

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

## Outcomes

The OSUWrite project ends with mixed results.

*Positive:* OSUWrite succeeded in its objectives of producing a representative range of blog pilots, drawing from those pilots a set of specifications detailing a blog environment useful for teaching and learning, and outlined an agenda of writing and research to provide information about quality online writing for blog users. Several of the educational blogs that OSUWrite founded continue to flourish and produce results. OSUWrite produced a resource for blog writers created in order to promote high quality blog writing; 35 articles about blog writing are currently in the "OSUWrite Guide to Successful Blogging."

OSUWrite created and maintained 56 pilot blogs for groups and individuals at Oregon State University.

*Negative:* We did not succeed at facilitating production of a system-wide blog environment for all members of Oregon State University as stated in the project objectives. This was due to system administrative concerns about security related to commenting features of blogs and lack of resources for long-term support for a new enterprise-wide capability.



Thus, while we did succeed in proof of concept and practical resources for academic blogging, we did not succeed in leveraging this into a University centrally supported tool-set. However, the campus discussion about blogging continues leaving open the possibility that a university-wide blog solution may be addressed in the near term.

<http://oregonstate.edu/osuwrite>

## Rationale

In the course of this project, two questions frequently arose from colleagues: *What is a blog?* and *What is the value of blogs in education?*

For the purposes of this project we identify a *blog* as a web-based publishing platform by which

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

an individual may regularly post content, including text, image, audio, and video. Blogs have traditionally been considered formats for personal diary, though the impact of blogging in journalism, social networking, and organizational communications has greatly broadened the concept. Blog is used as noun, verb, and adverb. By *blog* some people connote the platform and tools (e.g. Blogger) and others mean the content posted. We include both ideas together (tools and content) in our discussion. We assume that blogs of value to educators will have some social networking features and syndication capabilities.

Blogs matter to higher education because they can be used to advance periodic writing for a global audience with reduced technical challenge for the authors. Threaded forums and course management systems do not provide the capabilities that blogs do in this regard.

Blogging is a major part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century information environment. There are over ninety million blogs on the web. These range from highest level professional and academic publications to strictly personal diaries to the unintelligible. The fact of blogging and its influences on society, research, and academia are concrete and significant. Higher education ought to respond to such major change by guiding and modeling intelligent uses of information resources. Including blog use in course work is a way to orient learners to effective uses of their information environment. Equipping University faculty to use blogging for such educative purposes is the primary objective of OSUWrite.

## Pilot Blogs:

WIC, CWL, and TAC submitted a grant proposal to the Northwest Academic Computing Consortium (NWACC) with the major objective;

"We propose to produce a proof of concept project in order to demonstrate academic uses of blogs as tools for teaching and learning, research, organizational communication, and individual expression. The critical outcomes of this project will be specifications for a blog environment designed for widespread academic uses and a set of teaching strategies for course work uses of blogs. The presently proposed proof of concept project will allow for the implementation of 20 to 40 blogs that demonstrate a variety of purposes, configurations, and authors from the university community."

OSUWrite created and maintained 56 pilot blogs for groups and individuals at Oregon State University. These have been used for teaching and learning, research, organizational communications, and personal expression. The pilots ranged from heavily used for large audiences to slightly used and abandoned. Several of the pilots provide exemplars of excellent practice for academic blogging.

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

The selected pilots exemplify four models for educational blogging:

- 1) An organizational blog in which a single blog instance serves as an informational portal for a class or program. Multiple authors may be involved with a single blog manager in control of the published output. Commenting is important to allow other organizational members to contribute.
- 2) A class blog project in which students act as authors, individual and collaborative, to create a collective publishing project.
- 3) An individual blog publishing regular articles by an academic and used by a class and public.
- 4) Individual student blogs in which assignments are periodically posted, then collected to a class blog for group consideration.

