

# Hand in Hand

## Partners in Teaching, Learning, & Assessment Clarion University

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### September/October 2008

**Workshop—Sept 26<sup>th</sup>.** *Academic advising: The nitty-gritty.* Advising Center, 111Becht, 3-4:30pm. At Venango Campus, Oct 24th, 10:-11:30a, (location TBD)

**Informal meetings, Aug. 29, Sept. 12, Oct. 10, 24<sup>th</sup>.** Michelle's at 3:30pm.

### Web 2.0... Friend or foe?

~ Miguel R. Olivas-Lujan (Adm. Sci.)

**FACEBOOK, MYSPACE, Blogs, Wikis, Folksonomies, podcasts, e-groups...** Are they a black hole sucking our time and resources – or the most recent tools to engage the Millennial Generation? Questions about what technologies to use and which ones to pass on take greater importance for busy university faculty with the introduction of Web 2.0 (a wide array of social networking sites and web-authoring tools). In this piece, I share a few thoughts about why I believe these sites offer greater benefits than costs –at least for me, a faculty member who does a significant amount of teaching and research on information and communication

technologies.

Granted, most “social networking” websites like *MySpace* or *Facebook* have been designed to attract teenagers and college students. Still, some commentators make the case that these utilities are useful “even for baby boomers” (Kadlec, 2007). Kadlec continues, “Networking sites are like a digital cocktail party that never ends-only no one drinks too much and everyone is hell-bent on getting ahead” (p. 44).

These web-based services provide academics a way to keep in touch with former students and colleagues (not to mention family) and have the potential to provide us with a number of opportunities that are hard to find otherwise. To illustrate, in contributing to a report for accreditation purposes at our College, I was able to quickly find where our most recent graduates had obtained employment. My colleagues



and I are also able to get faster “intelligence” from the field (e.g., being able to poll recent graduates as to whether their companies are hiring students like the ones we train). Sure, we might have to write more letters of

recommendation or provide more advice to recent grads than we would if we are not so accessible, but perhaps those alumni will end up in higher places in the long run!

Research opportunities are also increasingly accessible. Recently, I was

able to explore research possibilities with a colleague through *Facebook*. In this case, we ended up postponing our research collaboration; however, without our common membership on *Facebook*, we would never have known about our shared interests and explored the possibilities. I've also been active in more fruitful enterprises: in the past eight years or so, I have been moderating the “e-groups” for three research initiatives. These have yielded one co-authored book and at least three refereed papers and eight conference presentations and workshops.


Of course, there are some costs. Exploring new technologies can be time consuming; some organizations might preclude the use of these technologies during work hours. Some sites may reveal “too much” personal information. Ultimately, it may even be harder to “disconnect” from work life if we allow these technologies to follow us by means of

### What is *Hand in Hand*?

*Hand in Hand* is a monthly e-newsletter published by Partners in Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Clarion University. *HiH* is dedicated to recognizing good teaching, fostering excellence in teaching, and creating an environment that fosters learning among students and faculty alike. Partners' activities and *HiH* are supported by a Presidential Advancement grant. Print subscriptions are available by contacting Kenn Staub <kstaub>.

We encourage submissions to *HiH* that focus on general rather than discipline-specific issues in teaching, especially articles that are creative, respectful, and recognize the best in all of us. Articles can be on teaching philosophies, technology, pedagogy, or book reviews, but should be no more than 600 words. Articles should be submitted for review in Word to jslattery. More information on submissions can be found at <http://psy1.clarion.edu/HiH/HiHguidelines.pdf>

cell phones and PDAs.

But then again, when one takes into account all the benefits, both personal and professional, at least for this writer, the balance is quite positive. 

#### References

Kadlec, D. (2007, October). You oughta be in facebook. *Money*, 36(10), p. 44.

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## Why not Wiki?

-Debbie Ciesielka (Nursing)

**IF YOU ARE** like most faculty, you are most familiar with the term wiki as applied to Wikipedia. You've probably even cautioned your students that this open source encyclopedia is considered neither reliable nor scholarly as a reference source. For those less familiar with the term, a wiki is server software that allows users to directly post and, unlike a blog, *edit* content in an online open forum. The term "wiki" is derived from the Hawaiian word for "super fast," which is what wikis are—a quick way to share information on the web. But is there a place for a wiki in the academy?

Wikis are actually already becoming a mainstream means for collaborating. With a quick search on the web you'll find wikis as a platform for information sharing on a broad range of topics—from children's literature (<http://www.childlit.info/>) to quantum physics (<http://qwiki.stanford.edu/>).

You can even become part of a project to create an online repository of educational textbooks (<http://en.wikibooks.org/>). What you may not know is how the wiki can be, and is being, used at Clarion.

Students in the Clarion, Edinboro, and Slippery Rock Universities' graduate nursing program have been using wikis since 2006 as part of a community health course. In previous years, individuals or groups of students enrolled in the course assessed a community—usually a town or other location defined by geographic boundaries—as one of their


assignments. In general, the assignment was never well-received by students and the final product was long, boring to read, and even more tedious to grade. When program enrollment grew, so did the number of 100+ page papers to grade. A logical solution was a meaningful group project. Thus was born the *Collaborative Community Project*.

