



Up Front

Technology for Collaboration —

Blogs and Wikis @ GSLIS

Two years after GSLIS and library staff began talking about the possibility, wikis and blogs become reality in GSLIS courses.

In early 2006, Dave Dwiggins, Dean's Fellow for Technology Support, helped the GSLIS Tech Lab debut blogs and wikis for GSLIS faculty, staff, and student groups to use. Several members of the GSLIS faculty are now using wikis in classes ranging from "Reference/Information Services" to, of course, "Technology for Information Professionals." Blogs haven't been quite as popular — except for the Dispatches blog. There, faculty, staff, and students are documenting their trips to libraries abroad and to conferences around the U.S.

Teaching Technology

GSLIS Adjunct Professor Caryn Anderson used a blog and a wiki in "Technology for Information Professionals," which she first taught in summer 2006. Several of her assignments were "born wiki or born blog," she noted — they immediately lent themselves to the format.

As part of her class requirement, Anderson required students to monitor blogs, listservs, and online periodicals like *D-Lib*. Students shared what they learned with one another by writing weekly blog posts or comments on their classmates' posts.

Karen Stern '08 was one of Anderson's students that semester. "I thought the use of the blog was especially good," she said. "It forced us to do some reading in the area and talk about it with others."

Anderson used the wiki to create some resource pages for her students. Students had to post a tutorial on how to get started with a new technology, such as RSS feeds or the Linux operating system. They also had to post a short presentation on a technology word instead of sharing their presentation orally.

"The wiki syntax was difficult at first . . . the best advice I got was to just copy the syntax from within the page itself," Anderson said.

GSLIS students, faculty and staff model their favorite geeky t-shirts.



She gave her students this advice, and set up some pages with different formatting styles for them to use. "Most students ended up saying things like, 'I had no idea it was this easy.' Or, 'I was totally scared, but it is really very simple,'" she said.

Hagar Shirman '07 found that the use of the blog and wiki "definitely made it more intense. I prefer using a blog to the Vista discussion, and it was great to see everyone's work on the wiki."

Assistant Dean Terry Plum also uses a wiki when he teaches this class. "In general, the wiki is a public knowledge bank for the class," he said. Plum adopted two of Anderson's assignments for his classes: the Tech Tutorial and the Word of the Day.

Using a wiki for these assignments worked well, for the most part. "The students enjoy learning about it and using it," Plum said. And due to the collaborative aspect, "the class is exposed to many tutorials on new technologies."

Molly Brown '07 took the class with Plum at Mount Holyoke in fall 2006. "I think because the class only met once a week, the wiki made it feel more participatory. And because I had never used a learning tool such as this before, I really enjoyed the fact that it made the course, and the learning, less of a solitary nature. We were all more engaged in each other's learning process."

Say what?

Blog:

A website that usually features news or the author's opinions. Blogs are quick and easy to update because they use an interface similar to Microsoft® Word. See the March '06 issue of *InfoLink* for more.

Wiki:

A website that encourages collaboration among a group by allowing anyone in that group to add or edit content easily, without knowing any special programming languages.

Classroom Collaboration

In other GSLIS classes, professors are embracing wikis as a way to foster more collaboration between students — something especially important on the Mount Holyoke campus, where classes are held only one day a week.

For Adjunct Professor Janis Wolkenbreit, the wiki she used in "Organization and Management of School Library Media Centers" was the anchor of the course. She adapted all of her assignments, in one way or another, for the wiki — it was "used as a class forum for collaboration on projects, dissemination of information, and discussion of readings."

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“Despite popular belief that New Jersey is all highways and chemical plants, I grew up playing in the woods.”

Cindy Fisher is a GSLIS student who works in the Tech Lab as the Dean's Fellow for Technology Support. The bulk of her job is working with WebCT Vista: training GSLIS faculty on how to navigate and use the software for their classes, and troubleshooting when they run into problems. Fisher also helps manage the logistics for the Technology Orientation Requirement.

Q: **Where did you grow up?**
In Mountainside, N.J. (That's exit 139 on the Garden State Parkway.) I grew up on the edge of the Watchung Reservation, so despite popular belief that New Jersey is all highways and chemical plants, I grew up playing in the woods, building tree forts, and such. I would go on nature walks for fun, so it was a pretty great place to grow up.

How does Boston compare to Mountainside?
More chowder, fewer diners.

What did you want to be as a kid?
A meteorologist, but I was less into the idea of waving my arms around at a blue screen while on TV; I kind of just wanted to chase tornados. When I was younger, my mom and I would go to the local library and I would sit in front of the weather section for hours. I got weather books as presents. I think if my math skills would have been a tad bit more, say, refined, I might have gone in a different direction.

You're one of the many English majors in GSLIS, right?
Yup. I went to Georgetown and studied English with a focus on culture and performance theory — not the most employable major, so I'm pretty happy I've made it this far!