## **Pilot #1: Bernard Harris Summer Camp Blog**

### *An Organizational Blog*

<http://oregonstate.edu/education/4H/BHSSC>



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Bernard Harris Summer Science Camp blog. At the top is a banner with the ExxonMobil logo and the text "BERNARD HARRIS SUMMER SCIENCE CAMP". Below the banner, on the left, is a "July 2008 Monthly Archive" section with a "Mission@ Dr. Bernard Harris" link dated "28 Jul 2008 11:55 am". The main content area features a post titled "Welcome to the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Summer Science Camp Mission to Mars 2008!" with a sub-header "2008 Blog Begins" and a paragraph: "Are you ready for lift off? The Summer Science Camp team has been working hard to prepare for the launch of this exciting program. Teachers and professors in the Colleges of Education, Engineering and Science are ready to assist campers in their voyage of discovery as they plan their mission with their Mars bound teammates and build their Mars Modules." On the right side, there is a "Currently Browsing" section indicating the current page and a "Monthly Archives" list with links for July 2008, June 2008, September 2007, August 2007, and July 2007.

Dr. Bernard Harris is an astronaut, M.D., and entrepreneur whose foundation supports summer camps designed to support young people interested in science and engineering. The 2007 summer camp came to OSU as a joint effort by OSU Extension Service 4-H Youth Development program, OSU Science and Math Investigative Learning Experiences (SMILE) program, and the science and math departments, and the

College of Education. Out of 200 applicants, 60 were accepted in 2007 and supported via scholarships funded by an \$80,000 grant from the ExxonMobil Foundation and the Harris Foundation.

Bernard Harris Summer Science Camps occur all around the United States, but until 2007 the

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

program had not used blogging to facilitate the effort. OSUWrite partnered with the College of Education to provide a blogging environment for this educational outlet. The blog was successful, particularly in providing parents of summer camp attendees to participate by posting comments. As a result, the OSU Summer Camp facilitator for the College, Chester Bateman, reports that the Bernard Harris organization began using blogs across its various summer camps based on the OSU experience.



*"I was contacted by the Bernard Harris Foundation to share why OSU is such a success by using social media (blogging, podcasting, user generated content etc.) tools in program delivery. After my podcast with Bernard Harris, I could hear he is impressed with the Web 2.0 innovation in OSU's science camp. In fact after our success last year, many other science camps around US found our innovative approach leading the way and conversations started about how to copy our success. TAC's blog grant and staff are in the DNA of this success and helping bring all stakeholders into celebrating our camper's passion for exploring potential careers in science and engineering."*

#### 4 Responses

1. olivia (camper) Says:  
August 19th, 2007 at 7:58 pm  
this camp was so fun and this field trip was a great experience hope to keep in touch with everybody!!!!
2. Dulce Says:  
September 12th, 2007 at 7:09 am  
That day was crazy! buy soo much fun i remember being so aware that poison ivy

#### Parent Comments

The Bernard Harris Summer Camp blog demonstrates one important model of the blog pilots: as an organizational communication platform. This differs from a traditional website is that multiple authors may contribute articles (in ways much easier than traditional website management) and all participants (e.g. students and parents) may contribute by comments.

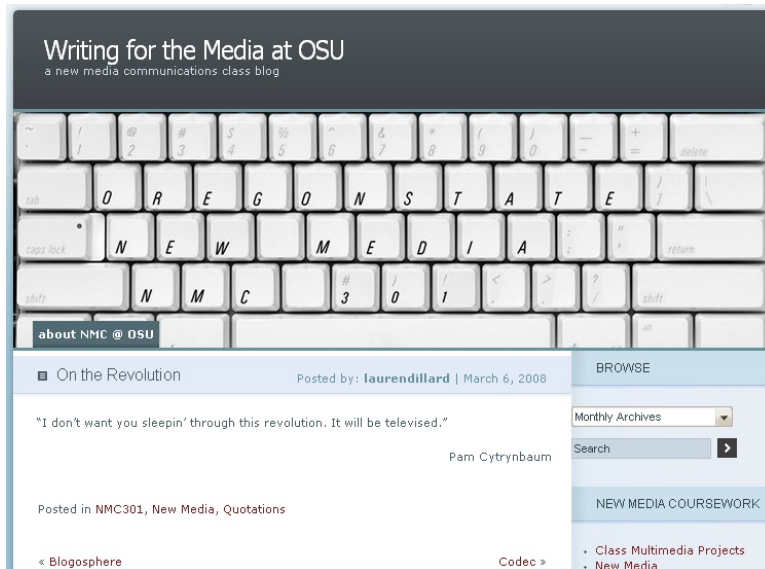
A unique installation of WordPress on the OSU servers is the tool set behind this blog. This instance (as others like it) is supported by TAC on an ad hoc basis. Ultimately we would like to see a centrally-supported university-wide implementation of such blogs. Until that becomes possible, TAC shall seek means to support individual blog users, within our means.

