CIT Monthly News and Events
October 3, 2008

In This Edition

- Upcoming CIT events for October
- Duke–RENCI Center Open House, October 14, 2008
- ScienceOnline conference, January 2009
- Mellon Seminars in Digital Humanities
- Teach Philosophy 101 website
- Online library instruction for Chemistry lab sections
- Flexible e−reader from Plastic Logic
- Bb tip: Student groups in Blackboard
- UMW Blogs (guest blog post by Jim Groom, Univ. of Mary Washington)

Upcoming CIT events and workshops: October 2008

10/3/2008 Tablet PC Discussion Group
10/7/2008 Teaching IDEAS: Duke Undergraduates: What every TA ought to know
Teaching in Flexible Learning Spaces
Electronic teaching portfolios: part 3 of 3
10/8/2008 Electronic teaching portfolios: part 3 of 3
Effective Use of Student Groups in Class
10/15/2008 Faculty Toolbox: Collaborative Document Editing with Google Docs
Managing Long Documents MS Word
10/16/2008 Faculty Toolbox: Collaborative Document Editing with Google Docs
10/17/2008 Distance Learning Lunch: Communicating Over the Web with Adobe Connect
10/20/2008 Teaching IDEAS: Academic Skills & Campus Resources for Undergraduates
10/22/2008 Blackboard Advisory Group Meeting

To learn more or to register for any workshop, visit http://cit.duke.edu/events/calendar.do.

RENCI Open House 10/14/2008

The Duke University Renaissance Computing Institute (RENCI) invites you to its premier Open House, featuring its newly completed research environments.

Tuesday October 14, 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Remarks by Provost Peter Lange at 3:15 pm
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OIT Telecommunications Building
390 Science Drive, Suite 106
West Campus, Duke University
Directions [http://www.renci.org/about/duke.php](http://www.renci.org/about/duke.php)


RSVP to Marilyn Lombardi, Director, Duke–RENCI Center: 919.681.9628 or marilyn@renci.org.

Register now for ScienceOnline

Register now for ScienceOnline! This free, local, participatory conference will explore science on the web. The goal is to bring together scientists, bloggers, educators, students, journalists and others to discuss, demonstrate and debate online strategies and tools for promoting the public understanding of science.

This conference is filled with great people, exciting ideas and inspiration. In previous years, we learned about science communication, open access publishing, science careers and science blogging. See (and contribute to) the tentative schedule for this year, see last year’s schedule, read my too–extensive notes from last year’s conference, or see other reports, pictures and video from last year.

See you there: January 16–18, 2009 at the Sigma Xi Center in Research Triangle Park.

Mellon Seminars in Digital Humanities

During this academic year, nine Mellon Seminars in Digital Humanities taking place at UCLA in real life (RL), will be “broadcast” via live feed into the Digital Library Federation’s (DLF) Second Life (SL) island, Entropia. Anyone interested is welcome to attend in Second Life.

This year’s seminar is co–organized by Jeffrey Schnapp (Stanford University, Stanford Humanities Laboratory, and Mellon Visiting Professor of Digital Humanities, UCLA) and Todd Presner (Germanic Languages and Comparative Literature, UCLA). The seminar’s theme is “What is(n’t) Digital Humanities?”

Through dialogues with expert guest interlocutors and practitioners from various fields, seminar participants will examine, historicize, and critique the emergent field of “digital humanities.” Bringing together insights from media, game, literary and cultural studies, we will attempt to take stock of humanistic inquiry at the start of the 21st century.

Topics will include Web 2.0, virtual worlds, ubiquitous computing, geo–temporal navigation, participatory media, digital narratives, open source knowledge, collaborative authorship, experiential design and the classroom as laboratory.


The following Second Life URL will teleport you to DLF’s Entropia, though you must have a Second Life account in order to log on: [http://slurl.com/secondlife/Entropia/110/117/21/](http://slurl.com/secondlife/Entropia/110/117/21/). Basic Second
Life accounts are free: http://secondlife.com/.

For more information visit http://www.digitalhumanities.ucla.edu/ or join the UCLA Digital Humanities Facebook Group. Topics for each session will be posted on-line once they have been finalized.

**Teach Philosophy 101**

In the current issue, the Chronicle of Higher Education profiles a comprehensive online resource, Teach Philosophy 101.

The site includes materials on planning a course, creating tests and assignments, creating engaging lectures and discussions and even “change of pace exercises” to “break up the routine” of your class. Recommendations on the site include references to research materials and links for more information.

