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College Governance Greater than Before: Modernization & Simplification through Web 2.0 Technologies

Jeffrey R. Bickford

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College Governance Greater than Before:
Modernization & Simplification through Web 2.0 Technologies

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Community College Leadership Academy
North Shore Community College
June 27, 2008
# Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pilot</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope Will Include Strategic Planning</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach and Literature Review</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-office Mail</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Mail</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Portal</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Network Shared Drive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups Have Fluid Boundaries</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Apprehension</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Use of Blogs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Plan</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Process</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings &amp; Conclusions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected Outcomes</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Learning and Development</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: PowerPoint Presentation Slides</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Survey of Pilot Group</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

The Governance System at North Shore Community College is made up of the Coordinating Council and eight standing committees. In the spring of 2007 a survey from the governance sub-committee revealed there were communication issues within the Information Technology Committee. At the chairperson training session in September of 2007 chairpersons were looking for better ways to communicate within their committees and with the entire college community. It was apparent the College needed a new tool for communication within the governance system.

There were several tools already available to governance members that didn’t quite match the needs. The College has a very successful portal environment, but the groups feature within the portal was cumbersome to navigate. Email was heavily used and was beginning to grow into a problem due to the sheer volume of messages. Tracking revisions of documents in email is also problematic. A college network shared drive was available but often people forgot to check for new documents which led to updates being emailed. The shared drive was also difficult to connect to from off campus.

It was time for a new tool that was easily accessible, intuitive and would allow communication through multiple methods depending on user preference. The WordPress blog server software was presented to me by my Web Administrator as a solution to all of these communication problems. WordPress is easily accessible on or off campus with any popular web browser as well as smart phones and other devices. The layout of the blog was worked on collaboratively by many members of governance, faculty and administration and the final result was an interface that was intuitive and easy to navigate. WordPress also supports RSS (real simple syndication) feeds allowing us to feed new posts and comments to any device that supports RSS as well as email on an opt-in basis.
The College decided to implement a pilot with blogs being introduced to all of the standing committees. The Information Technology Committee (I.T.C.) became my focused pilot and I made use of the college governance survey before and after the pilot was over to measure success. A survey was also distributed to all members of the I.T.C. at the end of the academic year to determine the effectiveness of the blog in the committee. We got back the following results:

94% of members want to continue using the blog next year to facilitate the committee

The blog improved:  
- 76% communication
- 65% document management
- 53% organization
- 47% participation
- 6% none of the above

85% response to survey

The response to the use of blogs in governance was resoundingly positive and led to the expansion of the new blog server into several other key areas including strategic planning and accreditation.

In the end this project required about $1,200 in initial investment of hardware and software and provided an easy system to replicate for multiple uses. The blog server is also feeding content directly into the college campus portal which has become a best practice across the country. Although a simple tool blogs clearly look like an effective communication tool within colleges and will most likely continue to gain popularity in the future.

This project uncovers many ways in which blogs can enhance communication in governance as well as other areas of the college. The necessary channels of support are outlined and several issues are brought up and answered. This is a pilot that is easy to replicate and maintain and truly opens the doors to a new level of communication on the campus.
Background

The Governance System at North Shore Community College is made up of the Coordinating Council and eight standing committees. The governance structure allows for shared responsibilities and provides incentives and rewards for participatory decision-making and problem solving, fosters collaboration and accountability, and inspires a sense of ownership and unity among all full and part-time members of the College Community. Key to the effectiveness of this governance system, communications must be widely accessible and intelligible for committee members as well as the public.

With communication often being the first problem in team building and highlighted in leadership books it was no surprise that more attention needed to be focused on this area. The governance structure at N.S.C.C. was working well but there was a need to increase awareness of the work the standing committees were doing. There was also a need to increase the amount of communication between committee members in the face of limited meeting times and availability. In short we needed to find a way to increase communication in and out of the governance system while also accounting for the varied schedules of members and non-members.

