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**Posting for Points:  
Edublogs in the JMC Curriculum**

Jane B. Singer

**Abstract:** Despite the spread of blogs in the media and in academia, little scholarly work has explored their use within the journalism and mass communication curriculum. This study, based on incorporation of blogs in 10 classes over five semesters -- undergraduate and graduate, skills and conceptual -- examines student use of the format in relation to theories of social and blended learning. The findings suggest that although students tend to approach blogging as yet another assignment, the blogs do facilitate their engagement with the material and one another.

Blogging has become an integral job component for growing numbers of journalists and other mass communications professionals,<sup>1</sup> attracting an increasing amount of interest from media scholars. Similarly, class weblogs (or “edublogs”) and other options for online student discourse are being incorporated in more and more university courses;<sup>2</sup> a separate but also steadily expanding body of work considers their impact on pedagogy, including perceptions about blogs by journalism educators.<sup>3</sup>

But to date, there has been little exploration of the use of blogs in classes aimed at preparing future journalists for the participatory media environment they are about to enter. As a result, there is little data on how, or even whether, blogs fit into the journalism and mass communication curriculum.

This article seeks to address the gap by presenting findings from the author’s use of blogs in 10 journalism and mass communication classes over five semesters. It examines student use of the blogs

in relation to specific class outcomes and broader educational goals, within the context of contemporary pedagogical theory and media trends. In particular, it suggests the potential value of blogs as part of a “blended learning” approach to journalism education.

### ***Blogs in the Media and in Pedagogy***

***Blogs, Journalism, and Public Relations.*** The participation of non-journalists in creating and disseminating “multi-perspectival news” through blogs and other formats challenges the notion of an exclusively privileged institutional gatekeeper.<sup>4</sup> Blogs encroach on the occupational jurisdiction of journalism, particularly journalists’ ability to autonomously determine what constitutes news.<sup>5</sup> Wall says that as “a form of postmodern journalism,” the blog “challenges elite information control and questions the legitimacy of mainstream news.”<sup>6</sup> However, Haas concludes that while blogs are produced by the public, “they are decidedly not ‘of’ the public.” Instead, she says, blogs strengthen the dominance of mainstream news providers by relying on them for information and by covering the same topics.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Harper suggests that although blogs may establish agendas and help frame the debate over important issues, they more typically react to agendas set by newsmakers and major media outlets.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have examined the extent to which top-tier bloggers manage their online self-presentation;<sup>9</sup> the perceived credibility of blogs in relation to traditional media sources;<sup>10</sup> and the ways in which photographers use blogs to record their daily lives and idiosyncratic visions.<sup>11</sup>

Of direct relevance to the incorporation of blogs in a JMC curriculum are a handful of studies that have examined journalistic use of blogs. Of particular value is the work of Chung and her colleagues in comparing uses of and perceptions about blogs by journalists and journalism educators; they found similar views but generally less use among educators.<sup>12</sup> Robinson suggests “j-blogs” are a way for journalists to “reclaim journalism – and its standards – online, even through a post-modern

entity originally created to defy those traditional norms.”<sup>13</sup> In his case study of a blog produced by journalists at the *Guardian* in Britain, Matheson emphasizes the value of a journalism built on connections, “situated within a model of knowledge-as-process rather than knowledge-as-product.”<sup>14</sup>

The undergraduate courses discussed here focus on journalism, but many students who take them plan careers in public relations, where blog use also is increasing. A 2006 industry survey found that nearly one-third of respondents worked for organizations that hosted, supported, or authored blogs, which are seen as facilitating deeper relationships with stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> Supporters say blogs’ dialogic nature contributes to the goal of two-way symmetrical communication.<sup>16</sup> They enable PR practitioners to educate, influence, and hear directly from constituent communities, and have been described as integral to a viral communications program.<sup>17</sup>