The *Collaborative Community Project* is a password protected public wiki in which only students enrolled in the wiki are able to add and edit content that is otherwise visible to anyone on the World Wide Web. The wiki has provided a means for students to essentially create websites to highlight their assigned communities (see <http://614comm.pbwiki.com/>). The first group of students assessed Meadville, the second group, Vandergrift. Unlike previous years, the final products have been creative, interesting, and a pleasure to grade. Student feedback has also been universally positive—for the first time in the history of this particular assignment. The public hosting site (pbwiki) used for the project has not only lived up to its claim of being "as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich," but made it possible for residents of those communities to have access to the information.

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## The possibilities for wikis in education are endless.

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Pbwiki is one of dozens of public wiki hosting sites. Many are free, although you can add enhanced features for a modest fee. (To compare features and pricing, go to <http://www.wikimatrix.org>). Faculty concerned with privacy issues also have the option of using the built-in wiki tool in Blackboard. Students enrolled in a graduate nursing internship last semester were creating e-portfolios using this particular feature. The possibilities for wikis in education are endless. So, is there a place for wikis in the academy? Yes! 

## Ask Ms. Scholar

**DEAR MS. SCHOLAR:**

**I'M SO UPSET** after reading one of my course evaluations. A student, who chose to remain anonymous, wrote that I don't respond to my emails in a timely fashion. Are they kidding?! I answer all my emails within one day, it's not like I have a personal secretary who can filter through the major and minor communications! What do you suggest I do to avoid this comment in the future evaluations?

Yours truly,

Instantly Frustrated

**DEAR INSTANTLY FRUSTRATED,**



**WHY DO WE** seem to pay more attention to that one snippy remark on our course

evaluations than all of the positive comments? Why does that one comment blindside us? After all, can't our students see that we are working as hard as we can to balance face-to-face and online classes, course requirements, and electronic communication?

What really is happening here is a culture clash of expectations. We as professors feel one day is reasonable to respond to requests or questions. But today's student is living the instant life with "instant messaging," texting, and 24/7 availability. Believe it or not, they think you are part of that 24/7 availability.

Is there a fair solution here? Of course! Here are a few suggestions that my colleagues recommend. First, during your first class meeting, clearly outline your expectations and availability. Tell your students that you don't use instant messaging and that they can reasonably expect a response to their inquiry within 24 hours (or however long) of receiving their message. Ask them not to use IM orthography because you won't understand the message. Next, give your students a procedure to use in the event that they

may have a true emergency and need an immediate response. For example, many email systems allow for priority flagging indicating urgency or simply tell them to phone your office. Finally, in non-emergency situations, encourage students to stop by your office to discuss their questions regarding an assignment or test. (Be sure to include this information in writing on the syllabus in the event students were multitasking and missed your speech.)

In the end, the bottom line is communicating expectations. Once the ground rules are laid, blindsided comments should be put to rest (or ignored). ☞

If you have questions regarding teaching, student/faculty issues, or other comments/suggestions, please write: Ms. Scholar c/o [msscholarcolumn@gmail.com](mailto:msscholarcolumn@gmail.com)

**MORE QUESTIONS** about Netiquette? Check out these sites:

Landsberger, J. (2007). Netiquette: E-guides on social interaction and communicating electronically. *Study guides and strategies*. Retrieved on September 4, 2008, from <http://www.studygs.net/netiquette.htm>

Shea, V. (1994). *Netiquette*. San Francisco, CA: Albion. Retrieved on September 4, 2008, from <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/bo-ok/index.html>

## Course Menu

~Marilyn Harhai (Library Sci.)

A SMALL CHANGE that you can make to your online class to make it more user friendly is to customize the course menu. It is possible to change between displaying a button menu or a text menu. This is done using the course design menu style option and choosing either button or text. When combined with customizing the displayed menu text, this can make it easier for students to find things within your course. For example, the button with

the default text Faculty Information can be changed to Contact Dr. Harhai. A text menu item could be added called Syllabus, which would make finding that key document obvious to your students. Changes can be made to the number and text of displayed menu items by using the manage course menu option. Even the simple act of removing menu items that you are not using (again using the manage course menu option) can make navigation easier for students. Take a look at the ways the course menu can be customized. If you would like a demonstration or have questions, please contact me at [mharhai](mailto:mharhai). ☞

## User-friendly research

~ Corene Glotfelty (Library)

ADVANCES IN technology have dramatically revolutionized library research methods for our students. Gone are the endless hours at a desk in the library surrounded by the card catalog, note cards, bound periodicals, books, and stacks of periodical index volumes, laboriously searching each annual volume for needed article citations. In addition to valuable print resources, we now have convenient online catalogs, e-books, online full-text periodical articles, and online periodical indexes and abstracting services.

