

Sabbatical Proposal for Gaylene Croker, Letters Department for Spring 2014

1. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this sabbatical leave is to research the various ways that academic blogging can be used in the classroom as an enhancement to educational discourse and as a way to strengthen the community among faculty members of Oxnard College.

Academic blogging is being used on college campuses nationwide and is gaining in popularity because this form of communication has an intrinsic appeal to students. It has been shown by researchers such as Shane Nackerud, Kurtis Scaletta and others that students will read more academic texts more carefully, think more critically, and write with more authority and with better technical skills when that writing is shared on a blogging site. The communicative nature of a blog, where students can share their insights and opinions with one another, can enhance nearly any class if the instructor carefully scaffolds the project and makes the goal and the requirements of the academic blogging experience clear.

Because the mission of Oxnard College is to provide high-quality learning, it is essential that faculty keep up with and embrace the technology and the social media with which our students are familiar. Oxnard College is made up of diverse students, and given the nature of a commuter school, there is sometimes a lack of community among our students. Academic blogging can reinforce a shared sense of purpose among our students and enhance the sense of communal learning.

In addition, many of our faculty members are part-time, and a department or division blog can help the faculty at colleges share information, provide informative links, and feel a part of the mission of the college. In addition, a blog can reinforce agreed upon objectives and goal. In short, a blog can help to create cohesion and unity in a department or division.

2. Rationale

a. Professional Development

As a teacher of writing for more than 20 years, I am interested in learning how to make writing more relevant to students across the curriculum. I am eager to learn more about this subject and to grow in my profession. My goal is to maintain traditional standards in the classroom while capitalizing on our students' interest in the Internet and in social media.

b. Value to Department or Discipline

My project will benefit my department as I bring to my colleagues my findings on the best practices concerning how to use blogging in the classroom. I intend to become an expert in the process of setting up and maintaining blogs. At this point, I am not aware of any other instructors on campus using academic blogging. I feel I could be an asset to my fellow teachers. I will also study the implications of this kind of learning system and help others to avoid any pitfalls, legal or ethical.

As part of my project, I plan to set up and maintain a blog for my department so that we can have an open and clear dialogue about issues in the teaching of writing and we can clarify our shared standards. Encouraging the participation among part-time faculty will be one of my goals.

c. Value to College and/or District

I plan to make myself a resource for anyone who desires to explore blogging as a form of classroom enhancement or as a way to bring cohesion to a department or division. While I work on my project, I will explore various platforms and the pros and cons of each one. By the time I complete my project, I will fully understand the legalities of blogging as they pertain to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and can help protect the college and the district avoid any legal issues involved.

d. Value to Students

My research will aid students in many ways. I use a form of blogging in two of my classes, and I have seen the tremendous growth of my students as they write for others to read. I have no doubt that academic blogging helps them build confidence, enhance their competitive edge, improve their transfer success, and develop job skills. I believe my project will improve student success rates as the students develop a greater sense of community in their classes.

e. Value to General Community

After having a blog in a class, students often realize the power in reaching out to others, providing information on resources in the community, and exchanging ideas. It is possible that some student bloggers could go on to establish blogs that would impact the community as a whole.

3. Implementation

a. Implementation Procedure

- 1) Read current research in the field of academics and blogging. This may require traveling to various campus libraries to use different databases.

Examples of the types of articles I would explore:

Kim, H. N. (2008). The phenomenon of blogs and theoretical model of blog use in educational contexts. *Computers & Education*, 51(3), 1342–1352.

Makri, K., & Kynigos, C. (2007). The role of blogs in studying the discourse and social practices of mathematics teachers. *Educational Technology & Society*, 10(1), 73–84.

So, H. -J., & Brush, T. A. (2008). Student perceptions of collaborative learning, social presence and satisfaction in a blended learning environment: Relationships and critical factors. *Computers & Education*, 51(1), 318–336.

