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Innovate-Blog: Need for More Discussion

by James N. Shimabukuro

I-Blog has grown in the last couple of months from 11 articles by 8 writers in November to [20 articles](#) by 14 writers in December-January. Our [team of authors](#) has also grown from the original 8 members (John Adsit, Claude Almansi, Steve Eskow, Gary Greenberg, Harry Keller, John Thompson, Lynn Zimmerman, and me) to 15 at this writing with the addition of 7 new contributors: Judith V. Boettcher, MaryAnne Gobble, Carrie Heeter, James L. Morrison, Randall E. Osborne, Anita Pincas, and Bonnie Bracey Sutton.

As we've grown, so have the range of topics and level of discussions. Still, as Steve Eskow reminds me, we need more discussion to realize I-Blog's full potential. A lot more. And to accomplish this, we will need to attract more writers—and readers—who are ready to take an active, ongoing role in helping I-Blog grow.

Back to Blog Basics

Blogs have been around for a while, but the idea of integrating them into professional journals such as *Innovate* is relatively new. A first step toward getting more of our colleagues to join us in I-Blogging may be to review some of the I-Blog basics. Perhaps the simplest way to accomplish this is with a quick Q&A:

How do I get to I-Blog?

The URL is <http://innovateblog.wordpress.com/>.

How do I find the table of contents?

Click on the "Index" tab at the top of the I-Blog page for a comprehensive list of all articles. For the most recent posts, see the list in the right sidebar under "Recent Posts." Each title is a live link to the full article. For a quick scan of the last ten feature articles, see the pull quotes in the right sidebar under "Latest Features." Clicking on the author's name will take you to the article, which will appear in the center panel.



How can I search the blog?

Type a key word or words in the "Search" field located in the upper right corner of the page, just below the banner. A list of articles matching your search terms will appear in the center panel.

Clicking on any one will take you to the article.

How do I add a comment?

Click on the title of the article and scroll all the way down the page to read posted comments and add your own in the box titled "Leave a Reply." Compose your response and click on "Submit Comment."

Leave a Reply

Name

Mail (will not be published)

Website

 Notify me of follow-up comments via email.

How do I add an RSS feed?

To take advantage of this feature, you'll need an RSS reader. I use Google Reader. Once your account is set up, you'll need to decide which of the RSS feeds you want to receive. (I get both):



After selecting the RSS feed, choose your reader from the list of feed destinations.

Become an I-Blogger

To get the most out of I-Blog, take the plunge and participate: Post comments and submit articles. Staff writers are expected to submit a minimum of three articles a year, one in each of the following three periods: December-March, April-July, and August-November. If you don't want to be held to a publishing schedule, sign on as a guest author when you submit your first article. Click on the "Submissions" tab in I-Blog to view author guidelines. Submitting an article for consideration is as simple as emailing an article to me (james@hawaii.edu) via a message or attachment.

I-Blog Is a Discussion Platform

I-Blog is a publishing platform that fills the gap between formal publications, such as *Innovate*, and professional discussion forums, such as Innovate-Ideagora. I-Blog articles are less involved than journal pieces but more formal and substantive than discussion posts. They provide a quick and easy venue for authors to expand on topics of their choice, sharing concerns, opinions, tips, or thoughts. Articles are often written in a few hours and published within a few hours of submission. Thus, timely topics can be addressed within a day or two after breaking into the news; see the forum series on Michelle A. Rhee, for example.

But more importantly, I-Blog is a discussion platform. It's a forum for exploring, at length, considered opinions and thoughtful responses. Usually, those responses appear as comments on an entry, but sometimes when the issue under discussion is complex or contentious, responses may take the form of follow-up blog posts. For example, my December post on Michelle Rhee, chancellor for the District of Columbia Public Schools system, "[Michelle Rhee - What's Really at Stake?](#)," was quickly followed by Morrison and Gobble's "[Two Ambivalent Views of Michelle Rhee's Efforts](#)," Adsit's "[Needed - A Professional Approach to Teaching](#)" and "[Poetic Faith—the Magic of Belief](#)," Morrison's "[Worth Reading: 'Myths Left Behind'](#)," and Sutton's "[Michelle Rhee Has a Broom: Should She Use It to Sweep Out Experienced Teachers?](#)" as well as a [poll](#) that allowed readers to offer their own brief assessments of the merits of Rhee's approach and the likelihood of her success.

