account or the university registration system. When a user logs in for the first time, this person's data are imported into Movable Type from the campus central authentication database. In this way, users do not fill out any forms asking for personal information, and registration and initial blog creation are done relatively quickly.

Who Uses UThink? In summer 2007, ten thousand registered users of UThink were inspected and analyzed. Of these, 60 percent were undergraduate students, 20 percent graduate students, 15 percent staff, 3 percent faculty, and 2 percent guests/unknown. In addition, 56 percent were female and 44 percent male. Finally, of the students (graduate and undergraduate) using the system, approximately 626 majors and disciplines were represented within UThink. Table 5.1 shows the breakdown of registered users by majors and disciplines. Some expected degree programs appear at the top of the list, such as writing-intensive disciplines like English, journalism, and history. In fact, the top ten majors and disciplines on UThink are mostly within the arts and humanities and the social sciences.

Table 5.1. Registered Users of UThink Blogs by Major/discipline

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Major and Discipline</i>	<i>Number of Users</i>
1	English B.A.	213
2	Psychology B.A.	189
3	Political science B.A.	140
4	Journalism B.A.	135
5	Sociology of law/criminal/deviance B.A.	89
6	History B.A.	84
7	Animal science B.S.	84
8	Sociology B.A.	74
9	Applied economics B.S.	74
10	Teaching M.Ed.	70
11	Communication studies B.A.	69
12	Architecture B.A.	68
13	Graphic design B.F.A.	67
14	Biology B.S.	60
15	Art B.A.	59
16	Mathematics Ph.D.	55
17	Foundation of education; Elementary education B.S.	50
18	Family social science B.S.	50
19	Spanish studies	49
20	Public policy M.P.P.	48
21	Environment and natural resources B.S.	48
22	Global studies B.A.	47
23	Environmental science B.S.	46
24	Nutrition B.S.	46
25	Sociology Ph.D.	45

Types of Blogs. When UThink launched in April 2004, it was assumed that personal blogging, or blogging about personal opinions, stories, and ideas, would be the dominant form. This was true in the beginning, but over time, class-based blogging has become the main type of use on the UThink system.

In April 2005, we analyzed active blogs on the system to determine what kinds of blogs were being created. For the purposes of this analysis, we defined an active blog as one that had been updated within the past three months. If a blog was deemed active, it was reviewed and placed into one of four categories:

- Individually authored: Subject matter of a personal nature, with the content being topical, political, or link driven
- Class based: Blogs used in conjunction with a particular course
- Work related: Blogs used in relation to a department or college on campus (for example, to create a departmental newsletter) or blogs by individual authors for work-related topics
- Testing: Blogs created to test the system

Not surprisingly, of the approximately five hundred active blogs in April 2005, 57 percent were personal in nature, 23 percent were class based, 13 percent were work related, and the rest were just there to test the system. We had hypothesized that personal blogging was going to be the dominant form of blogging. However, after three years, there has been a clear shift in the main type of blogging on the system. For example, analyzing blogs on the system again in fall 2006, we found that of approximately 1,000 active UThink blogs, 55 percent were class based. Fall 2007 saw a drop in class blogs to 42 percent out of approximately 850 active blogs, with 27 percent being personally owned and 24 percent being work related. However, it is clear that class-based blogging is the most popular kind of blogging on the system. As is evidenced, blogging in the classroom has received a great deal of attention as it relates to education. The rise in course-related blogging in UThink certainly coincides with this increased attention on the potential of blogs as an educational tool.

Class-Based Blogs. Throughout the life of the project, we have noticed three distinctive types of class-based blogs on the system. The first is instructor-created blogs: instructors create a blog mainly to provide logistical information to a class. The second is student-created blogs: instructors require students to create an individual blog as part of a class assignment. Finally, there are instructor- and student-managed blogs. This type of blog is usually created by the instructor, who then attaches all the students in the class to it. Students and instructors are then both free to create new entries, upload images and files, and comment on entries.

Anecdotally, instructor- and student-managed blogs seem to be the most effective type of class-based blog, especially when the goal is to engage students more in the course content. Individual student-created blogs can be effective, but without some work or encouragement from instructors, these types of blogs are too individual in nature, with only the instructor providing regular feedback. These blogs encourage students to react to what the instructor and their classmates are writing. On this type of blog, some instructors give students the option of writing new entries or commenting on their classmates' existing entries to meet class discussion requirements. Obviously this encourages students to read what their classmates have written and possibly comment on those writings. Feedback from their peers in the form of comments can sometimes be a thrill for students to receive.