## Pilot #2: **New Media Journalism NMC301 Magazine**

*A course publication environment*

<http://osunmc301.wordpress.com>

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report



Pam Cytrynbaum came to OSU from her work as investigative journalist at the Chicago Tribune and New York Times newspapers (<http://oregonstate.edu/cla/nmc/>). She came to TAC seeking the means to involve students in activities modeled on the demanding pace and human interactivity required in professional journalism. Like many instructors and researchers, Pam did not regard her skills with internet technologies as strong.

## NMC301 blog

Blogs proved an ideal platform for her teaching in several ways. With educational blog models and technical support from OSUWrite, Pam and her students experimented to find the strongest approach for their course objectives. The result is a group-organized class blog in which students are all authors. Students also create individual blogs for writing drafts and collecting research. Finished works are submitted as posts to the *mother blog* (as Pam calls the main NMC301 site). Students are aware that posting to the *mother blog* constitutes submitting an assignment for evaluation, because the blog site is presented as a group publication by the class for a public audience.

NMC301 students use a wide range of information sources to create their class blog; including text, image, video, audio, syndicated feeds, links, and social bookmarking. The instructor accesses and grades student work directly from the class blog. Teaching students to create and make their own blogs provides them with the means to experiment and develop their work without making a mess of the class blog. TAC provided class demonstrations and workshops for NMC301 students to facilitate their blog skills. In four terms, no students have indicated that using the blog tools creates significant difficulty. We conclude from these experiences that it is crucial to provide blogging instructors and students with timely and relevant support.

it is crucial to provide blogging instructors and students with timely and relevant support.

For the NMC301 blogs we provided training and support in the use of an opensource capability at Wordpress.com (<http://wordpress.com>). This is a site where anyone may register and create blogs. Using this resource removes us from the University environment and provides a centrally

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

supported system, at least with respect to upgrades and server maintenance. Wordpress.com does not provide support to individual users. The ultimate University resource would be similar to Wordpress.com (or Uthink at the University of Minnesota <http://blog.lib.umn.edu>) which facilitates self-managed blogs with central support for users.

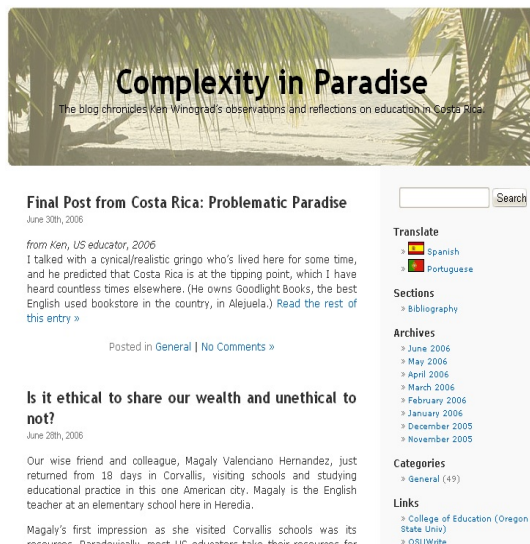
Pam Cytrynbaum plans to continue using blogs for her journalism courses and has ambitious designs to build upon her success with this format. A successful outcome is evident in Summer 2008 as Pam indicated by email in response to the OSUWrite offer to help with the coming term;

*"Miraculously I don't need your help. I did the entire thing myself on my own all by my lonesome. I cannot tell you how much I learned and how much I can now do. It's mind blowing. I'm so techno now I cannot stand it."*

This illustrates a principle by which instructors - especially those who consider themselves weak in technical skills - can be supported to self-sufficiency. This allows such instructors to focus upon the educational values of what they produce and gain increasing confidence in their judgements about technologies. Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs are significant in the impact they have on self-sufficiency of the users. Rather than struggling with arcane technical detail and self-doubt, instructors and students are enabled to create, assess, and explore.

Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs are significant in the impact they have on self-sufficiency of the users.