The author of the site, John Immerwahr, of Villanova University, hopes that the basic framework of the site can be used to create similar online resources in other disciplines.

**Camtasia and Blackboard: Distributing library instruction to multiple general chemistry lab sections**

Melinda Box and Anne Langley (Chemistry) have used Camtasia screen recording software to create a video to teach students how to find chemistry information online. The video demonstrations have freed the instructors from having to do the exact same demonstrations for each of 38 laboratory sections, while providing information to which students can refer later, and will allow the instructors to provide more personalized attention to students. More information about their project is here: http://cit.duke.edu/ideas/projects/2008/08/06/libvideo/. Faculty may apply for a Camtasia license from the Duke Digital Initiative at http://dukedigitalinitiative.duke.edu/tools. Camtasia also has a free 30 day trial: http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp.

**Plastic Logic demonstrates flexible ereader**

Plastic Logic has demonstrated a new ereader made of lightweight flexible plastics, giving us a glimpse at the next generation of these portable devices. The ereader, which is expected to go on the market in early 2009, is wireless and handles books, Word, PowerPoint, Excel and PDF documents and can be set up for newspaper subscriptions. It’s much lighter and thinner than the current generation Sony Reader and Kindle and features a larger 8.5 in x 11 in display, based on technologies developed by Cambridge University.

You can see pictures of the Plastic Logic ereader and read more details in this blog post from engadget and the official announcement at the company’s website.

**Bb Tip: Collaborate on projects and papers with Bb groups**

http://blackboard.duke.edu/help/groups.html

If you want to divide a large class into groups small enough to manage and collaborate on projects and papers, you can use the Blackboard Groups feature. To do so, log into Blackboard and go to the course you want to use the groups for. Then, go to the course Controls tab and click on Groups. Under the Choose how you will manage this group drop-down menu, select “Select groups from a list.” Under the Group List tab, choose the groups you want to use from the existing list and click on Apply. You can then add students to the groups as needed.
and papers, or you just want a private space separate from the rest of the class, you can via Blackboard Groups to set up groups and add your students to groups. Within a group, students have access to a private discussion board, chat tool and document exchange area.

To explore and discover additional Blackboard features, see the Blackboard support website. If you need a tutorial for the Blackboard group tool, request an office visit and we will come to you.

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**The UMW Blogs Story: Guest blog with UMW’s Jim Groom**

The University of Mary Washington (UMW) has been getting attention for their proactive approach to using blogs (often in innovative and unexpected ways) for all sorts of academic ends, including the delivery of course materials, student projects, etc. I contacted Jim Groom, an Instructional Technology Specialist at UMW, to find out more about the efforts that he and others have undertaken in order to make blogs an effective part the UMW technology culture. Through a series of email discussions, we decided that this post should actually come from the source. I provided the questions as a basic starting point, but I’m sure you’ll find Jim’s responses, as well as the many examples and links he provides, both useful and insightful.

**Q: Tell us about UMW Blogs. When did it start? What was the decision process?**

UMW Blogs is quite simply a web–based publishing platform for the Mary Washington academic community. The distinction between a blog and a more loosely defined publishing platform is actually important because while some people on UMW Blogs use it for what is commonly thought of as blogging, many more use it for a wide range of purposes that often don’t quite match the underlining logic of a blog (see Ten ways to use UMW Blogs for examples). So to call it a series of blogs in many ways doesn’t capture the more complex reality, it’s more akin to a dynamic online publishing space for students, staff, and faculty alike.

The official birth date of UMW Blogs is August 27th, 2007, but unlike Athena it didn’t just jump from the head of Zeus one day. It came out of numerous iteration cycles with a variety of free and open source applications. It was born out of a culture of experimentation at UMW more generally, and the Division of Teaching and Learning Technologies (DTLT) specifically. Our "sandbox" approach to exploring educational technologies embraced the best tools already freely available on the web (which were not necessarily limited to open source solutions) for sharing videos, images, bookmarks, and documents such as YouTube, Flickr, and delicious, and Writely (which is now Google Docs).