A growing body of scholarly work, notably from Porter and Sallot and their colleagues, examines practitioners’ use of the Internet, and its effects on roles and efficacy.<sup>18</sup> A comparison of perceptions of blog credibility among journalists and PR practitioners indicated that users in both groups see blogs as credible, but PR practitioners are using blogs mainly for information, surveillance, and research rather than contributing to the discourse.<sup>19</sup> Research suggests greater practitioner use of blogs may be warranted; because blogs facilitate a candid conversational style, they can convey “some sense of human attributes existing behind an organizational façade.”<sup>20</sup>

***Blogs and Pedagogy:*** Theory-based approaches to pedagogy inform the incorporation of digital technology into learning at all levels. The social-cognitive approaches exemplified by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues, who stressed the central role of language use in development, have been especially valuable. Writing about adolescent concept formation, Vygotsky described the functional use of signs or words as a means of solving problems and synthesizing those solutions into expanded knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Participation in social practice is fundamental to learning, and

knowledge is both socially mediated and open-ended;<sup>22</sup> reliance on and collaboration with others are keys to social learning.<sup>23</sup> Through communication, social understanding becomes available for individual understanding and the construction of increasingly powerful conceptual tools.<sup>24</sup>

As Ferdig and Trammell suggest, blogs fit well into this view of education as a knowledge construction process that is discursive, relational, and conversational. Blogs provide space for students to reflect and publish their understandings; other benefits include greater student interest and ownership in learning, as well as opportunities to air diverse perspectives.<sup>25</sup> Richardson suggests that the increasingly open and participatory nature of publishing creates relationships with far-reaching educational implications. Big shifts include the social, collaborative nature of information; the view of teaching as a conversation rather than a lecture; the move away from printed text to fluid and multimedia content forms; and the idea that authorship involves contribution to an ongoing product.<sup>26</sup>

Many of these notions have been incorporated into experiments with “blended learning.” This pedagogical concept has been variously defined but generally suggests a combination of traditional approaches with internet-based instruction to optimize the benefits of both face-to-face and online interaction. Proponents cite advantages of enhanced pedagogical richness; knowledge access; social interaction; and personal agency, including self-expression and self-reflection.<sup>27</sup> Several education scholars have written about blogs as components of blended learning, stimulating debate and enabling students to nurture critical and reflective thinking skills as well as to “establish and develop their individual perspectives within an often-overwhelming mix of educational activity.”<sup>28</sup>

Most educators who have written about their use of edublogs see them as tools for individual empowerment as well as engagement with a topic and with other students. Blogs in general can provide users with a strong sense of community, agency, or both; blogging about external issues or events is an especially powerful tool for developing agency among female bloggers, enabling them to

steer conversation in accordance with personal needs and motivations.<sup>29</sup> A study of 260 randomly sampled blogs found them to be highly expressive, using an informal tone to directly acknowledge and address potential audiences.<sup>30</sup> Translated into a classroom environment, blogs enable students to “write in a public sphere (as compared to closed discussion forums) and in a more coherent and organized way than in chat or instant messaging.”<sup>31</sup> They potentially enhance storytelling and verbal literacy skills<sup>32</sup> and can help reduce feelings of isolation, notably among distance learners.<sup>33</sup> An instructor who used blogs in a teacher preparation course reported most posts were self-reflexive (“I think that ...”) and many were addressed personally to a peer (“Joan, you raise a good point ...”).<sup>34</sup>

Very little work has been published on the use of blogs in JMC courses, although Pryor suggested student contributions to the *Online Journalism Review* blog at the University of Southern California helped make their writing more concise and focused.<sup>35</sup> Instructors in business communication classes also report that blogs are effective in terms of cost, time, and payoff for students, for whom they facilitate collaboration, peer review, and concept explication.<sup>36</sup>

The move from theory to practice has not been without its hiccups, however. While educators see benefits in the communal nature of blogging, students tend to have more instrumental goals. For example, instructors who set up a blog in connection with graduate units in economics made participation optional but provided course credit for those who chose to contribute. Only about half the eligible students used the blog. Those who did viewed it positively, citing meaningful intellectual exchange. But “some students clearly submitted solely for the sake of getting the marks (invariably the weaker students), and this detracted from the overall quality of the experience.”<sup>37</sup>

