ROUND-UP 2: BLOGS AND OTHER E-TOOLS FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

This is our second round-up of reports on incorporating blogging and other "e-formats" into the classroom, particularly the women's studies classroom. Our first one appeared in *Feminist Collections* v.27, nos.2–3 (Winter–Spring 2006), available at **http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/22258**, and was itself a follow-up to "Blog This! an Introduction to Blogs, Blogging, and the Feminist Blogosphere," by Vicki Tobias (*Feminist Collections* v.26, nos.2–3, Winter–Spring 2005), available at **http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/22243**.

We will continue to publish reports from time to time about how instructors are using new information technologies and social networking in women's studies. If you have something to contribute, please contact us at **wiswsl@library.wisc.edu**.

COMMUNITY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: THEORY THROUGH PRACTICE

by Elizabeth M. Curtis

A brief visit to *Blogher.com's* "Research, Academia, and Education" blogroll[1] reveals that many women's and gender studies practitioners have taken their scholarly work online through weblogs. Feminist scholars maintain personal and individual blogs, like *BitchPh.D*[2] and *CultureCat: Rhetoric, and Feminism*,[3] and also participate in academic community blogs, such as *Feminist Law Professors*.[4] Women's and gender studies students at various stages in their academic careers also participate in scholarly blogging. They share personal and political musings, as can be seen on *Blac(k)Academic*,[5] and document their scholarly projects, as Jennifer Noveck[6] and K.M. Aase[7] illustrate. Students also contribute to weblogs as a part of their coursework, whether they create their own blogs, like those listed on *Blogging in College: The Gender & Pop Culture Blog Experiment*,[8] or collectively author a single class blog, like *Varieties of Feminist Theory*.[9]

As a previous round-up in *Feminist Collections* has revealed,[10] weblogs provide strong pedagogical tools for women's and gender studies practitioners. By bringing blogs into the classroom as a novel forum for course work and discussion, instructors can help students practice important skills for critical analysis, writing proficiency, and technological literacy while also strengthening their classroom community and creating a space to continue in-class conversations that were cut short by time restrictions. By bringing classrooms to the blogosphere, instructors initiate an expansion of the discussion of feminist theory from the isolation of the academy to public debate.

Here I would like to concentrate on my own experiences using weblogs, as a student and as an instructor, to highlight the important ways in which blogs can bring conversations about feminist theory beyond the classroom and unite individuals in powerful coalitions. Feminist scholars not only connect with other academics and activists (and academic activists), but also have the opportunity to exchange ideas with individuals around the world with whom they may not otherwise have been able to engage.

As graduate teaching assistant for Professor Cynthia's Deitch's undergraduate "Varieties of Feminist Theory" (WSTU 125) course at the George Washington University, I was able to experiment with using blogs as a space for enriching class participation. Students collectively authored *Varieties of Feminist Theory* and posted book and film reviews of assigned materials, analyses of popular culture, opinion pieces and personal narratives, and requests for input from others about their various theoretical questions. This blog achieved its goal "to expand conversations about feminist theory beyond the classroom" when it gained visibility in the feminist blogosphere and was highlighted in the 36th *Carnival of Feminists*.[11] Through weblogging, students not only gained a sense of the breadth of the feminist blogosphere and feminist communities on- and off-line, but also bonded as a scholarly community, both when they invoked each other's postings in the classroom or referred to each others' in-class insights in their Web writing, and when Web-savvy students tutored students less familiar with blogging software.

As a graduate student, I incorporated blogging into my M.A. thesis project, in which I explored the promise that the blogosphere holds for social activism based on networking and information sharing and the limitations and barriers it presents to those attempting to effect social change.[12] I based my analysis on my experiences participating in the feminist blogosphere via my own blog, *A Blog Without a Bicycle: Riding the Cyberwave of Feminism*,[13] and the insight I gained through interviews with other feminist bloggers. My research was supported and enriched by feminist bloggers through peer review, interview participation, insightful commentary, and general encouragement. My blog not only served as an important research tool, but was also a source of catharsis and inspiration.