Blogs by and for Students. Outside the classroom, UThink blogs have been used to promote student services, groups, news, and events. Over the course of the project, student groups and clubs have used UThink to publicize upcoming events, meeting schedules, and other activities. Departments in the Office for Student Affairs have used blogs to deliver information about student life at the university. Blogs have been created that deal with student orientation, recreation center activities and events, parent programs, and more. They are a natural and easy way to publicize a group or department's

activities and news, and UThink provides the University of Minnesota campus with a centralized and integrated service to do so.

Specific departments also use blogs to deliver news, events, and information to students. For example, the Institute of Technology Student Services (http://blog.lib.umn.edu/itcomm/itup_announce/), the College of Design Student Services (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cdesnews/designstudentnews/>), and the Law School Career and Professional Development Center (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/lawcso/vocare/>) all use UThink heavily for this purpose. In fact, the Law School's blog goes beyond providing news, events, and information in the department to giving students tips and advice on job searching topics such as how to pass the bar exam in certain states or the importance of writing thank-you notes after interviews.

A number of university departments also use UThink blogs to attract new students. The School of Public Health has created a UThink blog that highlights the thoughts and opinions of seven students currently in the program (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/sphpod/sphere/>). Entries on the blog discuss a wide variety of topics, such as school work, extracurricular activities, and living in Minnesota, all told from the viewpoint of a student. The College of Liberal Arts (<http://discovercla.umn.edu/student/meet.html>) and the admissions office at the University of Minnesota Morris (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/admisfa/prospective/>) have similar blogs that use student voices to give a glimpse of what it is like to attend the University of Minnesota in general or as part of a college or department. Blogs such as these not only help encourage prospective students to come to school in Minnesota, they also provide faculty and staff with a way to read about and even comment on student life at the University.

Some of the more thoughtful and compelling blogs on the system discuss student civic engagement activities such as volunteering or leadership activities in the community. As part of various classes, students are required to volunteer, and some of these classes require students to blog about their experiences as volunteers. UThink has a large number of these writings and reflections from students who have volunteered at nursing homes, homeless shelters, and hospitals, for example. Learning outside the classroom is an important student outcome at the University of Minnesota, and it is exciting to see this activity documented and available for others to read and be inspired by.

A number of programs and classes dealing with leadership issues have also used UThink throughout the life span of the project. For example, the University of Minnesota's Co-Curricular Leadership Programs effort Leader-Quest has a UThink blog that documents the activities of this group and provides commentary and links for further reading (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/leader/leaderquest/>). Of course, this is but one example of the potential of using blogs to share opinions and viewpoints concerning leadership and similar topics in a university setting. One of the more important blogs to appear on UThink was written by the former vice president for public

engagement and included thoughtful commentary on university leadership and engagement opportunities in the community (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/victor/publicengagement/>). Although this blog is no longer being updated, it nevertheless demonstrates the potential for blogging as a tool to provide university faculty, staff, and students an easy way to share their opinions and viewpoints on these important topics.

Interesting Details. Since UThink was unveiled in April 2004, some interesting and unexpected details have emerged about the service.

Site Statistics. In comparing UThink server statistics with other servers operated by the University of Minnesota Libraries, we have found that UThink is by far the most heavily accessed. The main library Web site, www.lib.umn.edu, averages about 54,000 page views per day. The UThink system, blog.lib.umn.edu, averages about 135,000 page views per day. We were quite surprised by these statistics. Search engine indexing of these pages and hits coming from search engine results to these pages certainly account for a large amount of the activity on the server. Because UThink blogs are so heavily indexed on Web search engines, the University of Minnesota Libraries are presented with an interesting marketing opportunity. Thousands of people around the world are searching for and ultimately reading content provided through the University of Minnesota Libraries. This phenomenon can be used to publicize the university and its activities better.

Google PageRank. Google in particular gives UThink blogs extremely high page rankings. For example, if a student uses UThink to blog, that blog is usually at the top of a Google search for the student's name. We have theorized that Google gives pages it thinks come from an educational institution or from a library ("blog.lib.umn.edu") a higher page rank. While some students are both amazed and troubled by this, we could also market this as an opportunity for students to better manage their virtual identity. As is discussed above and in Chapter Six in this volume on privacy, stories abound of potential employers seeing inappropriate pictures or reading less-than-flattering stories about applicants based on Google searches. Students might conceivably put their best foot forward by using UThink blogs to post a résumé, samples of their best writing, or pictures of their graduation. Given UThink's high page rank, future employers may see these student blogs first and develop a good initial impression about a student or recently graduated applicant.

Support. UThink support is provided by one full-time employee for about two hours a day. This support is one of the most important aspects of the service. One area in which UThink is better than off-campus services like Blogger or LiveJournal is the support offered to users. Although we have tried to make the system as easy to use as possible, questions do arise, and we try to answer these questions quickly and comprehensively. This kind of support is something that other blogging services cannot provide at the same level as UThink.

