

Should you enter the academic blogosphere? A discussion on whether scholars should take the time to write a blog about their work

by admin

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While the blogosphere has always included sites by students, professors, librarians, administrators and other university members, more scholars are now tying their blogs to their work-related activities and making the connection between online presence and career development. [Melonie Fullick](#) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of scholars taking the time to write a blog about their work.



Academic blogs by definition tend to focus on professional rather than personal topics, showing explicit connections between blog content, research issues and academic life. However, blogging is not viewed positively by all members of the academic community, and recent exchanges online reflect the controversial position of blogging in a new debate emerging around the issues of open access to research, public scholarship and expert knowledge.

Peer-reviewed articles are still the benchmark for academic professionalization, and some graduate students and early-career academics feel that blogging is a waste of precious time that could be spent on “legitimate” publishing. Because it’s a form of self-publishing that lacks peer review, blogging isn’t usually viewed as a legitimate form of scholarship. Chris Parsons, a PhD student in political science at the University of Victoria who writes the blog [Technology, Thoughts, and Trinkets](#), has experienced “dismissal of my work because it’s online [and] criticisms that my work isn’t good enough to be published anywhere else.” Sometimes blogging is even seen as disseminating one’s ideas too freely. In a competitive academic field, research ideas could be “scooped” from a blog, while established journals may not want to publish work that’s available in some form online.

Yet, for a growing number of academics the benefits of blogging outweigh the drawbacks. Those who blog – including me – agree there are positive outcomes, such as networking and collaborating, finding new audiences and opportunities, disseminating research more widely, and building one’s reputation. Bloggers argue that far from diluting scholarly success, online writing can be a serious tool for academic practice.

David Phipps, director of the office of research services at York University and co-author of the [ResearchImpact](#) blog, explains that “rather than replacing traditional scholarly activity, blogging amplifies the reach and thus the impact of those messages derived from your research.” Academics can use blogs alongside formal research to form collaborative networks and to disseminate their work to different interest groups in new ways.

For example, Marie-Claire Shanahan, a professor from the University of Alberta, uses her [Boundary Vision](#) blog “primarily for outreach. I work in science education and there are lots of people (including scientists, science writers, museum staff and parents) that have an interest in science education, especially in schools.” The public, collaborative nature of blogging has helped writers to develop new relationships with students, peers and other audiences and to build new partnerships across disciplines.

Another benefit of blogging is that accessibility and exposure to different audiences tend to broaden academics’ reputations, which opens up new professional possibilities. Blogging can lead to contract and consulting work, public presentations and interviews, as well as invitations to write for academic publications. “This kind of exposure is important for graduate students ... given that most of us lack established publishing records,” says Mr. Parsons, the PhD student at UVic.

Most academic departments don't yet recognize blogging in any formal way – though this could change. Alfred Hermida, newly tenured at the University of British Columbia graduate school of journalism, saw his blog [Reportr.net](#) recognised as Best Blog at the 2010 Canadian Online Publishing Awards. Because of the blog's success and the close relationship between his research, teaching and online work, Mr. Hermida included social media materials (including blog and Twitter statistics) in his tenure portfolio.

More formal recognition may come when academic administrators and established scholars begin to take more seriously the importance of engaging with publics in ways that show what academics do. This kind of transparency helps counter the assumptions that can circulate in the media and highlights the notion of knowledge as a public good, as something that shouldn't be confined within university walls.

This article first appeared on [University Affairs](#). Melonie continues the debate about academic blogging over on her blog, [Speculative Diction](#).

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