## Pilot #3: Complexity in Paradise *Professorial blogging*



The screenshot shows the header of the blog "Complexity in Paradise" with a background image of a tropical beach. Below the header, there is a search bar and navigation links for "Translate" (Spanish, Portuguese), "Sections" (Bibliography), "Archives" (June 2006, May 2006, April 2006, March 2006, February 2006, January 2006, December 2005, November 2005), "Categories" (General (49)), and "Links" (College of Education (Oregon State Univ), OSUWrite). The main content area features a post titled "Final Post from Costa Rica: Problematic Paradise" dated June 30th, 2006, with a snippet of text starting "from Ken, US educator, 2006. I talked with a cynical/realistic gringo who's lived here for some time, and he predicted that Costa Rica is at the tipping point, which I have heard countless times elsewhere. (He owns Goodlight Books, the best English used bookstore in the country, in Alejuela.) Read the rest of this entry >". Below this is another post snippet titled "Is it ethical to share our wealth and unethical to not?" dated June 28th, 2006, with a snippet of text starting "Our wise friend and colleague, Magaly Valenciano Hernandez, just returned from 18 days in Corvallis, visiting schools and studying educational practice in this one American city. Magaly is the English teacher at an elementary school here in Heredia. Magaly's first impression as she visited Corvallis schools was its resources. Paradoxically, most US educators take their resources for".

<http://oregonstate.edu/~winograd/blog/>

Until recently, blogs have been regarded as vehicles for individual expression. It can be valuable for academics to publish frequent ruminations as resources for their students and colleagues. This was the case for Ken Winograd, Associate Professor in Teacher/Counselor Education when he spent his sabbatical in Costa Rica. Ken sought a way to stay in contact with his students and colleagues in a manner that appropriately reflected his experiences. Ken was in Costa Rica at the time and needed a solution that anticipated his moderate technical skills, as well as the infrastructure challenges of his location. The effective answer for Ken was a blog instance (Wordpress) hosted on the OSU servers with user

### Ken Winograd's Costa Rica blog

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

support by TAC.

Ken quickly mastered the level of tool use relevant to his needs and began a steady pace of blog posts of about one per day. He adapted his writing to the format (length, tone, pace) and produced a strong exemplar for how an academic may use blogs effectively, for both teaching and research purposes.

"I am developing a book proposal based on the blog writing and I am already sending out pieces from the blog for publication."

Upon his return the United States, the Costa Rica blog had competed its utility. However, Ken found additional value in using his blog writing to pursue a book proposal. He is very clear that the blog tools positively affected his performance during his sabbatical. In a follow-up email he wrote;

*I don't know if you followed my Costa Rica blog, but it turned out to be one of the smartest moves I've made. Early on, the presence of an interested and critical audience shaped my*

## **La Nacion, Its Coverage of Schools, and Getting Chased by an Angry Dog**

May 31st, 2006

I have been in Costa Rica a year and have been reading La Nacion almost every day. La Nacion is the leading newspaper, probably

### **Ken's post of the day**

*thinking, influenced writing behavior when I wasn't actually writing, and was a real motivator to write/read/think. I am developing a book proposal based on the blog writing and I am already sending out pieces from the blog for publication. So, thanks for your help and encouragement last fall. I want to do another blog. Before I say another word, do you still work with people in "blog development" as you did with me last fall?*

Ken further expresses the value of OSUWrite blogs to his efforts on his College of Education Faculty Profile page:

<http://oregonstate.edu/education/people/teachcounsed/winograd.html>

This is a striking result for a faculty member who introduced himself as technically challenged. This is a main point in favor of support for educational blogging as a University service: academics will gravitate to content development formats which lend themselves to multiple-purposes and support frequent writing. Providing members of the University community with enhanced and supported means to express their quality thought is coincident with the fundamental mission of the institution.

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

## Pilot #4: Philosophy Journals: InterQuest

### *One to many syndication*

<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/blogs>

In teaching philosophy I (Jon Louis Dorbolo) typically find that students have great difficulty in seeing relationships between ideas. I have taught InterQuest, my online Introduction to Philosophy course, continuously since 1994. The primary objectives of that course are to bring each student to recognize that their own ideas form a system of belief and that this system is connected to the history of ideas. A powerful obstacle to attaining those objectives is the propensity of learners to treat concepts, texts, issues and events as discrete. Therefore, it is necessary to deliberately teach my students to perceive relationships.

Part of my effort to help students to perceive relationships between ideas is a series of weekly writing assignments requiring analysis concepts - one each week, chosen from a set of ten that are studied that week (e.g. knowledge, truth, mind, justice, and so on).

As the term proceeds, learners are challenged with writing tasks of increasing complexity.