All of this material, generated in just over a week, continued to spark comment into early January. My article elicited several comments: Ira Socol asserted that Rhee is not an innovator at all but rather "the perfect person to preserve the status quo"; for Zimmerman, Rhee's one-size-fits-all approach felt overly constricting and ignored studies that show that students need "touchy-feely" teaching solutions as well as test-based approaches; and Adsit suggested that Rhee's goals are reachable but the necessary changes must be approached "delicately." Morrison's comment, combined with input from Gobble, was expanded into "Two Ambivalent Views," which generated comments in turn; it also received a pingback from [Trinity Washington University's President's Blog](#). "Two Ambivalent Views" led Morrison to develop a second article on the subject, "Worth Reading." Each of the other follow-up articles also generated (and continues to generate) a range of comments; the result is an active, passionate, considered discussion of the challenges Michelle Rhee faces and the merits and pitfalls of her confrontational approach.

Another brewing discussion took a while to get warm, but it is quickly heating up. Eskow's "[The 375-Billion Dollar Question. And the New Agora](#)," published on November 3, suggests that the answer to the cost problem in higher education, and to many other issues, might well lie in technologies that render the physical university obsolete. In her article "[Access: The New Imperialism?](#)," posted on December 31, Zimmerman counters that the emphasis on technology may well disenfranchise those who have no access to the innovations that make such visions possible. Eskow responds in a third article, "[The Campus: The Old Imperialism?](#)," posted on January 23, that buildings themselves, which require both enormous investment and a centrally located student body, represent a kind of imperialism and shut out those who cannot get to them. The topic is itself a carryover from an Innovate-Ideagora discussion begun by Morrison in July 2008 entitled "[Addressing the problem of faculty resistance to using IT tools in active learning instructional](#)

[strategies](#)," which continues to generate comment. Expect more posts and comments on the topic in coming weeks.

A Wide Range of Topics

The controversial Rhee and imperialisms old and new are just a sampling of the topics covered by I-Bloggers in December and January. Almansi's thoughtful and comprehensive articles (see the list under her photo in the left sidebar in I-Blog) on the latest developments and issues in technology and accessibility have generated lively discussions among an international readership. Adsit and Keller have both published at length on topics related to change in the teaching of science, and their articles emphasize not only best practices but leading-edge theory as well.

Osborne's "[Defining One's Diversity Philosophy: A Crucial Skill in a Changing World](#)" makes it very clear that thought-provoking philosophical pieces are not only suitable but essential in an education blog. In "[A Model for Integrating New Technology into Teaching](#)," Pincas shares an instructional model that can guide the integration of technology into the instructional planning process, ensuring that need drives technology use rather than the reverse. Her model is informed by years of field experience and practice as well as the latest theories.

Boettcher's articles, "[An Interview with Terry Anderson: Open Education Resources - Part I](#)" and "[Part II](#)," are particularly exciting because they're the result of interviews Boettcher did at the Sloan-C conference in November 2008. In the coming months, we'll be actively seeking more conference-based submissions, including interviews, reports, and reactions. See the "Live I-Blog" entry in the right sidebar for a link to details.

Finally, Heeter's "[Adventures in Hybrid Teaching: The First Day Is the Hardest](#)" is the kind of article that we've all been waiting for—one in which the author doesn't take herself too seriously and is willing, as Almansi says in her comment, to inject humor into a subject that is all too often treated in a glum, mechanical, and overly serious manner. Ultimately, all of us have to discover the fun in what we do for a living. Otherwise, we're in for a long, hard, and boring journey.

I think I speak for all of us when I say that one of the goals in I-Blog ought to be humor. The more we are able to laugh at our own sometimes hapless efforts at working with the latest technology, the better able we'll be to work together, stick with the task, and see it to fruition.

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