Teaching with Blogs: 
Advice from a Student

Profile of an “AVERAGE” Duke Student:

Academics: Public Policy Studies Major, English Minor, MMS Certificate 3rd year / Junior

Classes with Blogs:
- English 144 – Shakespeare after 1600
- English 179 – Experience of being Foreign
- PPS116D – Policy Choice & Value Conflict
- ISIS120S – Your Brain on the Internet

Class Blog Tools Used:
- Blackboard Discussion Tool
- Blackboard Blog Tool
- WordPress (OpenSource)

Other Experience with Blogs:
- Shopping Blog on Wordpress
- Tried MySpace, Xanga
### Why Blogs DON’T work

1) **Blogs fall into a black hole**
   Teachers, TAs, and discussion leaders need to recognize and respond to blog posts. Blogs are supposed to be a medium for collaboration and discussion.

2) **Blogs are not relevant to class or have no structure**
   Blogs explore questions that are not related to classroom material or they are too open ended that they generate little response.

3) **There are unrealistic expectations**
   Teachers actually want essays in blog format, discouraging students to share their thoughts and ideas.

### How Blogs CAN work

1) **People involved RESPOND!**
   Teachers and TAs can help encourage responses by taking the time to respond or comment publicly, online, or in class. Remember, blogs are inherently social.

2) **There is proper incentive**
   Students live by grades, it’s the ugly truth. Also, assigning a grade shows that teachers also think blogs are important to the class.

3) **Provide an easy mechanism**
   - Easy-to-use tools to facilitate use and also discussion (we are lazy)
   - Provide structure for collaboration

### Effectively using Blackboard

#### FACILITATING DISCUSSION

Generally, it is easier to facilitate a discussion by asking questions that give the blog entries structure and purpose.

Open-ended blogs can also work, they just might require more teacher / TA engagement with the students.

#### STRUCTURING COLLABORATION

Structure of the blog must be easy to use: meaning it is easy to see posts and easy to comment

- Blackboard Blog tool >> bad
- Blackboard Discussion tool >> better
Credits to the CIT Live Twitter Feed

- Social networking aspect is fun, helps to open it up. More likely to get comments.

- difficult to make blogs easy to use, because "profs have to use what's out there". She's not a fan of Blackboard-based blogs.

- "This is your brain on the Internet" used WP "a lot cooler". Didn't use Bb at all, just WP, and she preferred the "real" look/feel.

- Implement tools in the classroom that mimic tools people use outside the classroom. Blackboard tries to do that & doesn't succeed.

- Effective Bb use: prefers the Bb discussion board to the blog tool, which she hates, finds hard to navigate, so students won't use.

- She was invited to do this presentation because of her post on HASTAC about how profs should use digital tools.

Credits to the CIT Live Twitter Feed

- audience q: what about sending students to "real" blogs on the Web? student: topics might not be appropriate, but could work.

- audience q: incentives for students to blog if there's no grade? (MPS blog) student: difficult, if you don't think anyone's reading.

- audience q: how long to get WP blog set up? student: 10 mins for individual blog, maybe a week for course blog.

- audience q: are you easily distracted using Web while doing research? student: all students multitask all the time. you deal.

- audience q: thoughts about using many different tools? student: no problem, kinda cool, but want one place for official course info.

- audience q: would you use full public blog? student: public is fine. Individual WordPress was easy to install/use.

- faculty q: why don't like Bb blog? student: hard to navigate, text heavy, have to scroll 2 much. Comments hard to find & no one sees.