As it goes with constructing complex learning activities, they become, well *complex*, to

administer and explain. One challenge is for some students in addressing their own past writing is that it is no longer in their thought; at least was it was when they wrote it. I have found that when students can look at all of their written work as a collection they improve at discerning patterns and points of connection.

Blogs turn out to be an effective way to collect student writing both sequentially and by category.

Determinism	Abstraction
Ethics	Karma
Realism	Reason
Causality	Scientific method
Utilitarianism	Consciousness

### **Shelley's weekly concept choices**

It is worth asking: on what occasions do college students see their collected work? My guess is that it is not often, if ever. The growing national interest among educators in online portfolios is partly driven by the value of students viewing their own work as an *body of work*, which entails that they perceive relationships among the parts.

Blogs turn out to be an effective way to collect student writing both sequentially and by category. Many blog tools that OSUWrite worked with such as WordPress, Blogger, and Moveable Type order posts chronologically by default. Every post also has a category, thus allowing posts to be reordered and viewed under different aspects. Stipulating a set of category variables, or assigning students with the task of producing their own categorical schema, focuses them on the

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

task of making choices about relationships among the ideas in use.

To clarify, InterQuest students are not merely reordering concept words. They write concise weekly mini-essays (conceptual precis) about their chosen concepts. It is the presentation of these essays as a growing collection that I hypothesize has impact on how students come to perceive the relations between the parts of what they have written.

The conceptual precis writing, along with other assignments, serves as a basis for more complex writing assignments. In most of the grading I have done, my instructional focus is on the current work of the students which I am commenting on. I may have a recollection of the student's overall direction and assumptions, and can certainly open prior works to study them. The blog posting approach, however, allows me an overall view of each learner's thought as it develops. It is easy to see some patterns in writing style at a glance, when the essays are juxtaposed. It is also easy to open the blogs of other students and set them side by side. Just as it is easy to have students read one another's work and post comments.

Just as important is the fact that students will keep their class work as a body when the course is over. I recall when my InterQuest course was first assessed in 2004 by FIPSE evaluator Stephen Ehrmann. He appreciated the course design and pedagogical principles, given that this was one of the earliest web-base courses around. Yet, Dr. Ehrmann raised an insightful question which I have pondered in the decade + since; "What do the students keep and take with them at the end

## Shelley S

PHL201 Blog

---

### Week Ten- Consciousness

November 27th, 2006

"Consciousness" is a concept that has a significant place in my personal belief system.

I have long held that "Consciousness" is literally 'knowledge of things together.' It is important to me because it is what distinguishes humans from animals and what brings all creation together.

Beliefs that I hold which depend upon the concept "Consciousness" include: "Consciousness is what separates humans from animals" and "Consciousness is what unites all creation."

What I mean by "Consciousness" in its most general form is: a state or condition of being conscious and having a sense of one's personal or collective identity held by or considered characteristic of an individual or a group.

The major attributes of my concept "Consciousness" are:  
It is purely spiritual  
It is purely physical  
It is the basis of existence  
It is the basis of nonexistence

I cannot think of an example of the use of the word "Consciousness" that is different from the meaning that "Consciousness" has in my belief system.

Posted in PHL201 | No Comments »

---

### Week Nine- Utilitarianism

November 26th, 2006

"Utilitarianism" is a concept that has a significant place in my personal belief system, especially as I get older.

I have long held that "Utilitarianism" is an ethical position holding that the morally superior position is the one that would result in the greatest pleasure or happiness and least pain for those to whom it would apply.

Beliefs that I hold which depend upon the concept "Utilitarianism" include: "Utilitarianism is based on the moral worth of an act should be judged on its consequences" and "Utilitarianism's general rules of moral conduct promotes the general good."

What I mean by "Utilitarianism" in its most general form is: "the greatest good for the greatest number."

The major attributes of my concept "Utilitarianism" are:  
It is an ethical theory  
It is belief  
It is determined by its utility  
It is judged by its social utility  
It is achieving the greatest happiness for the greatest number

I cannot think of an example of the use of the word "Utilitarianism" that is different from the meaning that "Utilitarianism" has in my belief system.

Posted in PHL201 | No Comments »

---

### Week Eight- Scientific Method

November 19th, 2006

The "scientific method" is a concept that has a significant place in my personal belief system.

I have long held that the "scientific method" is a method of investigation based on induction from empirical evidence and the experimental verification of theoretical hypotheses.

