

Guidelines for use of Social Networking and other Web 2.0 tools in teaching and learning Faculty of Humanities

Background

The December 2007 meeting of the Humanities eLearning Network (HEN) discussed emerging Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking (SN) sites, wikis and blogs. The Web 2.0 term has been applied to those technologies which aim to facilitate sharing of information, communication, creativity and collaboration and therefore many have social networking aspects. The discussion looked at whether such external sites and technologies may have any value for the Faculty in enhancing teaching and learning methods in terms of online and blended learning.

The discussion led to the production of these guidelines for staff, the aims of which are as follows;

- To explain the uses and features of some of the more popular social sites external to the University,
- To explain how these technologies can be used to support teaching, communication and a blended learning environment, including examples of current practice,
- To explain how students use these technologies in support of the social aspects of their work,
- To highlight how some of these technologies can complement and enhance the functionality of Blackboard, the University's new virtual learning environment.

This document was approved at the Faculty's Teaching and Learning Committee meeting on 7th May.

External sites with potential uses for teaching and learning:

NB: None of the external sites and technologies discussed in this document currently receive support from the Humanities IT Teaching and Learning Team. Most are based on free, open source software.

- **Social Networking** sites are mainly used to keep in touch with others, collaborate, join networks or groups and post or store information such as photos, videos and notes via the creation of a digital identity by the user. Popular sites are **Facebook** (www.facebook.com)¹, **Myspace** (www.myspace.com)² and **Bebo** (www.bebo.com)³. **Facebook** seems to have the most activity associated with learning, as it is mainly associated with colleges and Universities and was initially created for use by students of Harvard University. At present it also seems to be the most popular with 8.5 million UK users⁴ of which c.31000 members are in the University of Manchester network (including current students, alumni & staff). **Myspace** and **Bebo** have similar functionality although they currently have less grouping associated with learning.
- **Elgg** (www.elgg.org)⁵ is another example of such a site with an academic orientation and is used in other Universities and by JISC. It allows users to connect and collaborate and to discover and contribute resources and information through their connections. Users create a digital identity: describing themselves and their professional/ research interests. Any content published by the user is assigned tags which the software then uses to connect the user to other learners with similar interests/ tags. The GradConnect project⁶ (run through a partnership between the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences with Roberts' money) uses Elgg software. The project allows students to create personal and community blogs and find others with similar interests. Gradconnect is open to all postgraduates rather than being closed to a particular course or programme which allows communities to be established from the "bottom-up". It is held on the University of Manchester webfarm on our own server, as we own the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) to any material thereon (unlike facebook etc, see section on 'Drawbacks to using External SN tools').

¹ <http://www.facebook.com/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

² <http://www.myspace.com/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

³ <http://www.bebo.com/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7257073.stm> [last accessed 28.02.2008]

⁵ <http://www.elgg.org/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

⁶ <http://rhogus.mc.man.ac.uk/gradconnect/login/index.php> [last accessed 24.04.08]

Ning (<http://www.ning.com/>⁷) is another social site for users who want to create networks around specific interests or have limited technical skills. Its unique feature is that anyone can create their own customised network for a particular topic or need, catering to specific audiences⁸.

- **Moodle** (<http://moodle.org/>⁹) is a **course management system** (CMS) which is similar to Blackboard. It is designed using pedagogical principles, to help educators create effective online learning communities. You can download and use it on any computer, and it can scale from a single-teacher site to a University with 200,000 students.
- **Blog** sites can be used to quickly post thoughts and publish them on the web. They can also be used to link to other sites and upload photos, videos and podcasts. Examples include **Blogger** (<https://www.blogger.com/start>) and **Typepad** (<http://www.typepad.com>¹⁰) and **Livejournal** (<http://www.livejournal.com/>¹¹). **Edublogs** (www.edublogs.org¹²) is aimed specifically at the education community.