In an educational technology course that used discussion forums similar to blogs, some students put off participating until the last day, frustrating classmates.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, a faculty member who incorporated blogs in a first-year composition class reported that some students subverted assignment

goals by writing all their entries at the end of the semester. However, he also reported a positive overall experience; blog use made rhetorical concepts more tangible and helped students “discover that writing for a larger audience is a valuable activity, one connected to issues of citizenship and democracy.”<sup>39</sup> Other authors also report overall positive experiences with edublogs but note “once the course ended, student blogging also ceased.”<sup>40</sup> Software engineering students identified personal, pedagogical, and communication purposes, though here, too, the blogs were deserted as soon as the course ended.<sup>41</sup>

The literature thus suggests that blogs are increasingly significant in both media and classroom environments, though there has been little published exploration of their use within classrooms designed to prepare students for media work. Moreover, while the potential benefits in both settings are clearly recognizable, implementation within existing institutional structures has been at least somewhat problematic. This study poses the following research questions:

- RQ1:** When blogs are incorporated as part of a journalism and mass communication curriculum, what is the nature of their use by students?
- RQ2:** How does course structure affect student use of edublogs?
- RQ3a:** What additional factors enhance the contribution of edublogs to pedagogical goals related to social and/or blended learning?
- RQ3b:** What additional factors detract from the contribution of edublogs to these goals?

## ***Method***

This study draws on the author’s use of blogs in 10 JMC classes for seven different courses at a Midwestern research university over five semesters (see Appendix A). The blogs were created using blogger.com, a free blog creation and maintenance tool. Students in each class posted to the associated blog; their contributions, which are not password-protected, remain available online and are in the public domain. However, in order to ensure students were comfortable having their contributions used for this research project, permission to quote them anonymously was obtained each semester.

The term “post” refers here to creation of an original discussion topic for the blog – the start of a “thread,” to use the older message board terminology. The term “comment” refers to a component of the resulting discourse provided by another blogger.

**Data Analysis:** Two data analysis methods were used. Simple descriptive statistics generated findings related to quantifiable data, such as the number of posts and comments and the ratio between them. Qualitative data were obtained through textual analysis of student contributions to the blog.

The author logged all blog contributions over the five semesters, a total of 334 posts and 2,244 comments. She recorded the author, title, and date of each post, plus the author and date of each comment. Students could not post anonymously, but they could comment anonymously. Although this was rare (they got points only if the instructor could identify them), some students never joined blogger.com and occasionally forgot to sign their comments. These were coded as “anon” and counted among the totals; all “anon” comments were clearly from students. A very few comments came from outside the class, described below.

The textual analysis focused on aspects of the blog discourse related to blended and social learning, as demonstrated through written language. Drawing on pedagogical theory, two attributes were seen as central: responsiveness to others’ contributions and the extent to which comments referenced in-class discussions. To obtain these data, the author went through each post and comment and logged any references to other students or to in-class discourse. Examples of the former include “I agree with [name’s] argument that ...” or “Like a couple of you have mentioned...”; examples of the latter include “In our discussion today ...” or “Remember when we talked about ...?”

**Course Structure:** In all the courses, students were introduced to the blog and to blogger.com on the first day of class; information about blog use was provided in the syllabus and in handouts. In the skills courses, where students had in-class computer access, part of the first day’s introduction

(beginning in spring 2005) included posting a comment to the blog; in the conceptual and graduate courses, where there was only one computer in the room, a demonstration had to suffice. The instructor subsequently referenced the blog and encouraged student participation throughout the semester.

Over the study period, the instructor modified the relationship between the edublog and other course components, as well as her own involvement in the blog, in ways relevant to the pedagogical theories considered here. In the first two semesters in which she incorporated blogs, she provided virtually all the posts; students contributed primarily through comments, mostly associated with class assignments. In fall 2005, her third semester of blog use, the instructor significantly curtailed her own presence, posting only in the first few weeks and then leaving the conversation to the students. In the last two semesters of this study, she participated in the online discussion to varying degrees.