- 2) Conduct survey on campus to gauge current use of blogging and areas of interest in the practice. Locate and contact teachers at at least three other community colleges who are now using blogging in the classroom. Conduct survey and interviews with these professionals.
- 3) Take a 4-Week course such as @One Online Training, Building Online Community with Social Media. Through such a course and individual research, investigate the various platforms (D2L, Blogspot, Wordpress) for blogging and research the capabilities and limitations of each. Assess the ease of use for the inexperienced blogger. Coordinate with Distance Ed. Committee to implement blogging platforms.

- 4) Pilot a blog for the teachers of Composition at Oxnard College. After a period of time, get feedback, assess efficacy, assess success, and consider changes.
- 5) Prepare a campus-wide presentation for faculty members who are interested in making blogging a part of their academic toolbox.
- 6) Write a detailed report of my findings.

b. Projected Results

At the end of my sabbatical, I will have achieved the following:

- 1) Thoroughly researched the issue of blogging as an academic tool and as a useful way to encourage discourse in academic departments.
- 2) Distilled this information into a presentation for other instructors, including a “How to Blog” blog for inexperienced faculty to springboard into this practice. Provided a bibliography on our portal for all faculty members who are interested in the research concerning academic blogging.
- 3) Be a consistent resource for other instructors in future semesters.

c. Project Timeline

January 2014

- 1) Begin reading research.
- 2) Begin pilot blog for Composition teachers in the Letters Department.
- 3) Investigate which colleges use blogs in their classrooms.
- 4) Conduct survey at OC to gauge current use of blogs and experience with blog platforms.

February 2014

- 1) Continue literature review.
- 2) Maintain department blog and assess participation.

- 3) Make contact with individuals at other colleges who use blogging, and contact those individuals for interviews.
- 4) Continue to maintain and enhance department blog, monitoring the use and reaction of faculty members.

March 2014

- 1) Focus on privacy issues concerning blogs.
- 2) Interview instructors at other institutions who use blogging in the classroom. If possible, gain access to their blogs to compare and contrast methods.
- 3) Focus on methods of scaffolding blogging into the classrooms. Investigate best practices and best ways to establish tone and purpose in academic blogging.
- 4) Continue maintenance of department blog. Record my observations of participation.

April 2014

- 1) Synthesize all research and all findings.
- 2) Work on presentation for faculty.
- 3) Begin writing detailed report.
- 4) Continue work/research on department blog.

May 2014

- 1) Complete presentation for faculty.
- 2) Send out survey to teachers of Composition about department blog and its effectiveness.
- 3) Write a detailed report of my sabbatical project.

d. Dissemination Plan: Benefit to Colleagues/Students/College

I will share my report with my English colleagues in the form of a presentation at our department meeting. I will also share my report with the Ventura Community College District's Distance Learning Task Force and Technology Committee. I hope to have a session at flex day in which I will present my findings and make myself a resource for others who want to make blogging a part of their classroom practice.

4. Past Contributions to the District

a. Scholarship

Fellow, South Coast Writing Project. Attended intensive 2-week conference. Currently attend follow-up meetings when available.

Participant, Great Teachers Seminar. Attended 1-week seminar. Participated in and presented workshops for other instructors.

Presented “Engaging Students in Learning” at Summer Institute at OC.

Article published in *POSTSCWRIP*, a publication of the South Coast Writing Project.

b. Service

1) Department/Discipline

Vice Chair, Letters. Conducted all part-time evaluations for the Letters Department for past 12 years.

Academic Senate representative, 2010 and currently.

Campus Use, Development, and Safety representative 2011.

2) College

Professional Development Committee representative and past chairperson of committee. Developed and implemented Flex Day activities. Organized campus activities such as “Sundaes on Tuesday.”

3) District

Attended various board meetings. Addressed board members on importance of maintaining communications division.

4) Community

Involved with Puente Project for 7 years; gave workshops and presentations in high schools throughout county.

Participated in numerous Youth Days held at Oxnard College.

5. Length of Service & Past Sabbaticals Awarded

- a.** Employed as a full-time faculty member in 1993 at Oxnard College.
- b.** Past sabbatical leave received: 1999.