Beliefs that I hold which depend upon the concept "scientific method" include: "Scientific method is free of personal biases" and "The scientific method is free of personal influences."

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

of the course?", he asked. When the term ended, the discussion board was archived and recycled, and the course was updated for the next term. It is just this way with course management systems such as Blackboard. When the term is done, most of the work done in it by students - such as in threaded discussion boards, email, and groups - is retired. What is the body of work that the student takes with them from an online course? Surely there are many possible solutions to this matter, though it remains true that quite a few online courses do not explicitly provide for persistence of effort.

Blogs, as currently used in InterQuest, are an excellent solution. They are owned by the individual learner; they can be re-purposed by the student for other courses and for many other purposes. It seems to me that blogs used in a coordinated fashion may act as the online portfolios that many educators would like students to have. In order for this approach to be educationally useful, there must be a degree of consistency and reliability among the products. Thus, another point in favor of the centrally supported University blog.

I will continue to use the blog approach to student writing in InterQuest. I am using Wordpress.com because it is free, open, and easy to support. I would prefer to have a blog platform that contained features specifically of use to educators. With patience and persistence, we may be able to achieve this in time.

## Recommended features for Educational blogging

Commercial and open-source blog platforms can be excellent. WordPress.com is an example of a powerful and free blog service. However, these blog platforms are not designed with teaching and learning in mind. OSUWrite had the objective of identifying features that will be of value to instructors and students, and even to use funding to develop technical implementations of those features. We did not succeed in producing a University blog platform to which such features would be applied. It remains an open possibility to produce plug-ins for a platform such as WordPress in order to create the desired capabilities. Here are some of the educational capabilities that we seek.

the ability to generate an automated list of class bloggers using available banner class list information is needed for viable teaching and learning blogs.

**1) Class list:** In order for an instructor to use student blogs effectively for class work, there must be a direct and accurate way to collect and display a class blog roll (web links to the blogs). Hand-building blog rolls for each class is time consuming, error-prone, and not a viable option for many faculty. We conclude that the ability to generate an automated list of class bloggers

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

using available banner classlist information is needed for viable teaching and learning blogs.

**2) Grading:** Instructors must have the means to collect the blog work of individual students for the purpose of grading assigned activities. Existing blog packages are not designed with the needs of instruction in mind, thus an blog environment for educators will make it easy to query information useful for grading.

**3) Aggregation:** Depending upon the instructional strategy, it may be desirable for the student blog entries to be collected for each individual student, by the entire class activity, or by the entire class over a specified duration. Existing blog tools do not directly support these variations. In order to meet this need, OSUWrite has developed a model by which individual blogs may be aggregated via RSS syndication. Using this model, each student maintains their own blog, posting assignments as directed. The instructors blog acts as an aggregator, pulling the targeted posts from each student's blog into a category of the instructors blog. In this way, students are able to view their own work as a collected set and they are able to view and comments on the posts of other students. This model opens enhanced potentials for assigned revision of posts and other uses of an individuals work over the term.

## Conclusion

Blogs are powerful tools for education. They increase the power of web publishing for faculty and students. Blogs may be effectively used to facilitate instruction, student writing, student collaboration, organizational communication, and research. Open-source tools may serve well for many of these tasks. Yet, education specific features will make the blogs far more useful and attractive to faculty. Most important is the need for usable educational models for blog use in conjunction with a robust program of training and support for faculty and students using blogs. Our project results in an awareness that faculty and

faculty and students who consider themselves as having weak technical skills are among the most appreciative and enthusiastic of educational blog users.

students who consider themselves as having weak technical skills are among the most appreciative and enthusiastic of educational blog users. We believe that this becomes so only with adequate training and support. At present it is safe to say that nearly 100% of the University community are web content consumers. Still, a small fraction of those are also web content producers. Blogs and other Web 2.0 technologies are changing this to the point where nearly all web consumers will also be web content producers. Eventually at OSU, we may see the acceptance of educational blogging to the level that an centrally supported institutional solution will be sought. We hope that our research and development in OSUWrite, made possible by the foresight of NWACC grantors, will help guide the selection of a future OSU blog platform.

# NWACC: OSUWrite Final Report

## Budget Expenditures

6/15/2007-9/15/2007	GTA blog guide writer	\$3,600.00
---------------------	-----------------------	------------