The Centre for Museology in the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures has been running a blog in Wordpress¹³ linked to the 'Digital Heritage' course unit since Jan 2007. This acts as an online collaborative notebook where students can reflect on class discussion with input from staff and museum professionals. See: <http://digitalheritage.wordpress.com>

- **Del.icio.us** (<http://del.icio.us/>¹⁴) is a site where you can save, bookmark, access and share websites. It can allow students to create a tagged, online bibliography which can, should the student choose, be accessed by other users either on a course unit or programme-wide basis. A cohort, project group or social network can therefore build up an online library of shared, tagged resources. The Centre for Museology has maintained a del.icio.us site (<http://del.icio.us/centre4museology>) since Oct 2007, where both staff and students add and share links to web resources relevant to the MA Art Gallery and Museums programme.
- **Clocklink** (<http://www.clocklink.com/>) is used on the MA programmes in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Educational Technology and TESOL. It is launched from within WebCT. It is useful to show the different timezones of students enrolled on a Distributed Learning programme, so that when you are putting students into groups to work on online tasks you can bear the time differences in mind! **Frappr ! Maps** (<http://www.frappr.com/>) Frappr! Maps is also used on the Distributed Learning MA TESOL, where students upload a photograph of themselves, a message, biographical detail etc. message directly onto the course web page, so that fellow students can "meet" each other online as real individuals and personalise their online identity, creating a proper sense of community. It is free, can be embedded on any web page that supports flash embeds, and provides an easy and unique way for students who may never actually meet in person to visualize and interact with each other online.
- **File sharing** sites such as **Flickr** (www.flickr.com¹⁵) and **YouTube** (www.youtube.com¹⁶) are useful for posting and sharing images (photos and videos). **Googledocs** (www.docs.google.com¹⁷) allows you to upload existing documents, spreadsheets and presentations, or create new ones from scratch which can then be accessed and edited from a Web browser. Multiple users can be invited to edit the documents simultaneously. Documents are stored securely online.
- **Wikis** are a type of website with pages which any user can easily contribute to and edit, including text, photos, videos etc. An example of a wiki site is **Wetpaint** (<http://www.wetpaint.com/>¹⁸). They are therefore useful tools for collaborative writing and the content can grow quickly,

⁷ <http://www.ning.com/> [last accessed 14.11.08]

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ning> [last accessed 14.11.08]

⁹ <http://moodle.org/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

¹⁰ <http://www.typepad.com> [last accessed 11.04.2008]

¹¹ <http://www.livejournal.com/> [last accessed 11.04.2008]

¹² <http://edublogs.org/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

¹³ <http://wordpress.com/> [last accessed 25.03.2008]

¹⁴ <http://del.icio.us/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

¹⁵ <http://www.flickr.com> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

¹⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/> [last accessed 28.02.2008]

¹⁷ <http://www.docs.google.com> [last accessed 11.04.2008]

¹⁸ <http://www.wetpaint.com/> [last accessed 11.04.2008]

e.g. Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>¹⁹) which is an online encyclopedia that anyone can edit. Most wiki sites ensure that user amendments to pages are tracked and recorded to ensure accountability, and various permission schemes to keep editing or viewing pages under different levels of control.

- **Instant messaging** software such as MSN Messenger²⁰ and Yahoo Messenger²¹, the main uses of which are technologies which facilitate instant communication via text over the web. Skype²² in addition allows users to make calls to other users free of charge over the internet.
- **Virtual worlds** e.g. **Second Life** (www.secondlife.com²³). This is an interactive virtual world environment where people can build, watch and show sound/video and possibly teach. It is inhabited by 'residents' in the form of their online identities. Residents can make digital creations to which they retain the rights. Creations can be bought, sold and traded with other residents via the Second Life unit of trade, which can be purchased.

Potential uses and benefits of external sites for T&L purposes:

Social networking sites and other online technologies have potential benefits in terms of encouraging participation, problem solving, creation of a repository of knowledge and community building. They may therefore be useful in supplementing teaching and learning activities either face-to-face, or online as provided by the new Blackboard VLE, as discussed below.

Most of these sites are free to use and open to all, via registration, which involves the creation of an account or digital identity. They are easy to use (especially for those with limited technical skills) and to publish and produce your own content. Most allow you to adjust the privacy settings to limit or increase the information shown about your profile to other users. Facebook in particular has certain applications for T&L purposes, as many students already have an account and engage well with it - possibly more so than with other such sites.

Social groups: alumni, peer mentoring

Currently, the primary use for social networking sites is for societies and for community-building purposes linked with learning, such as peer mentoring schemes. Students can create virtual links and keep in touch with each other online. The Faculty of Life Sciences has set up a Peer Assisted Study (PASS) group on Facebook, and the Student Ambassadors have groups for Widening Participation, Race Relations and Admissions, which again are all mainly used for social purposes. The Gradconnect project discussed above aims to reduce isolation amongst researching students by facilitating networking and peer support opportunities.