Intellectual Freedom. Over the course of the UThink project, controversial entries have been published on the system. Surprisingly, though, requests for the removal of content have been sparse. Approximately five removal requests have been made in the past three years. On one occasion, a student blogger wrote some negative comments about a local business. The student's blog entry soon reached the top of Google's search results for a search for that business. The business demanded that the entry be removed and threatened potential legal action. In compliance with university policy on academic freedom, the University Libraries refused to remove the content, and the threatened legal action proved to be a bluff. Fortunately, the University Libraries have never been forced to take down content by anyone from within or outside the university. As guardians of intellectual freedom, the University Libraries have encouraged people to write what they want when they want to, without fear of institutional restraint. Users have been supported when necessary.

Future Plans. UThink will upgrade to version 4.2 of Movable Type, the blogging software used by the system, during the 2008-2009 academic year. Along with this upgrade, it is hoped that the following enhancements to the system will be made:

- The creation of class-related blogs made easier. Currently professors and instructors must attach students to class-based blogs by hand. In the future, we hope to connect UThink to the University of Minnesota course registration system so that professors can easily create course blogs and attach registered students to them.
- To better comply with FERPA, we plan to extend UThink's ability to password-protect blogs. Currently it is possible to password-protect a blog, but the blog owner must have a certain level of technical expertise to make it work or ask for further assistance from UThink support or other instructional technology experts on campus.
- Enhance the file management features of the system, especially for uploaded files. Movable Type comes with the ability to easily upload files, but it expects users will have access to uploaded files through other means (such as SFTP) that UThink does not provide due to server security constraints. We need to improve our file management functionality in order to better serve users in making podcasts or videos.
- Along those same lines, other University of Minnesota departments have begun to create some new applications to help faculty, staff, and students manage and distribute multimedia files on campus. This includes media sharing systems like Media Mill from the College of Liberal Arts (<http://mediamill.cla.umn.edu/mediamill/>) and GopherTV (<http://gophertv.micro.umn.edu/gophertv/>). We hope to strengthen our ties to these systems by allowing quick publishing of multimedia files from these systems to UThink and allowing UThink users to upload large multimedia files to these systems for better file management capabilities.

With UThink: Blogs at the University of Minnesota, the University Libraries host blogs for the entire University of Minnesota, including campuses in Duluth, Crookston, and Morris, for a total of eighty thousand potential users. UThink launched in April 2004. As of the writing of this chapter, it hosts well over eight thousand individual blogs and over one-hundred thousand individual entries, and it has over seventeen thousand registered users. This use makes it one of the largest academic blogging sites in the United States. Other universities and colleges that also have campuswide blogging initiatives are the University of Michigan (<http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/>), Case Western Reserve University (<http://blog.case.edu/>), and Harvard University (<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/>), among others.

Conclusion

At the heart of the University of Minnesota campus is the Washington Avenue Bridge, a double-decker bridge that spans the Mississippi River. The upper level is a pedestrian crossing, with a shelter that runs the length of the bridge.

The inside of the covered walkway has always featured official murals by student groups, but used to have a graffiti blur of comments and annotations. The bridge was cacophonous and intertextual, with curt exchanges about religion, politics, and social issues. It was difficult to walk across it without getting caught up in the dialogue. Each layer of fresh paint buried the discussion of the previous year. An enterprising archaeologist may have been able to strip away the paint and delve into institutional history layer by layer.

This archaeological record was destroyed when campus beautification efforts stripped it clean and repainted it a tidy maroon and gold. In a way, UThink has taken its place as the anything-goes medium at the heart of the campus. Like the bridge, it provides student groups, departments, and other organizations a way to present an official promotional front to the campus, as well as supporting individual, even guerrilla, self-expression. It supports intertextuality through comments, trackbacks, and blog rolls. UThink also has innumerable hyperlinks to and from the rest of the Web, making it as much a hub for Internet traffic as the Washington Avenue Bridge is for motor and pedestrian traffic.

But UThink is much more, providing depth of content and a historical record that are impossible in a physical space. It supports podcasts, embedded video, scanned or digitally created images, and tacit links to news stories and other media. It hosts a plethora of nascent genres, even within academic culture: rostra for public intellectuals, personal diaries, transparent social networks, records of personal achievements, and so forth.

There are unanswered questions about how these nascent genres will grow as blogs enter their second decade or how the power of self-publishing balances with issues related to privacy, intellectual property, and liability. One thing is clear: a centralized blogging service within the university provides a valuable communication tool to all of its constituents, while capturing a

fascinating historical record of university life and thought that is as varied and complicated as the university itself.

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