The Pilot

I began this project as I was elected chair of the Information Technology Committee in the summer of 2007. I decided to use the I.T.C. as my pilot for this project as they had additional challenges related to communication beyond those I have already mentioned. The governance sub-committee had put out a survey of all standing committees during the early spring of 2007 which identified several key areas that needed to be worked on in the I.T.C. The chart in figure 1 on the next page shows the average scores of all governance committees along side of the scores of the I.T.C. for 2007.
I had been working in this committee for a year and witnessed the great deal of work that was accomplished by the group and yet the survey results pointed to several weak areas. First and foremost I could see that time was a big problem as most of us had very busy schedules and could not afford to meet more often. Communication also jumped out as it was clear the committee did not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities nor did they feel connected to the community as a whole. I was confident that making use of a “web 2.0” type application could help the group communicate more effectively and be able to work in a more organized fashion throughout the year.

In its simplest form a blog is a web-based application that allows participants to engage in conversations from anywhere at any time. If the blog was used effectively this would certainly alleviate the need for more communication without adding more meeting times. Members would have the luxury of joining the conversation at their leisure. These conversations are also stored in a log (the term “blog” comes from “web log”) which allows anyone to review issues and points made in one easy place. With a

### Governance Survey 2007 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that the time I invest in my committee is well spent and productive</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting once per month provides my committee with adequate time to undertake its business.</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a clear understanding of the responsibilities that have been charged to my committee.</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The business undertaken by my committee adheres to its stated responsibilities</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The business undertaken by my committee results in outcomes that benefit the College.</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
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Figure 1
properly managed blog all could review pertinent points made by others and then contribute their own educated opinions.

September kicked off the year with a governance chairperson training session. Some individuals in this session expressed the desire to email all agendas, minutes and supporting documents to the entire community each month. On the other side of the fence several others complained that we all have too much email already and it will be too difficult to manage all of this information through their inbox. Even those who organize their email into concise folders find it difficult to remember if something was filed under a division name, project name, etc. In the end most of us end up searching our email and then trying to decipher which is the most current version of an attachment. This conversation turned to an even more pressing need to involve more of the community in the governance process. I knew in the back of my mind that a blog could provide the central location for communication and documents while also offering the option to have communication emailed to individuals that chose to subscribe. I informed the group of my blog pilot with the I.T.C. and offered to support any other committees that were interested.

**Scope Will Include Strategic Planning**

In the very first month of the blog pilot going live with the I.T.C. I was approached by the C.I.O. and V.P. of Administration and Finance with a need for the same tool set in the strategic planning process. N.S.C.C. was embarking on the development of our next strategic plan which would clearly add an additional burden to our standing committee members’ busy schedules as well as the community members that would participate in the process. The fact that our campuses are spread over three cities also makes it a pressing priority for us to find a centralized approach to better streamline, organize and increase communications. This system will need to be easy for both users and administrators, provide
centralized version control and ensure the ability to readily obtain feedback. A system of this nature is required to accommodate the varying schedules of committee members, improve communications outside of regularly scheduled meetings and increase input and communications with the general public. Electronic mail and portal environments can be constrained, difficult to administer and less flexible than what users expect which is why I believe it is time to look at web 2.0 technologies as a new communications vehicle for governance and central planning of the institution.

**Goals**

1. Committee members increased satisfaction with the ability to readily locate information, provide committee updates and simplify/enhance communications with document tracking, group discussion and input mechanisms.

2. Increased satisfaction from the community at large as they will be empowered to participate in meetings and important discussions that they have not in the past due to the inability to locate information, time constraints and other limitations.

3. Reduce the ever increasing volumes of email that we are all experiencing, which makes it cumbersome to track and respond to especially when there are attachments with multiple revisions involved.

4. The pace at which governance effects change (in particular the new strategic plan) will be increased while preserving the involvement of more individuals within the N.S.C.C. community.

5. Blog training will become a regular part of standing committee chair training.

6. Information and participation can take place 24 x 7 from both on-campus and off-campus systems.
Approach and Literature Review

I started my research by interviewing committee members and the general community at N.S.C.C. looking for what communication vehicles were currently being utilized in governance and the strengths and weaknesses of each. The four options that were available and used to varying degrees were inter-office mail, electronic mail, the campus portal and the college network shared drive.

Inter-office Mail

Although inter-office mail provides an easy to use communication system it was slow and difficult to manage. Agendas, minutes and supporting documents could add up quickly and easily be misplaced in busy offices amongst other piles. The use of paper was also actively being reduced to be more environmentally friendly not to mention more cost effective.