Have you had a career outside the field of LIS?
I worked for the *Washington City Paper* as its online article archivist. I also worked at Provisions Library in D.C., first as a new media intern, and then I was hired on as a program associate. At Provisions, I organized film series to accompany the library's current gallery show and featured library collection, in addition to introducing a small 'zine collection to its general collection.

What is Provisions Library?
Provisions Library is a resource center for activism and the arts. It is part library, part art gallery, and part workshop center. The library collection is quite exhaustive, from art to critical theory to fiction. The main focus, however, is to bring [public] awareness to authors and perspectives from underrepresented groups — whether it's radical poetry, conceptual art, or indigenous novels. In order to check out materials, however, one had to be a paid member of the library, which has definitely helped me to consider the impact that such requirements have on the ability to connect with the patron base.

What do you like best about your work now?
Definitely the lightbulb moment when teaching about technology, whether it's how to use an online database, HTML, or yes, even WebCT Vista.

If you could have a totally different career, what would it be?
National park ranger or disaster planner.

What about those careers intrigues you?
I think a lot of what attracts me to those careers is the connection back to nature and trying to live with it harmoniously, instead of trying to dominate it.

What are you passionate about professionally?
How librarians can continue to equip users, especially youth, with media literacy and information literacy skills. I'm also interested in tech services and outreach for the elderly.

And outside of work?
Cooking, amateur nature photography, typography.

Why typography?
I'm not quite sure, though my mom does calligraphy on the side, so it is possible that my love of artistic lettering came from her. I have always been fascinated by typefaces and try to save or sketch interesting fonts I come across.

What is one of the biggest lessons you've learned in life?
Sometimes if you look too long before you leap, the hurdle gets even bigger; spontaneity gets a bad rap.

What is your biggest challenge?
Staying grounded in the world of technology; it's easy to take [technology] for granted and to forget that without skill-training and outreach, technology can be very exclusionary.

What do you do for fun or excitement?
In all honesty, food shopping; it's like [the TV game show] *Supermarket Sweep!*

Do you have a favorite grocery store in the area?
I don't have one particular favorite store, but Hi-Lo in Jamaica Plain, Super 88 in Back Bay, and Trader Joe's are good ones.

Are you reading anything interesting right now?
Understanding Media by Marshall McLuhan and Lewis H. Lapham and *A Crack in the Edge of the World* by Simon Winchester.

You live in Jamaica Plain. What's the best thing about that?
City Feed has the best sandwiches (try the Farmer's), living close to good pals, and the diverse community.

You have a couple of unusual collections. Care to share?
Sure. I collect frumpy clothing and well-designed stationery.

What are your favorite pieces? Do you wear/mail them?
I have a few house coats that I wear on occasion in the summer and a bunch of sweaters that friends seem to think are a bit matronly for my years. My stationery collection mainly consists of letter pressed cards and screen prints, which I admire for a while and then send on to friends and family.

Interview by Alison Cody



Blogs and Wikis @ GSLIS

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"The centerpiece of the course has been the creation of a management notebook by each student," Wolkenbreit said. "One of the biggest complaints about the 'paper' management notebook was that it was just a huge pile of paper that was too difficult to keep and use. The wiki is an electronic management notebook that all students are contributing to, so it contains the best thinking and materials of all the students in the class, rather than just what an individual has found."



Adjunct Professor Stephanie Willen Brown used a wiki in her fall 2006 section of "Reference/Information Services." Students wrote up annotations of reference sources and posted them to the wiki. "Overall the class reviewed 230 total reference sources, and they each selected one to three sources per week to annotate. They used this information to help them study for the final exam," said Brown. She believes that using the wiki for this assignment is beneficial to her students. "It introduces them to new technology in a way that's relevant to the class and will be useful to them in the class," she said.



Back on the Boston campus, Professor Candy Schwartz has employed a blog and wikis for her courses. The blog encompasses all of her classes. She said she uses it to broadcast announcements to students (course updates, deadlines, reminders, news), "jobs in areas in which I teach, and occasional musings." Previously, Schwartz had updated a static HTML page with course news and announcements. With the blog, students can subscribe to the content and have any updates delivered directly to them.



In fall 2006, she used a wiki in both her "Digital Libraries" and "Information Organization" classes. For "Digital Libraries," the wiki was "a space in which all the committees creating the class digital library did their work, posted their files, shared communication, gave feedback and so on," said Schwartz.



Student Hagar Shirman took "Digital Libraries" with Schwartz and noted that the wiki was another way to demonstrate class participation. But because the class used so many methods of communication and collaboration (the wiki, Schwartz's blog, WebCT Vista, online project management software, a shared network folder, and e-mail), "it got a bit confusing as to where was what after a while, and I had to create a 'What is Where' section on the wiki," she said.



"The wiki was basically our content management system," Shirman said. "It became our depository for all class-related issues, and I think it could work even better with some imposed structure. The collaborative aspect is brilliant." She thinks that in future semesters, Schwartz will assign a student to better organize the wiki's structure.

What's next?