Undergraduate course grades were based on a total of 1,000 possible points. For courses in which blog contributions counted toward the student's grade, original posts were worth more than comments: 10 points and 5 points, respectively. The extent to which blog contributions could enhance a student's grade was capped so blogging did not become a substitute for other course requirements.

Six of the eight undergraduate courses in this study period included in-class problem-solving or discussion sessions, structured as small-group assignments. In two conceptual courses, as well as in a skills course offered three times, students were required to identify supplemental readings on a topic and to lead an in-class discussion. In the third conceptual class, students worked together each week to resolve ethical issues related to journalistic work. The face-to-face engagement built into these courses offers a useful framework for considering edublogs in the context of a blended learning environment.

The graduate seminars emphasized research, writing, and in-class discourse. They did not use a point system for grading. Students in the fall 2005 class were asked to use the blog to post information

and discussion questions about readings; they were encouraged but not required to engage in online discussion as a complement to in-class conversation. In the fall 2006 course, blog use was optional.

## ***Findings***

This section contains two parts. The first offers quantitative findings about the extent and timing of student contributions. The second uses qualitative interpretation to consider these edublogs in the context of pedagogical theories of social and blended learning.

***Edublog usage:*** Although ability to comment was unrestricted, the blogs were used almost exclusively by the instructor and class members. Of 2,578 total posts and comments over the five semesters, 2,430 (94.3%) were from students, 140 (5.4%) from the instructor, and two from graduate assistants; two more were from personal associates of contributors. Only four contributions were from true outsiders. One was from the author of a class reading, thanking the students for reading his work and offering additional ideas. Another was a nonsensical post from an unknown source. Two more, containing an identical promotional message, appeared seven months after the semester ended.

The instructor's participation affected student usage patterns. During the first two semesters in this study, she provided ninety-nine posts, mostly related to assignments, in four classes, compared with twelve posts from a total combined enrollment of 100 students. Though students were encouraged to initiate topics, their formally assigned role was to comment, and few ventured beyond that role. In the last two semesters in this study, the instructor logged twenty-two posts in four classes, while seventy-nine total students initiated 101 posts -- only a minority directly connected to assignments.

The fall 2004 conceptual course generated the most comments -- 752 from thirty-eight enrolled students, more than double the number in any other class. However, almost all were tied to a course assignment; only sixty-two comments (8.2%) were voluntary contributions. In the spring 2005

conceptual course, there were 347 student comments – of which a grand total of one was unrelated to an assignment. The 2006 courses again exhibited a different pattern. For instance, the spring 2006 conceptual course generated 325 comments from thirty-seven students, none of them specifically required by an assignment.

When comments were connected to assignments, of course, timing of the assignments dictated when students contributed. More useful is a look at blog contributions *not* directly connected with specific assignments; those data are provided in **Tables 1 and 2** for seven of the eight undergraduate courses in this study period. (The other course did not incorporate blogging in the grade structure.) In all seven, students gained points for blog contributions. The difference is that the courses in **Table 1** afforded points for contributions unrelated to specific assignments while those in **Table 2** did not.

Although there is some variation among the **Table 1** courses, the volume is generally greater in the latter half of the semester, when students were focused on maximizing points; the number of voluntary posts (worth twice as many points as comments) rises dramatically toward the end of the term. The final weeks of the semester also saw the greatest number of comments in all four courses. Across the courses, there were roughly six times more student-instigated posts and three times more comments at the end of the semester than at the start.

In courses where student-instigated blog contributions did not count toward their grades, shown in **Table 2**, such contributions were not surprisingly much lower. The fall 2004 conceptual course, on media and politics, is an anomaly; students were relatively eager to post their political views before and immediately after Election Day. The other two classes are closer to what might be expected based on the experiences of instructors represented in the literature above. Voluntary student participation on the blogs was virtually nil in the second half of the semester and minimal earlier on.