While today's students have grown up with access to these labor-saving research tools, they've also enjoyed unprecedented access to the wealth of information available on the free Web. While we all know that valuable information can be found on the Web, many faculty are frustrated by student research papers with reference lists comprised heavily of web site citations, many of questionable quality. In spite of classroom and library faculty's efforts to teach students to evaluate web sites and expectations that they use peer-reviewed, scholarly research sources, many students are reluctant to relinquish the user-friendly search

capabilities of Internet search engines such as Google.

Libraries have been making great strides in developing research tools for their users that mirror and incorporate the seamless, user-friendly, and student-preferred aspects of favorite Internet search tools. Faculty can point students toward these new tools to encourage students to find and incorporate more scholarly research sources into their writing assignments.

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Gone are the endless hours at a desk in the library surrounded by the card catalog, note cards, bound periodicals, books,...

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One such tool is the federated search engine, which provides a common interface for searching the online catalog and the various periodical databases subscribed to by a library, making searches more "Google like." Clarion University's federated search engine is locally known as "Eagle Gold Search" and is produced by WebFeat, now owned by ProQuest. It can be accessed from the Clarion University Libraries' web site. Before Eagle Gold Search, students would have to identify the periodical databases they wished to search and, usually, search them individually. A potentially intimidating factor for students and other researchers was the perceived complexity of the various database search interfaces. The federated search engine allows students not only to search all of these databases through one common, user-friendly interface, but also to select a broad subject area and search all of the available databases associated with that subject area simultaneously. Federated search engines are becoming popular research tools among college and university students nationwide.

Many libraries are also subscribing to tools that give the library catalog a face-lift. Students often expect a library's online catalog to have the

book cover images, book reviews, and other content that they're accustomed to finding in other web-based tools such as Amazon.com or Google Book Search. Many libraries, including the Clarion University Libraries, subscribe to services such as Syndetic Solutions™, owned by Bowker, to place this added content within the catalog. When a search is done in the University Libraries' catalog, one can often now find cover images, book summaries, tables of contents, excerpts, and book reviews from sources like *CHOICE*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Booklist*. This added content helps students select the most useful and relevant items to support their research.

At the University Libraries, the recent introduction of the ILLiad software to manage interlibrary loan requests has also helped make the research process more seamless than ever before. As students find citations for periodical articles within the Libraries' various databases, they can first instantly determine whether or not the item is available locally by using the *360 Link to Full Text* button following the citation. For those items not available through the Libraries' print and online subscriptions, simply clicking the interlibrary loan option within the *360 Link* pop-up screen will open the ILLiad software and automatically populate the request form with the necessary ordering information (after the student has created an ILLiad account.)

In addition to the services discussed here, many other opportunities are emerging to make library research and the identification of scholarly research sources more user-friendly for our students. As we encourage our students to become familiar with and utilize these sources and services, we can expect to see not only an improvement in the quality of sources referenced in bibliographies and works cited lists, but also a renewed appreciation of the value of scholarly

research sources on the part of our students. 

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## Podcasting 101

~ Donna Ashcraft (Psychology)

Podcasting. It sounds cool, it sounds complex, it sounds trendy, it sounds techy! But beyond the glitz, why would a professor want to learn to podcast? There are numerous answers, but for me, the issue was about being able to explain more complex concepts to the students in my web-based courses. While many of us teach in a traditional way in a face-to-face classroom setting, lecturing isn't always an effective means of teaching or learning, especially when the course is web-based, not face-to-face. But last semester I used podcasts to explain some concepts through online "lectures." Although my students had readings, study guides, and assignments to help them learn material, I believed some material needed additional explanation, and so I relied on a modern version of a traditional teaching method for my online course. I developed PowerPoint slides, created podcasts for those slides and uploaded the podcasts and PowerPoint slides to Blackboard for my online class.

If an instructor is going to employ this technique, I recommend the following:

1. Develop your PowerPoint slides first and then create the podcast so that you can refer to the material on the slides as you are developing and recording your narration.
2. Consider developing podcasts of minimal length to help keep students' attention. Just as their minds can wander during face-to-face lectures, so too can this happen as they are listening to this contemporary version of the lecture. Mine ranged anywhere from just a few minutes to around 20 minutes. And even though my PowerPoint presentation had numerous slides, I did not discuss all of them in one


podcast. Instead, my PowerPoint presentation was accompanied by multiple podcasts.

3. Refer to your slides during your podcast. I started out my podcasts by explaining which slides the podcast would cover (i.e., the slide numbers in the PowerPoint presentation). Then during the podcast I would either refer to the slide by number or say, "next slide" before discussing the concepts contained on the slide. At the end of the podcast I told my students that the podcast was completed.

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I relied on a modern version of a traditional teaching method for my online course.

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4. When you upload your podcast to Blackboard let students know in their descriptions which slides are being referred to in the podcast, the topic of the podcast, and the approximate length of the podcast so they know how much time they need to dedicate to that "lecture."
5. Don't feel that you need to develop podcasts for all course material. Use them only where needed. Some concepts need additional clarification. For others, the readings provide enough explanation. 

### Upcoming Issues of *HiH* (tentative):

- Classroom climate
- Professional development
- Student research, creative activities, & service

### Editors:

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