Blogs and wikis are still a new tool for many GSLIS professors. Those who have used them are finding that they are most successfully deployed when students are required to use them for an assignment. As other GSLIS professors form ideas based on their colleagues' use of these technologies in the classroom, Dwiggin and the Tech Lab hope to see more instructors taking advantage of the collaborative aspect of wikis and blogs.

Article by Alison Cody

Translation of Andrew Campbell's latin shirt, left:

I have a catapult. Give me all the money or I will fling an enormous rock at your head.

GSLIS students, faculty and staff pictured in this issue

Page One:
Joshua Jackson
Sally Legore

Page Two:
Alison Cody
Ellen Wilson
Andrew Campbell
Sheila Denn
Linnea Johnson
Ben Florin

Thank you to all of our "geeky shirt" models!

February Events

February 7, Wednesday, "Life After GSLIS: Librarian for LibraryThing." Abby Blachly, Librarian for LibraryThing, talks about what she does for a living. Blachly earned her MLIS and MA in History at Simmons. Time and location TBA. Sponsored by ALA @ Simmons. For more information about LibraryThing, visit: <http://www.librarything.com/press.php>.

February 13, Tuesday, Lunchtime Seminar: Crimes of War, Crimes of Peace: Destruction of libraries during and after the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. Lecture given by Andras Riedlmayer, Bibliographer in Islamic Art and Architecture, Harvard University. P207, 1-2:00 p.m. Snacks will be provided. This lecture is co-sponsored by Simmons International Relations.

February 20, Tuesday, "Tech Tools at the MIT Libraries." Nicole Hennig, Web Manager and Usability Specialist at MIT Libraries, will speak about MIT's use of tech tools including LibX, a toolbar for web browsers that helps researchers connect to the catalog, and other e-resources. Location TBA. 1:00 p.m. For details see <http://web.simmons.edu/~asist/>. Sponsored by ASIS&T@Simmons.

February 26, Monday, "On the Library Crimes Beat." Kim Martineau is a reporter for the *Hartford Courant* whose recent assignments included covering the E. Forbes Smiley map theft case and other library crimes. Time and location TBA. For updates on these events visit <http://gslis.simmons.edu/blogs/alasc>. Sponsored by ALA @ Simmons.

February 27, Tuesday, Brown Bag Lecture Series: Howard Silver, Associate Head & Bioengineering Librarian at MIT. Topic and location TBA, 1:00 p.m.

March 2, Friday, Deadline for Student Petitions. All students requesting a petition to transfer credits or to enroll in credits at another institution must submit their petitions by Friday, March 2, for discussion at the March Faculty Meeting.

More information about these and other events can be found at <http://my.simmons.edu/gslis/resources/calendars/events.shtml>.

GSLIS CE, Workshop Discount

Two CE workshops are available to attend at a deeply discounted rate of \$30. Funding for this program is provided by the National Library of Medicine.

"Will Duct Tape Cure My Warts? Examining Complementary and Alternative Medicine," Saturday, March 10, 2007.

"Caring for the Mind: Providing Reference Services for Mental Health Information." July 1-31, 2007, online.

For details please see <http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/continuinged/workshops>.

Workshop Series

Emerging Technologies Workshop Series returns! Stay tuned for details on the return of the Emerging Technologies Workshop Series, sponsored by ASIS&T@Simmons and the GSLIS Tech Lab. Dates, times and topics will be announced soon.

Announcements from P-111

Summer 2007 registration will occur via AARC beginning March 12. Students will be assigned individual registration dates and times based upon their expected graduation date and total number of credits completed. At the end of February, log in to AARC and click the link entitled "My Registration Priority" to view your registration timeframe.

You may register and make changes to your enrollment at or any time after your assigned start date and time, through the end date and time listed. If you have questions, please contact the Registrar's Office at 617-521-2111.

Folks on the Move

Congratulations to GSLIS student Elizabeth Galoozis, who has been selected as the Simmons College ALASC Student-to-Staff Representative for the 2007 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., from June 21-27.

Congratulations scholars! Katherine St. Germaine has received a \$1,000 scholarship from Bookbuilders of Boston. Akunna Eneh received a \$500 book award from the Massachusetts Black Librarians Network in October, 2006. Also in October, Elizabeth Walters and Hagar Shirman were received the Josephine Fang Award.

Jean Morrow, GSLIS adjunct professor, presented at "The Academic Music Research Library of the Twenty-First Century," a symposium held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library at Harvard.

Professor Ching-chih Chen's Global Memory Net project was featured in the article "Global Library Launched" in *Information Today*, October 2006 issue.

Check out the November/December 2006 issue of "Searcher" to read GSLIS student Karie Kirkpatrick's article "OpenCourseWare: An MIT Thing?" OpenCourseWare is a plan developed by MIT faculty that would open up MIT's course content to the rest of the world — for free. Congratulations on your publication, Karie!

InfoLink

InfoLink is the monthly newsletter of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College. Its purpose is to provide school- and career-related information and to foster community among the many diverse people who make up the school.

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Copy deadline for the March issue is **Thursday, February 15, 2007**.