The two graduate seminars provide further evidence of students' instrumental goals. Again, these courses did not use a point structure for grading, and blogging carried no specific value. Although students exchanged ideas passionately in the classroom, they made little use of the edublog. Fall 2005 students were asked to post questions related to readings they selected for in-class discussion; they did -- but posted nothing else. And although they engaged in online dialogue early in the semester, when they were feeling one another out socially and intellectually,<sup>42</sup> the number of comments dropped dramatically by mid-semester. There were five posts from the instructor and two from students in the first four weeks, generating a total of 55 student comments. The 18 student posts over the rest of the semester, all in connection with readings, managed to elicit only 37 total comments.

In the other graduate seminar, in fall 2006, blog contributions were entirely optional. Not a single student contributed a post or a comment all semester long.

Two main findings can be extracted from these data. Although neither is especially surprising in light of earlier research, they do highlight the fact that students saw the blogs as an assignment rather than an inherently rewarding communicative activity. One is that the instructor affected student use of the blogs both through formal structuring of course requirements and her own participation. The other is that class structure has a direct effect on use, suggesting that students viewed the edublog primarily as one task among many to be completed en route to finishing the course. Regardless of how the blogs fit into their grades, students quickly figured out how to amass points to fulfill their instrumental goal. Nor did they continue to use the blogs once the class was over. Of 204 total students in the 10 classes using edublogs, only one contributed (a single item) after the semester ended.

Yet there were hints that at least for some students, the blogs did have intrinsic value. Nearly a third of the students in the four undergraduate courses in **Table 1** -- 27 of a total 85 enrolled -- continued to contribute to the blog after they had attained the maximum number of allowable points.

Some presumably miscalculated, but others were among the most frequent bloggers all semester long. In the politics course, students signalled their engagement by voluntarily turning to the blog to share reactions to the election and media coverage of it, as well as personal political views.

***Blended and social learning:*** The quantitative findings suggest that for the most part, students used the edublogs to do what was required and little more. Looking beyond the raw numbers, however, reveals a more nuanced picture of the blogs' contribution to these JMC courses. Even in classes with low student participation, the blogs generated substantive conversation about course-related topics, including references to and extensions of ideas expressed verbally in the classroom. They also served as a forum for contributions from students who rarely spoke in class but proved quite eloquent online. An unedited excerpt from the politics class offers a sample:

“I think this article raises some very serious issues. Do the media have a responsibility to the public to block these Internet-rumor driven stories from becoming real news, or do they have a responsibility to debunk them in their news broadcasts? Which method is more helpful to public discourse of American politics? In a marketplace of information, the idea is that among this borage of false and misleading information, the truth will prevail -- but can it do so without the attention getting power of the mainstream media?”

In every class, student comments explicitly referred to the contributions of classmates, almost universally in appreciative terms, with such phrasing as “I agree with [name] that” or “Like [name], I too liked the advice ...” Sometimes they went on to offer a contrary view but almost always framed as part of a civil discourse. Of 2,132 student comments in undergraduate courses over these five semesters, only one offered anything close to a personal attack, in which a student reacted to what she perceived as another's criticism of President Bush. The blogs thus afforded an opportunity both to consider the ideas of others and to publicly articulate their own views.

In relation to blended learning, in which online and face-to-face discourse are integrated, the blogs provided evidence that students were making connections to and building on the complementary conversations. Posts commonly referred to remarks made in class. An example from the editing class:

We talked a bit last week about whether to report on hostage situations. On the one hand, publishing stories about the incident gives the kidnappers the publicity they want. Then again, it may be a newsworthy event, especially if it's part of an ongoing trend. And what about the family's wishes? The BBC came up with an interesting solution. [Student describes BBC approach.] ... What do you all think?

The edublog in the spring 2006 conceptual course was especially noteworthy in for the high levels of interaction and engagement – both with course content and with one another -- that students displayed through it. Although space limitations prevent extensive examples, **Appendix B** provides an excerpt suggesting the flavor of the online discourse.