There are also independent alumni groups on Facebook around certain University of Manchester (UoM) programmes, e.g. BA (Hons) Politics and Modern History. Appreciation societies and groups have also been set up, mainly for purposes of social activity. However, not all groups are formed show appreciation – UoM students have set up an 'Against Arthur Lewis²⁴' group to share their dislike about the new building!

Group-based learning, participation and presentation

Many SN sites have the ability to create spaces which can be used for 'virtual face-to-face' interaction. Facebook users for example can create or join an existing group and messages can be shared between all members (by posting to the group's 'wall'). It could therefore be useful for students in enabling communication between members of a group taking part in group work, in an environment not moderated by staff, as groups can be set as 'closed' to certain members by invitation or open for anyone to join. This allows students to informally interact with each other and control their own environment. It may encourage participation from some students, as it could make it easier for them to contribute to a task. These spaces can also offer alternative methods of presenting work to fellow students and academics.

¹⁹ <http://www.wikipedia.org/> [last accessed 11.04.2008]

²⁰ <http://webmessenger.msn.com/> [last accessed 14.04.08]

²¹ <http://messenger.yahoo.com/> [last accessed 14.04.08]

²² <http://www.skype.com/intl/en-gb/useskype/> [last accessed 14.04.08]

²³ <http://secondlife.com/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

²⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=25635900384> [last accessed 28.02.2008]

Collaboration, discussion and reflection

Social sites can offer useful tools for collaborative writing work and enable online discussion and reflection. Wikis for example, are ideal for groups of people with a common interest or bond and a need to collaborate on an issue. Instead of sending email back and forth, a wiki website can be used to centralize the knowledge of a group and can be edited by anyone with the proper permissions.²⁵

Most social networking and file sharing sites also allow comments or discussion threads. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has an official presence on Facebook, using it for collaboration and communication. The University's eLearning technologies group²⁶ is also used to share knowledge and information on eLearning.

Skype, Yahoo and MSN instant messaging is used to communicate with students on some of the distance learning programmes in the School of Education to answer questions quickly and efficiently, to conduct quick tutorials and increase their feeling of involvement. Google Docs may also be introduced in order that tutors can discuss assignments with distance students.

Publicity and events promotion

Facebook users can create an 'event' and publicise it to their friends or group members. Those invited can then confirm attendance or non-attendance. The University of Manchester Students' Union (UMSU) uses it to publicise events and meetings to members of the UMSU online group. Training organisations such as Netskills use it to promote workshops. The Universities of Huddersfield and Cambridge have an official presence on Facebook. Cambridge has a page for all students who have accepted an offer for 2008 entry²⁷. Other social sites have similar functionality.

Learning material and resource repository

Resources can be pooled via sharing of documents and others such as photos and videos, which can be uploaded and shared via social sites such as Google Docs, Flickr and YouTube. These resources plus the associated discussions between users that these sites allow can create a useful repository of knowledge. The Centre for Museology's Wordpress blog and del.icio.us sites (see above) collect together online resources relevant to the unit's themes.

The use of a variety of online technologies can also help students develop transferable ICT skills and encourage the development of writing and communication skills.

Drawbacks to using external SN tools:

- If technologies other than Blackboard are used, care should be taken to ensure that the chosen functionality could not have been provided by Blackboard, as this is the University supported VLE.
- The technologies described above are not licensed to the University. The Faculty of Life Sciences consulted solicitors before setting up PASS group in Facebook and consequently have added a disclaimer to their group.
- Comments and information posted on these sites are outside of University control. On some sites there are also issues of privacy and intellectual property rights (IPR) regarding data posted. For example, Facebook's terms and conditions mean that any information posted is owned by Facebook, and should be read carefully by new users.
- There are as yet unanswered questions about the detection of plagiarism from participating in or viewing such collaborations online, and more generally about academic discourse in the online environment. Training on IPR issues will be required for students who use such sites.
- Social networking sites in particular are intended for social purposes and students may not want to use them as a learning environment. Therefore, if they are used as learning environments, students may need to access them frequently, but may get distracted by their other uses.

²⁵ <http://www.wetpaint.com/page/What-Is-A-Wiki> {last accessed 27.03.2008}

²⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2520455937> [last accessed 28.02.2008]

²⁷ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2642400136> [last accessed 24.04.08]

- Facebook has also seen its first drop in UK users²⁸, drawing attention to the fact that the popularity and audience of such sites tends to fluctuate, and may not be suitable for building a long term VLE.