To conclude, I would like to use one personal experience to highlight the way in which blogging can create supportive scholarly and feminist communities. When I was at a point in my thesis writing process where I felt stymied and stagnant, I received the following email from an individual who had been reading *A Blog Without a Bicycle*:

> Dear Elizabeth,
> I am just a lowly undergraduate student who is majoring in gender studies and government.
> I have spent the past two years attempting to explain to my family and friends (and myself)
> what the hell I plan to do with a Gender Studies degree . . . So imagine my surprise when
> I was randomly googling women's studies and law topics on my computer and it pulled up
> the George Washington University website where (gasp) they offer a joint degree in women's
> studies and law! . . . Anyway while I was exploring the site I stumbled upon your page and I
> thought that it was the smartest, funniest most honest website that I have ever encountered.
> Me thinks you are my new "her-o" (which is a million times better than being a he-ro). Keep
> up the good work!!!!
> Take care,
> Your apprentice,
> Ej =)[14]

I am sharing this piece of "fan mail" not to brag about my sense of success in this project, but to highlight the way in which the feminist networks that form in cyberspace are powerful both personally and politically. For Ej, *A Blog Without a Bicycle* offered encouragement in her or his own personal academic endeavors, and Ej's email provided me with motivation from a new sense that my research on feminism in cyberspace was important — to individuals, to communities, and to mainstream culture. I hope that the use of blogs in women's and gender studies classrooms will allow many more students, practitioners, activists, and individuals to experience such mutual *Aha!* moments.

Notes

1. *Blogher.com*, **http://blogher.org/blogroll/research-academia-and-education-blogs?from=0**.

2. *BitchPh.D.*, **http://bitchphd.blogspot.com**.

3. *Culture Cat: Rhetoric and Feminism*, **http://culturecat.net**.

4. *Feminist Law Professors*, **http://feministlawprofs.law.sc.edu**.

5. *Blac(k)ademic*, **http://blackademic.com**.

6. *Jennifer Noveck*, **http://www.nurenxintan.com**.

7. *Blogging with Balls*, **http://blogwithballs.blogspot.com/index.html**.

8. *Blogging in College: The Gender & Pop Culture Blog Experiment*, **http://genderpopculture.blogspot.com**.

9. *Varieties of Feminist Theory*, **http://feministvarieties.blogspot.com**.

10. "Round-Up: Blogging Women's Studies," in *Feminist Collections* v.27, nos. 2–3 (Winter–Spring 2006), pp.15–21; **http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/22258**.

11. 36th *Carnival of Feminists*, **http://fetchmemyaxe.blogspot.com/2007/04/carnival-of-feminists-36_19.html**.

12. The full text of this manuscript is available at **http://ablogwithoutabicycle.blogspot.com**.

13. *A Blog Without a Bicycle: Riding the Cyberwave of Feminism*, **http://ablogwithoutabicycle.blogspot.com**.

14. Ej, in email message to author, February 28, 2007. An excerpt from this email appears here; the full text is available at **http://ablogwithoutabicycle.blogspot.com/2007/03/blog-love.html**.

[*Elizabeth M. Curtis recently graduated with an M.A. in women's studies from the George Washington University, where her M.A. thesis focused on blogging and the creation of feminist networks online (the full text of her thesis is available at **http://ablogwithoutabicycle.blogspot.com**). Currently, Elizabeth continues blogging and serves as a program coordinator at the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership (**http://www.woodhull.org**).*]

TECHNOLOGIES AND PEDAGOGY: HOW YOUTUBING, SOCIAL NETWORKING, AND OTHER WEB SOURCES COMPLEMENT THE CLASSROOM

by Janni Aragon

I find that I am increasingly referring to and using YouTube, MySpace, FaceBook, and other online sources as teaching tools in my women's studies and political science courses.

As a media junkie, I constantly find interesting items to share with students. I often note these sources on the course syllabus or notify my students via WebCT (now Blackboard) or FaceBook. These online sources grab the students' attention, since the sites are convenient to access. I find that the "Net Gen" is tech- and Web-savvy and expects multiple information media in the classroom.

Students regularly send me YouTube video clips related to course content. Many of the videos are humorous; however, some have been particularly thoughtful and germane to our readings and course materials. For instance, Alanis Morisette's parody of the Black Eyed Peas' "My Humps" sparked an insightful discussion about the ways in which women's sexuality is used in popular culture, specifically in hip-hop music.