First, although fewer topics were instigated by students on this blog than on some others, the posts generated extensive discourse. Students provided 22 posts (with another 10 from the instructor). But there were 325 student comments, a ratio of 10 comments for every post. Moreover, nearly half the student contributions -- 153 posts and comments -- explicitly solicited or referenced the views of others, either on the blog or during class meetings. Many directly requested thoughts on a proposed topic, with phrasing such as “I was wondering what you all thought about ...” or “Has anyone else noticed ...?” They frequently complimented one another for a good post (“[Name] brought up an excellent topic for discussion ...”) or comment (“I loved [name’s] remark that ...”). And although students felt free to disagree with one another and often did, not one contribution indicated a lack of respect for others’ views. Instead, they framed their contrary comments with phrasing such as “[Name] makes a good point, but at the same time ...” or “I agree with you, but I’ll play devil’s advocate ...”

This class also suggests the potential benefits of blended learning because it provided the most interactive physical environment of any of the undergraduate courses. Students worked together in small in-class groups every week to solve problems, make decisions, and apply course concepts to practical workplace situations. The composition of the groups was shuffled so students got to know most if not all of their classmates by jointly completing assigned tasks. The easy respect with which

they referenced one another online, as well as the extent to which they drew on one another as resources for ideas and opinions, suggests that this blending of physical and online interaction may hold significant pedagogical value as a social learning tactic.

## ***Discussion***

The findings presented here are in line with those of others who have experimented with blogs in their classes. It is not especially surprising that, as others also have found, students tend to approach the edublog with an instrumental mind set: They see it as a class assignment to be fulfilled along with all the rest. There is little indication that students would participate were that participation entirely voluntary; on the contrary, the experience in the graduate seminars, as well as the early undergraduate classes included in this study, suggests that they would not. But although the volume and timing of student use suggests that the impact on their grade may propel them to blog, once they sit down to compose a post or comment, they find themselves thinking about course content in ways they might otherwise not have taken the opportunity to do. This study provides evidence that particularly when blogs are used as part of an undergraduate blended learning approach that also incorporates in-class discussion and team activities, they contribute to learning that is explicitly social and self-reflective.

In response to RQ1, the nature of student blog use was wide-ranging. Although they tailored both the timing and volume of their contributions to course requirements, students also used the blog to broach and explore topics of interest to them; to engage in a respectful and responsive discourse with classmates; and to articulate, explain, and defend their own views about course-related material. Their use was in line with elements of social learning outlined by pedagogical theorists, notably the socially mediated use of language as a vehicle for knowledge synthesis and expansion.<sup>43</sup> In some courses,

particularly later in the study period, this study suggests the blogs enhanced students' ability to think about course topics, to articulate those thoughts, and to share ideas and opinions through their writing.

However, as other educators have noted, students abandoned the edublogs after the course was over. Whether the social engagement facilitated by the blogs survived finals week is unknown. Although some class members did have connections through social networking sites, it is impossible to determine whether those connections were related to the blogs. A study designed to explore the interactions among a range of social networking opportunities, including but not limited to edublogs, would be an excellent follow-up to the present work.

In response to RQ2, the findings also clearly show that the structure of the course affected student use of the blogs. In addition to the grading structure, the instructor's own participation was important. Her early efforts reflected an overly didactic approach in which she controlled the conversation; not surprisingly, students stayed within the boundaries set, thus defeating the broader pedagogical goal of student ownership of the knowledge construction process. An instructor role of limited participation, combined with ongoing encouragement of blog use, was more effective. Additional research is needed in a variety of institutions, with a variety of instructors, students, courses, and approaches, to clarify the necessarily limited findings in this area.

There is an argument, of course, that making the blog part of a graded assignment virtually mandates that students see it that way. Ardent bloggers might protest that the nature of blogs is free, open, and voluntary, and that a "points for posting" scheme kills all that is wonderful about the format. That may be ... but when the edublogs were entirely free, open, and voluntary, students ignored them. The fall 2006 graduate seminar included a blog but disconnected it from the course requirements; although in-class discussions were inclusive and intellectually sophisticated, not a single student contributed a single word to the blog all semester long, ignoring the instructor's posts and providing

none of their own. Undergraduate courses in the early semesters of this study, in which student-initiated posts were encouraged but not explicitly rewarded, generated barely a handful of such posts. Some formal incentive does seem beneficial en route to the desired social or blended learning goal.