University of Manchester licensed sites with SN applications:

- **Blackboard.** The University's new VLE is fully supported and integrated into other services. For example students can log into the Student Portal and access a wide range of personalised information, and links to the tools described above. This supports the students' 'Manchester' experience rather than having to log onto a variety of disparate services. All course units are to eventually have a presence. The software allows for online formal and informal learning activity around units.

Uses and advantages of Blackboard:

- Material is presented to students in a single learning space
- Supports the material delivered by lecture
- Allows for the tracking of students via moderation of discussions and monitoring of participation
- Offers new ways of teaching
- Encourages new ways of communicating – instant chat, discussions, live chat rooms, calendar
- Other functionality such as journals, media library, who's online, announcements from staff.
- Links to JRULM: reading lists, electronic resources, catalogue
- Allows continuous access for tutor and students – anytime, anywhere
- A cost-effective way of dealing with large numbers of students
- Can replace notice boards for announcements and sign-up sheets
- Feedback on assessments can be provided

For more information about the implementation of Blackboard in the Faculty, a list of pilot and exemplar projects, the migration plan for units currently in WebCT and information on user support, see the pages of the Humanities IT Teaching and Learning Team:

<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/humanities/ict/tandl/elearning/blackboard.html>

The University eLearning support site

<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/elearning>

The University also runs a support site for students using Blackboard, see:

<http://www.studentnet.manchester.ac.uk/blackboard/>

- The University has recently set up an online **Teaching and Learning Enhancement forum (TALENT)** for staff using **Clearspace** software, which is used to share examples of teaching and learning practice. It is currently limited to use by UoM staff. Within the forums you can join with colleagues on various discussion topics, or access a knowledge base of best practice documents, which is split into various sections and topics. The forums can be found via the following link, along with a user guide: <https://forums.manchester.ac.uk/clearspace/index.jspa> For more information, please contact Miriam Graham (M.graham@manchester.ac.uk) in the Teaching and Learning Support Office (TLSO) or Nicola Lord in the Faculty of Humanities T&L Office (nicola.lord@manchester.ac.uk)
- **PebblePAD** (www.pebblepad.co.uk²⁹) is an online e-portfolio tool. The Faculty is currently (2007/2008) running a pilot using Pebblepad for online PDP support at PGR level and on the UG Combined Studies programme. The Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences also uses PebblePAD for participants to store evidence for the assessed portion of the programme and the associated reflection required. See: <http://www.eps.manchester.ac.uk/tlc/nap/eportfolio.htm>

For further information about PebblePAD in Humanities email elearning@manchester.ac.uk.

²⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7257073.stm> [last accessed 28.02.2008]

²⁹ <http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/> [last accessed 26.02.2008]

Conclusions:

- Blackboard is the University’s choice of tool for blended and online learning. It can act as a single point of entry to all the learning resources needed by a student.
- Blackboard can be enhanced by linking to external sites – for example, students can add images to Flickr or YouTube to share with the class.
- Blackboard has a blogging facility and the potential for a wiki.
- Small sub groups can be set up in Blackboard to allow for Problem Based Learning.

However:

- Creation of groups in Blackboard is controlled by the teaching staff – Facebook and other SN sites allow students to create ad hoc groups as and when *they* need them.
- Blackboard sections have to be created through Campus Solutions. It might not always be possible or appropriate to create non-credit bearing sections.

Recommendations:

- Blackboard should be the first choice in most situations.
- Users should be aware of the issues of IPR and copyright when using external sites.
- Branding should be carefully controlled.

Further reading:

Definition of ‘Social Networking’ on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking³⁰

Some interesting short videos on Social Networking, Wikis, Blogs etc are provided ‘in Plain English’ on YouTube: http://youtube.com/watch?v=6a_KF7TYKVc&feature=user³¹

Social Networking content on the UoM TALENT Forums / Clearspace:
https://forums.manchester.ac.uk/clearspace/search.jspa?resultTypes=BLOG_POST&resultTypes=DOCUMENT&resultTypes=MESSAGE&resultTypes=BLOG&resultTypes=COMMUNITY&peopleEnabled=true&q=social+networking

Powerpoint presentation on GradConnect, available online (include Clearspace ref)

Powerpoint presentation on the use of SN tools in the MA TESOL/Educational Technology and TESOL, available online (include Clearspace ref)

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Document Control

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³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking [last accessed 26.02.2008]

³¹ http://youtube.com/watch?v=6a_KF7TYKVc&feature=user [last accessed 26.02.2008]

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