Electronic Mail

The natural improvement on inter-office mail was to turn to electronic mail. This was by far the most widely used form of communication in N.S.C.C. governance. Although this form of communication is “green” and more cost effective it presented a new set of problems. Many individuals receive 40+ email messages a day. Faced with this high volume of email it was difficult to keep governance communications organized. As became clear from the early days of electronic mail the system is most suitable for communications between two people (University of Technology Sydney 1996). Once you move to communications between three or more people and make use of working documents with revisions it is extremely difficult to manage the revisions and discussion points. Individuals would have to dig through their email and try to determine which version of a particular document was the most current. In the end I found most people would email the chair asking for the latest version of a document to be sent again.
**Campus Portal**

The Campus Portal is a big step in the right direction. The portal currently provides a single stopping ground for many college services. Students, faculty and staff can all access the one central stopping point for pertinent information and forms and this seemed a natural fit for governance communications in the beginning. Research shows that more and more campus members are expecting to visit the campus portal for collections and amalgamations of software and services (Shilakes & Tylman, 1998) but more importantly most now look to the portal as a single entry point or gateway to information resources (Abuhamdieh, 2003).

As students, faculty and staff have made greater use of portals they have come to expect the ability to provide secure, customizable and dynamic content from a variety of sources (Smith, 2004 p. 94). A key factor in the success of a portal to provide these capabilities is for the tool itself to be intuitive and user friendly.

As I delved in deeper I found the portal had a group feature designed to allow groups to easily share documents online. What the group feature was missing was an easy way for conversations to take place online. Many users also found the group feature to be cumbersome and involve too many steps to access and post information.

**College Network Shared Drive**

Another tool made available to the community is the network shared drive. This is a common drive that appears on all faculty and staff computers in the college and allows for sharing of documents via the campus network. Most committees made it a point to put copies of their agendas, minutes and supporting documents on this shared drive in their respective committee folder. Though the network drive was easy to use there were a couple of clear challenges. Users need to be organized in their approach as finding files can be cumbersome (University of Edinburgh 2006). Users
on campus were automatically connected to the network shared drive when they turned their computers on however when they were home they faced the second challenge.

As can be seen above users now had to make sure they were connected to their ISP (Internet Service Provider) at home and that their personal firewall at home/current location was not blocking necessary ports to VPN to the college. Users would then have to connect to the college’s secure network over the Internet via a VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection. This involved making a secure connection to the college and providing the proper credentials to connect. At this point there was still one more step as users would have to now initiate the process to login to the College network allowing access to the shared drive. Needless to say this process was also too cumbersome for most users to take advantage of.

I felt even more certain that the blog would be an excellent solution for users as it would alleviate the four major road blocks of inter-office mail, electronic mail, campus portal and network shared drive. I next turned my attention to what other institutions were doing and found further support in new areas including the very makeup of a group.

Groups Have Fluid Boundaries

“A study revealed that many faculty and administrators believe most decisions are made in informal meetings” which lead the researchers to expand the definition of meeting to include any gathering of members of an organization who assemble... in an attempt to solve the problems of the
organization.” (Mangrum, 2000, abstract) These “ad hoc” groups are a key to the success of much of the committee work I was a part of and I realized I could involve more people in these informal gatherings if they could take place virtually in the blog. Not only would the technology be able to increase the input into these gatherings but it would also bring the information discussed in these small groups to the committee as a whole instantaneously.

These Informal Problem Solving meetings (Mangrum, Wieder, & Fairley, 1998) are a critical role in the success of the organization as they provide a voice for those in multiple groups, previous members and those that do not have time to attend regular meetings. We can all think of the “go to” people that may not be members of a committee but do know how to get something done. The blog would offer a way for these individuals to engage the entire group without having to attend meetings.

In the end these fluid boundaries as presented by Mangrum (2000, p. 17) show the direct relationship our informal structures and meetings have with our structured governance communication. The blogs would only enhance this relationship by giving these informal meetings a voice front and center in the committee.

**Writing Apprehension**

Written communication has been identified as an important skill for leading a faculty senate or council, yet writing apprehension can be debilitating. (Miller, 2000, p. 6) When committee members and particularly chairs are faced with the thought that their communications will be read by many and critiqued it can become difficult to write and keep up a proper pace. This fear can intensify when working on a blog and early on became a concern for me.