The final research questions asked which additional factors enhanced or detracted from pedagogical goals. The findings here lend support to the value of blended learning. The extent to which student blog contributions referenced in-class conversations in the undergraduate courses was striking, and they did so both when asked to comment on reading discussions and when left to their own devices. They also extensively referenced one another personally and positively. In addition to listening to one another in class, most (though not all) clearly were reading what others had said online before them, using the ideas as a springboard for articulation of their own views. However, a question for further exploration is why the results were not similar in the graduate seminars, in which robust in-class discussion was not reflected in blog participation. Conversely, some undergraduates who rarely spoke in class were active bloggers; a look at the role personal communication styles or preferences play in guiding participation choices within a blended learning environment that includes blogs would be informative. So too would be studies designed to more formally measure the effects of blogging on knowledge acquisition, development of communication skills, and other educational outcomes.

In the meantime, this study helps address a gap in understanding of blogs within the particular curriculum of journalism and mass communication. Many of the students in these classes, now alumni, are working in the media today; others soon will be. As the literature above suggests, they increasingly are expected to maintain and contribute to blogs as part of their jobs. So their experience with class blogs may fill another instrumental goal: that of making them more valuable employees.

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**TABLE 1: Points for Posting**

This table shows student-instigated use of class blog (posts and comments unrelated to specific assignments) in four undergraduate courses when such use generated points toward a final grade.

| Type,<br>Date     | Posts<br>Weeks<br>1 – 4 | Comments<br>Weeks<br>1 – 4 | Posts<br>Weeks<br>5 – 8 | Comments<br>Weeks<br>5 – 8 | Posts<br>Weeks<br>9 – 12 | Comments<br>Weeks<br>9 – 12 | Posts<br>Weeks<br>13 – F | Comments<br>Weeks<br>13 – F |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Skills<br>Fall 05 | 6                       | 23                         | 5                       | 5                          | 6                        | 6                           | 37                       | 25                          |
| Concept<br>Sp 06  | 0                       | 26                         | 4                       | 47                         | 7                        | 101                         | 11                       | 149                         |
| Skills<br>Sp 06   | 3                       | 31                         | 13                      | 16                         | 9                        | 30                          | 9                        | 38                          |
| Skills<br>Fall 06 | 4                       | 16                         | 6                       | 15                         | 5                        | 16                          | 23                       | 70                          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | 13                      | 96                         | 28                      | 83                         | 27                       | 153                         | 80                       | 282                         |

Messages indicating the student was merely testing the tool are omitted unless they include other substantive comment.

**TABLE 2: No Points for Posting**

This table shows student-instigated use of class blog in three undergraduate courses when such contributions did *not* generate points toward a final grade.

| Type,<br>Date      | Posts<br>Weeks<br>1 – 4 | Comments<br>Weeks<br>1 – 4 | Posts<br>Weeks<br>5 – 8 | Comments<br>Weeks<br>5 – 8 | Posts<br>Weeks<br>9 – 12 | Comments<br>Weeks<br>9 – 12 | Posts<br>Weeks<br>13 – F | Comments<br>Weeks<br>13 – F |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Concept<br>Fall 04 | 1                       | 19                         | 1                       | 9                          | 4                        | 31                          | 0                        | 3                           |
| Skills<br>Fall 04  | 0                       | 6                          | 1                       | 11                         | 0                        | 0                           | 0                        | 0                           |
| Concept<br>Sp 05   | 0                       | 1                          | 1                       | 0                          | 0                        | 0                           | 1                        | 0                           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       | 1                       | 26                         | 3                       | 20                         | 4                        | 31                          | 1                        | 3                           |

Messages indicating the student was merely testing the tool are omitted unless they include other substantive comment.