Although I discourage students from citing Wikipedia in their research papers, I do acknowledge that it can be a good starting point for gaining some familiarity with a topic. Students admit that for many of their papers, they go to Wikipedia first.

Blogs have provided an additional rich source for reading and discussion. My students' evaluations express their desire for more blog material — perhaps because blog text tends to be short and lively.

Del.icio.us has been quite effective in stimulating discussion about the ways people categorize their favorite news articles and other sources. Students find that among their peers there are few favorite or recent posts that relate to women. That absence offers another opportunity for discussion relevant to our course materials.

In each of my courses, we examine a different website each week that fits the week's theme. These websites make the assigned readings more real to the students and demonstrate the applicability of the material and of feminist praxis. For instance, if we are discussing women, globalization, and economics, we might look at the site for the Global Fund for Women, a United Nations article on gender mainstreaming, and sites that deal with boycotts of the World Bank.

The various social networking sites are useful to refer to, as so many students have accounts on MySpace, FaceBook, Friendster, or other networking sites. FaceBook was particularly useful in provoking a discussion about feminism and anti-feminism one term. A search for "feminism" on FaceBook led to a plethora of hits for anti-feminist groups. The students were intrigued with these findings and felt that the various FaceBook groups offered inaccurate, vitriolic misunderstandings about feminists and feminisms. In my feminist theory course ("Waves or Tsunamis: Second and Third Wave Feminisms"), several students actually wrote papers discussing the relationship between these tensions and debates within popular culture and how such misunderstandings influence feminism and feminists.

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FEMINISM TASTES DEL.ICIO.US: USING SOCIAL BOOKMARKING IN THE WOMEN'S STUDIES CLASSROOM

by Natalie Jolly

Social bookmarking is the practice of creating a user-generated taxonomy of Web content. To put it more simply, users generate *tags*, or keywords, associated with certain content such as a website, weblog, article, picture, or video clip. Users attach these tags to particular content and can create their own pages of bookmarks sorted by the keywords they have assigned. Social bookmarking websites such as **http://del.icio.us** are becoming an increasingly popular way to categorize and search for information on the Web. And because tags are user-generated rather than developed by search engine robots, users are able to find information with similar tags; they can search through popular tags generated by other users and can even browse the bookmarks generated by fellow del.icio.us users. Users of del.icio.us are then able to network to others who share a similar topical interest and are able to keep track of other users' recently added bookmarks. Del.icio.us allows users to discover sets of tags developed by other users who interpret Web content in a similar way, and thus it makes a wide body of Web information easy to search and access.

Because my "Introduction to Women's Studies" course is taught entirely online, I encourage students to learn new Web technologies alongside the feminist course content. I do this by requiring them to become familiar with del.icio.us and create their own del.icio.us pages in conjunction with their final course projects. Their del.icio.us pages serve as annotated bibliographies for their final projects —Web-published feminist zines on the topics of their choice. Because this project requires students to gather information from a variety of sources, del.icio.us serves as one possible database for their information collection and allows them to access tags generated by other del.icio.us users who have bookmarked similar content. As a result, students have access to del.icio.us users who have categorized and compiled interesting and informative feminist Web content. My students can search feminist blogs for entries on their topics of choice, locate popular Web pages that other del.icio.us users have found useful, access video clips that offer information, and even find images that correspond to particular material they are writing. And by creating their own del.icio.us pages, the students are helping to build a larger network of feminist resources on the Web.

Students produce zines on a number of different topics, so the content of each student's del.icio.us page looks different. A student may, for example, choose to focus her zine specifically on the relationship between women and the military-industrial complex. A quick search of del.icio.us bookmarks nets more than 500 possible entries. From these bookmarks, the student can browse information ranging from news articles at sites like CNN.com and Salon.com to popular blogs such as *Baghdad Burning*. When she locates material of particular interest, she is able to tag the site and add it to her own page of bookmarks. This tagging process allows a student both to compose a short description of the material she has just found and to jot down any particular notes she wants to include with her bookmark. In effect, she is able to stick a virtual Post-It note on the site, reminding her why she tagged it and what sort of information the site contains. When she returns to her del.icio.us page, she is able not only to view the sites that she has tagged, but also to review the notes and descriptions she has composed. Once her del.icio.us page has been created, the student's tags are available to other del.icio.us users who may share similar interests and want to browse her particular collection of links.

