

Current debates about the purposes of higher education often construct a binary between an older ideal of a Humboltian university dedicated to the greater public good and a modernised institution serving the needs of the knowledge economy (e.g. Holmwood, 2011). Within this binary, academics are generally portrayed as disillusioned and demoralised. While not wanting to deny the realities of today's higher education, we have been exploring an arena where this picture does not ring true: academic blogging.

In this presentation we attempt a provisional taxonomy of academic blogging practices. Weblogs, or blogs they have come to be known, have been in existence for a little over a decade. It's impossible to know how many blogs are run by academics; existing registries such as Technorati do not have an education section, let one which concentrates on academia. On the whole, Universities seem to pay little attention to the blogs run by their academics; it's rare to find an institution that lists any blogs run by staff, let alone a comprehensive index. To further complicate the matter, the content on academic blogs can blur the boundaries between personal and professional.

Sourcing a large sample of blogs to analyse is the first stage of building a taxonomy. The use of 'blogrolls' - a list of suggested links to other blogs - enabled us to use a 'snowball' approach (Atkinson and Flint, 2011) to finding relevant blogs. To categorise the blogs we scanned the 'about' page, which generally states the purpose of the blog, and then a selection of the content to see if it matched the description. The analytical question we asked was: what academic work is being done in this blog?"

Broadly speaking academic blogs are either solo or collaboratively authored. Across this divide, some blogs are very focused on particular kinds of academic work, while others tended to slip between two or more of these types. Below is a list of the categories we have built, including descriptions.

Category of blog	Description
Journey blogs	These blogs are usually authored by doctoral researchers about their PhD activities. These blogs tend to roam widely, covering research topics, experiences of research and the practices of everyday life. It is unclear who the PhD candidate imagines the audience is for their blog in many cases: is it the supervisor, the student themselves, other students, their broader research community or all of these at once? Along with pragmatic note keeping and idea generation (Ward and West, 2008), many candidates write candidly about problems they encounter and reflections on the process and are relatively candid about the gaps, mismatches and stumbles.

	<p>In many of these blogs the ‘messy reality’ of research is foregrounded; exactly the mess which is usually edited out or elided in more formal publication avenues such as journal papers and conferences. We could think of journey blogs as foregrounding a ‘confessional practice’, the primary difference which separates them from the other types.</p> <p>Generally those blogs where the candidate is focussed on the journey of the self show little evidence of reader engagement (signalled by the number of comments and ‘pass alongs’ on social media). However some of these student blogs can slip into a ‘pedagogical mode’ where the candidate talks about techniques or processes they have adopted. There is a subgenre of the journey blog where this pedagogical intent has taken over. A small, but growing group of blogs run by doctoral candidates explicitly attempt to teach aspects of research or writing practice that they have found difficult.</p> <p>It is interesting to see what happens to blogs where the PhD is finished. Occasionally the blog is abandoned, but sometimes the practice of blogging continues on, transformed into a professional and / private blog where the writer continues to have a dialogue with their imagined audience.</p>
<p>Self Help’ or ‘Survival’ Blogs</p>	<p>These are generally authored or edited by research support staff with the explicit purpose of helping researchers be more productive and effective. A subgenre of these blogs focus on writing or presenting research. Some attempt to assist researchers on the transition out of the PhD, or academia, into private practice or industry.</p>
<p>Academic Practice Blogs</p>	<p>In general these attempt to articulate academic practices for others. Blogs in this genre may be focussed on writing or on academic publishing ‘how tos’, tips for tertiary teachers, advice on using social media or they may range across a selection of scholarly questions and practices</p>
<p>Academic Blog Aggregators</p>	<p>There is an emerging trend for mainstream publishers to curate a site populated by blog and blog style content. Some universities are starting to host collaborative student blogs. There are tentative moves towards building ‘editorial opinion’ sites authored by academics for the general public, which seek to provide an alternative to mainstream newspapers.</p>
<p>Research Communication Blogs</p>	<p>These blogs focus on research findings of a general or specialist nature. The authors may be practising academics, doctoral candidates, early career researchers,</p>

	adjuncts, retired academics or academics on extended leave. Some seek to engage and inform interested members of the public about areas of scholarly interest and / or facilitate dialogue within specific academic communities. Some of these blogs are more concerned with critique or commentary than others; these seems to be informed by disciplinary backgrounds of the bloggers.
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With the possible exception of some blogs produced by academics in support services, the vast majority appear to be the result of individual or group initiative, are operated entirely on voluntary labour, bring little tangible reward to their writers and often bring together academics at various career stages.

We suggest that these blogs provide evidence of ongoing academic good will, intergenerational dialogues and the kinds of gift economies that are apparently in decline on other material locations. While there is evidence of some institutions wishing to regulate academic blogging, and increasing commercial activity, this still appears to be a space which is somewhat anarchic, open and fluid and where apparently endangered notions - such as sharing knowledge and expertise, taking time to engage in conversation, and offering assistance without expectations of reward – still operate.

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