## APPENDIX A: Edublogs

The blogs discussed in this article remain available online as of this writing.

|                                                     |                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Undergraduate skills classes</b>                 |                                                                                    |
| Editing (spring 2005, spring 2006)                  | <a href="http://iowajournalism136.blogspot.com">iowajournalism136.blogspot.com</a> |
| Online Journalism (fall 2004, fall 2005, fall 2006) | <a href="http://iowajournalism138.blogspot.com">iowajournalism138.blogspot.com</a> |
| <b>Undergraduate conceptual classes</b>             |                                                                                    |
| Politics and Media (fall 2004)                      | <a href="http://iowajournalism159.blogspot.com">iowajournalism159.blogspot.com</a> |
| Comm Technology and Society (spring 2005)           | <a href="http://iowajournalism166.blogspot.com">iowajournalism166.blogspot.com</a> |
| Journalism Ethics (spring 2006)                     | <a href="http://iowajournalism168.blogspot.com">iowajournalism168.blogspot.com</a> |
| <b>Graduate seminars</b>                            |                                                                                    |
| Advanced Communication Theory (fall 2006)           | <a href="http://iowajournalism331.blogspot.com">iowajournalism331.blogspot.com</a> |
| Communication and Change (fall 2005)                | <a href="http://iowajournalism254.blogspot.com">iowajournalism254.blogspot.com</a> |

## APPENDIX B: Excerpts from Journalism Ethics Edublog

(Contributions are unedited except for the removal of students' names.)

### ORIGINAL STUDENT POST:

#### 9/11 9-1-1 Tapes

This past week over 9 hours of emergency operator tape recordings from September 11th were released. I heard a few highlights on news programs of the operators giving instructions to people, trying to calm the callers, and also talking to other operators. After hearing some clips, the news anchors said that all of the caller voices have been edited out of the tapes in order to protect their families. This struck me as odd. It is good not to include the callers' voices in order to protect their privacy and those last moments, and the family members still alive today, but what about the pictures? Early on in the semester we discussed the appropriateness of photos of victims falling from the towers being published. It seems that most people thought it was best to use pictures where the person could not be identified--but it was too late--the pictures were out. Now that the tapes are out and everyone is protected from identification, what does this say about publishing such pictures, if anything? Has the press learned something in the last few years about people's privacy?

### STUDENT COMMENTS:

- I think this is a really good point-- have the media learned something since the pictures caused such a controversy? I really am still torn about whether or not to publish these kinds of things, but I do believe that the media should be consistent in these matters. If you are going to publish peoples pictures then the words should be open to the public too, but if not I think the media should just uphold this protection of the families unless they otherwise give permission. I just do not see the benefit of this "pick and choose" thing we have going on here. It is just plain confusing.
- This is a frustrating issue-I was also confused when I saw this story on TV and only the operators' voices were heard. Though I would rather have heard the other end of the line, I understand the need for privacy. I think what makes the issue of these tapes difficult is the fact that they are being released nearly five years after the 9/11 attacks...it's kind of like opening up an old wound. I do agree with [student name], the media need to be consistent because if not, then people get confused- just as in this situation. Maybe this situation shows that the media have learned their lesson and are trying to respect the privacy of victims and their families. Though honestly, I don't think I'll ever get myself to fully believe that.
- Going along with what both [student name] and [second student name] said, consistency with privacy especially, in the media will keep it reliable. I can't help but think of the Kobe Bryant case study that we read awhile back, where the accuser did not want her name released, and through blogging and what not, it eventually came out. With the 9/11 tapes, though i did not see coverage of this in the news, i can imagine how weird it is that pictures can be shown but voices of victims are hidden. Honestly, i think it would be easier to recognize and remember a photo of someone plummeting to their death, than hear a voice 5 years later. The ethical and privacy related dilemma here brings up a lot of important questions about the consistency of the media.
- I agree with the others regarding the media maintaining a consistent method of broadcasting its news. However, the very nature of having human beings report news inherently suggests human flaws exist along the way. I think that journalists have to learn from mistakes and from others mistakes in their line of work. Just as everything else changes over time, so do the publics in which we represent and inform. In order to live up to their expectations and to further develop an democratic informed citizenry, we must also change and alter our methods of broadcasting.

There were another 10 student comments related to this topic, of which all but three referenced the prior discourse.