By incorporating new Web technologies such as del.icio.us into my women's studies courses, I hope to demonstrate to my students that feminism is alive and well in the digital age. Through the use of social bookmarking sites such as del.icio.us, students quickly discover that there are a vast number of people

out there thinking, writing, and posting about feminist-themed issues and topics. And by tagging Web content that they find interesting and building their own pages of bookmarks, students get to become part of the cyber-feminist movement themselves. This sort of practice leads to the democratization of Web content, as students become in control of generating a Web taxonomy through the compilation of their bookmarks and tags. It also leads to the democratization of feminism more generally — students get to tag (or name) which content they deem to be feminist, and thus they are participating in building what feminism means on the Web.

[*Natalie Jolly holds doctorates in women's studies and rural sociology from Pennsylvania State University (2007), where she taught extensively using Web-based course management tools and currently teaches online as an adjunct instructor. She has published articles, book chapters, and handbooks detailing the use of Internet technologies in higher education.*]

BLOGGING MEMOIRS: A TEAM EFFORT

by Patricia L. Wasielewski

In the spring semester of 2007, I tried a new final project in my "Women In Society" course at the University of Redlands — the Women Sociologists Memoir Project. The primary goal was to encourage student engagement with women doing sociology and to enliven the connection between sociology, women's studies, theory, research, and community action or activism.

Each student was matched, based on my perception of shared interests, with a living sociologist to research and to interview by phone or email. We spent several class sessions focused on learning to construct blog sites.[1] It turned out to be important not to rush this process. We consensually organized and defined exactly what would be covered in each section.[2] Because the students themselves determined what to include, all of them were motivated to find all the information, even when it was not so easy to find.

We also collectively set three "rolling" deadlines, each followed by feedback and revision, before the final deadline. Although all of the student blogs followed the same outline, each was unique to the specific information available for that student's assigned sociologist. I chose the best blogs (those created by three quarters of the class) to link to the class blog site, which explains the project: **http:// wmst227womensociologistmemoirproject.blogspot.com**.

The project was a success because of the coordinated effort among our women's studies librarian (Shana Higgins), our IT technical manager (Catherine Walker), and me. Shana came to the class session in which we made final choices about what students would include in their sites. This made her particularly effective at our next session, held in the library, in which she introduced the students to the many and varied places (online or not) they could look for information about the sociologists' personal lives, teaching, and research. She also provided a very helpful guide for assessing online resources. Catherine's demonstration in the second session familiarized students with how to create a blog. She prepared a mock site to show possible arrangements of written and visual information. The students benefited from the varied expertise, and it showed in the integration of materials in their final projects.

Some problems did occur: Some students did not contact their interviewees in a timely manner; sometimes the interviewees didn't respond.[3] Some of the sociologists were more well known than others; thus, some students were able to find more information than others were. In the end, I worked with students individually to ensure that they made the most of what they had. The most positive benefit of

the assignment was that students "spent" so much time with their sociologists that each began to use her sociologist's work, noting it in class discussion and referencing it in other assignments. The majority of students indicated that they were inspired by their interviewees and that the project helped them understand the general conceptual ideas of the course. My hope is to archive and continue building the collection as a resource for this course and others.[4]

Notes

1. We used **http://www.blogger.com**.

2. We agreed on eleven categories: 1. Biography. 2. How the person became a sociologist. 3. Teaching interests. 4. Research interests. 5. Accomplishments and awards. 6. Community involvement and/or activism. 7. Interesting facts. 8. Thoughts on the future of sociology and/or women's studies. 9. Goals. 10. The student's final thoughts. 11. Useful links.

3. About half of the women did respond in one way or another; some communicated extensively with their student biographers. Students have told me (anecdotally) that some interviewees were surprised by the amount of research the students had done on them and by how well organized and aesthetically pleasing their sites turned out to be. Each student was required to share the blog and all information appearing on the class site with her or his interviewee. In essence, the women sociologists who worked with my students also became part of the team effort.

4. I would appreciate it if visitors to the site would comment on it to make it better next time. Anyone wanting to use the site in her or his courses should contact me. The site referenced above also has more of my reflections on the process and a copy of the syllabus linked to it.

[*Patricia L. Wasielewski is a professor of women's studies and sociology at the University of Redlands.*]

Miriam Greenwald