I think the driving logic behind the experiment was to imagine what takes place in the classroom at a university as not removed from what is happening already on the wide open web more generally, but rather in constant dialogue with the conversations and resources that already exist out on the web. The move towards ‘openness’ (the networked approach of thinking and sharing openly on the web) with these Web 2.0 tools at UMW was not so much premised on a pre–determined ideological impetus, but a push for developing the best framework for sharing resources and publishing easily on the web for an entire intellectual community. In many ways openness comes as a serendipitous extension of such a framework, illustrating the point that the architecture of most Course Management Systems (and university websites more generally) are built upon a vision of controlling an image and locking down ideas rather than sharing and opening them up to the world at large. Openness is as much a function of design as it is of any set of beliefs. One might truly desire to be open, but have no means through the web–based publishing tools provided by their campus’s IT department to truly enable the kind of access requisite for allowing others to both find and re–purpose their work and ideas easily.

One of the things we really like about UMW Blogs is it allows people throughout the community to take ownership of their own work, they control their space to some great extent. For example, they
take ownership of their own work, they control their space to some great extent. For example, they can use their blogs for personal reflection, to frame an eportfolio (here's a nice student example), they can delete their own work at will, and export their data on the fly and re-import it to their own space, or a commercial blogging system like Blogger or WordPress.com. Moreover, this “syndicated framework” we are using allows instructors and students who are using external applications to easily add their RSS feeds to UMW Blogs so that their work can become part of the searchable and discoverable flow of data. [CIT note – for more on Really Simple Syndication see CIT's page on RSS aggregators or watch RSS in Plain English] That is the key, don’t try and create a space that locks anyone in to one university tool, rather build a system that can, to quote Whitman, “contain multitudes.” This idea of empowering the community with their own tools for framing the work they do during their time at UMepitomizes DTLT’s approach to instructional technologies. One practice that has highlighted the importance of managing and developing your voice online has been UMW Blogs’s ability to pull together all the individual threads from individual blogs into a larger, syndicated (or is it syncopated?) chorus of learning on campus. UMW Blogs has brought us closer to that vision than we have been heretofore, but there is still a ways to go. Nonetheless, after three years of one–off WordPress blogs and MediaWiki installations, the move towards a larger, integrated campus–wide publishing platform was as much a necessity as it was an experiment.

Q: Does UMW blogs take the place of a standard Learning Management System (LMS) for UMW?

No, it doesn’t replace our standard Learning Management System (LMS) which is Blackboard Basic. UMW Blogs is not a mandate from the administration. In fact, we’re still trying to make sure everyone knows it’s very much an experimental space. Despite this fact, the interest has been so great that it has become a de facto enterprise system simply based on numbers: we currently have 1,954 users on campus (out of a population of roughly 4,000), and more than 1,800 blogs. Those numbers are far more than the 100 or 200 blogs we were hoping for last fall.

The growth has been phenomenal and much of that might be because the system is not mandated, nor is it cordoned off for a special few. Such facts have no small impact on the community that uses UMW Blogs. It’s active, variegated, experimental, and highly entertaining. Over the last 12 months over 75 UM faculty have signed up for UMW Blogs, and almost 100 courses have used (or are currently using) this publishing platform in some fashion. And I stress ‘in some fashion’ for often no two courses use it the same exact way, much like the fact that no two professors teach in the same exact way.
For example, Dr. Gardner Campbell's Milton Seminar this summer has pushed the limits for his class by encouraging students to use their own blogs, and pulling (or feeding) their work into a central aggregated course blog. Professor Steve Greenlaw's freshman seminar on Globalization is an excellent example of a distributed course site using all kinds of tools like Wordpress.com, Flickr, del.icio.us, and YouTube. Professor Mara Scanlon's Asian American Literature course blog used the tool as a space where students could choose where they did the work, and built the course resources (such as a syllabus, assignments, etc.) around the active blog space. Professor Sue Fernsebner's Cultural History of Late 20th Century China provides a centralized course space for the professor to publish announcements and reading questions while at the same time providing pages for tracking all the students' research blogs. Professor John Morello has used the space for his speech course to allow his class to share and comment on each others' video-taped speeches. Our provost, Nina Mikhalevsky, has been using UMW Blogs for two of her course sites (one here, and the other here) for both sharing course materials and creating a dynamic forum via the blog posts. Additionally, Professor Steven Gallik is using UMW Blogs as digital laboratory notebooks for his Cell Biology course, harnessing the power of syndication for his Online Laboratory suite (find out more about this project here).

Yet, all that said it does not replace our LMS because there are several things it cannot do (all of which might be more of a blessing than a curse):

* It cannot integrate into Banner and other institutional data systems.
* It cannot provide pre-populated lists of students and courses for professors.
* You cannot have a testing/quizzing module, nor do you have a grade book.

The logic behind UMW Blogs is a loosely coupled system that gives the community the ability to publish and share online, it is not (nor do we necessarily believe it should be) contorted to meet the administrative concerns that are often better dealt with by course management systems.

Finally, in terms of the hosting and administration of UMW Blogs, it is hosted off campus and for the first year it was on a shared server and cost us $30 a month. This year we have it on a dedicated server with nightly backups to an alternate site and it currently costs us about $400 a month. And if a campus wanted to offload the hosting and maintenance entirely, James Farmer's EduBlogs Campus might be an excellent, cost–effective alternative. The cost of any campus publishing endeavor like this should be far more in terms of people working with the faculty and students for imagining ways of using these tools rather than infrastructure and administrative overhead. How about that for a cost effective and sustainable model in these troubled economic times!

Q: What have the general faculty and student reactions been?

So far, the reviews have been rather favorable, and the number of people using it might be one indication of this. The dialogue around the tool is wide open, and we are constantly getting feedback about tweaking things and ironing out some interface issues. But most of the conversations center around how to further push the limits of using this space for teaching and learning, which might suggest we have gotten beyond the question of whether or not it's functional and onto the issues of how we can make it even better as a space for syndicating the amazing stuff happening around campus.

In many ways the range of faculty has been interesting. It isn't simply the most tech savvy folks are using UMW Blogs, as is often the case with new media. Rather, it has attracted those faculty who want to do something online, and want it to be both simple and aesthetically pleasing. This is where such a system has become a tremendous asset for the professors. It is often no harder than writing an email, and the ability for them to maintain full control over their space and make it look the way they want has made it very appealing to a wide range of people. This includes working committees.
they want has made it very appealing to a wide range of people. This includes working committees, staff organizations, student organizations, and faculty who want to create online resources for their professional presentations and research. It has offered a low-threshold entry point for many who have been previously uncomfortable with the web, while providing the room for experimentation and customization that keeps those who understand the web intimately continually intrigued and engaged.

Q: Since many of the blogs are public, how do you deal with privacy concerns? Along that same thread – have any of the blogs received ‘outside’ attention/feedback/collaboration?

Keep in mind that making blogs public or not is determined on a case-by-case basis by the user. Not everything published on UMW Blogs is open, and every person controls the extent to which others see what they create. This is essential to the logic of such a system. We wanted to put as much responsibility and control in the hands of those managing their own space as possible. The logic behind the model is that someone who wants to share their work freely can do so as easily as someone who wants to control who sees their work. What is radical about this is the idea of choice built into the system; the ability of controlling permissions and access in LMSs and CMSs is often far more difficult than it should be.

That said, I would imagine most of the sites are open to the public, but that has less to do with the system than the culture. It is made easier given our choice of platforms, but the faculty and students often understand this space as a resource made freely available as part of the mission of a public university. Below I’ll point to a few of the class projects that have intentionally created resources for the world at large:

* **Jeff McClurken’s Digital History course** sites researched created by students have become heavily trafficked resources by the local community (check out the Historical Markers student site);

* **Marie McCallister’s Eighteenth-Century Audio** have become a resource that has collected and contributed hundreds of audio files to the internet more generally;

* **Claudia Emerson’s Literary Journals** project that provides students the ability to envision, solicit entries and create a web-based literary journal over the course of a semester.

If you followed any of the links above, you may have noticed that many of these sites are not blogs at all, but dynamic websites for publishing research, media, and creative works for the world at large.

Q: In terms of the various uses your faculty are making of UMW Blogs in teaching, is the main thing the platform (i.e., WordPress specifically makes so many things possible) or the concept (i.e., blogs are by nature flexible)?

The application we are using, WordPress Multi-User, is indeed a blogging engine, but we have found its open-ended possibilities and simplicity make it far more. It’s a highly flexible and accessible platform that the UMW community can use for anything from publishing dynamic personal web pages to sharing audio and video on the fly to framing eportfolios.
pages to managing courses, or sharing audio and video on the fly to framing eportfolios. So, its ease-of-use and built-in syndication works well for what we are trying to accomplish, and hence was the tool of choice.

All that said, the concept of an open and flexible syndicated publishing platform is far more important than any one application. Moreover, the willingness of faculty and students to experiment has been the key element for something like UMW Blogs to garner the impressive response and buy-in we have had over the past year. Part of the genius of this system is that additional functionality comes at no extra cost. More importantly, such a system encourages faculty and students to explore the framework and think about what they would like to see and go out and find it. In that very act there is a different relationship to how you frame the educational experience online.

To read an expanded version of this post, visit Jim Groom's personal blog.