As a new blog is developed and articles are first posted comments tend to trickle in slowly. Provided enough direction and encouragement is given with further participation I have seen communication take off in this medium. Once a solid dialogue is running in a blog it also provides an
excellent reference and supporting material for council leaders who then need to write official communications.

**College Use of Blogs**

As I turned my attention to who is using blogs and for what purposes I found a plethora of universities and colleges already in the web 2.0 arena. Princeton University provides hosted blog service for faculty, staff and students. The New Media Center and Educational Technologies Center at Princeton support blogs for “departments, administrative organizations, faculty research projects, faculty collaborations, student groups, student publications, classes, etc.” (Princeton, 2008) Although the uses supported varied at each institution I researched the vast majority of four year universities and colleges are supporting a similar list to that of Princeton.

Some institutions are reluctant to open up public blogs to students but I feel Pace University makes an excellent point as they state “This wouldn’t be a University Web site, if we didn’t give voice to our most important asset: our students!” (Pace 2008) The student blogs give students at Pace an environment they are familiar with to learn about activities, organizations and discuss life at the campus.

I even found a blog discussing the best makeup of a University Senate at Arizona State. (Arizona, 2008) Considering the vast array of uses for blogs I was able to find at most Universities I was all the more confident that the tool was more than a fad. Several of these blogs are being used for administrative use and have been operating for years.

It was evident the web 2.0 technology of a blog could effectively improve on the communication vehicles already used in N.S.C.C. governance if properly planned and supported. The research only supported my direction further by showing me additional benefits the blog could provide by involving the work of IPS meetings as well as alleviating communication apprehension. The scan of the use on
the Internet was resoundingly in support of the project as numerous universities have already embraced the technology. Now it was time to layout the steps I expected to take.

The Plan

1. Select WordPress as the free blog server software to build the site on and build on a desktop computer
2. Locate server at publicly accessible address but limit advertising to directed links and emails
3. Develop the blog architecture and hierarchy
4. Develop RSS (real simple syndication) support via RSS enables devices and optionally email
5. Appoint moderators for governance sub-committees and strategic planning goal team
6. Survey the pilot committee (I.T.C.) at the end of the year to determine effectiveness
7. Compare the 2007 governance survey results with the 2008 governance survey results in April of 2008
8. Setup a structure of people to provide regular maintenance and support of the system
The Process

The first step was to select WordPress as the official blog server software to be used, download it along with supporting materials and build the server. The software was highly recommended by our then Web Administrator, Aaron Toleos. The server required little power and we were able to use a Dell GX745 desktop computer as the server. RedHat Enterprise Server was the operating system the Information Systems department chose due to previous experience and stability. The total cost of the server and necessary software was about $1,200. This was truly a small price to pay for an entirely new service that held so much potential for the college.

Additional development tools were also used all of which were free of charge. MySQL was the database used to support the blogs and PHP was the development language used to fine tune the code and add new custom features. Google calendar provided the free calendar that was embedded in each governance blog with a master calendar that incorporated all standing committee calendars. Google does not charge for this service. An account was opened up with FeedBurner.com to support podcasts and subscriptions via email. FeedBurner does offer an enhanced service with additional tools at a cost, but I opted for the free services which were adequate for what I needed in this project.

Next the choice was made to put the server on a public IP address. This would mean the server would be publicly accessible from any computer on the Internet. The domain name blogs.northshore.edu was assigned to the server to further assist users in locating it. For the first year we decided not to advertise the server on our public web site which meant we did not provide any links from the public site (www.northshore.edu) to the blogs server. Instead we would only advertise the link via emails to directed groups, the College’s campus portal, word of mouth and printed materials. We wanted to give the pilot a good chance to get off and running before we were inundated with requests for blogs.
Now that the physical server was built and online it was time to turn the focus onto the layout and content of the site. Over the course of several weeks I met numerous times with members of the Coordinating Council, the Governance Sub Committee, VP of Administration and Finance, VP of HR, CIO, and developers in Information Systems and Marketing. Early on it was decided to model the blog site after the public web site which would make it easier for users to acclimate themselves to the new environment. Discussions with senior management centered on what information a committee needed in order to do their work. Key areas were identified including agendas, minutes, charge and membership information. It was also decided that a navigation area was needed for committee members to easily travel between committee blogs. The final design is shown below in figure 3.
The new design offered a standard menu bar across the top for each committee. The menu bar consists of HOME, AGENDAS, CALENDAR, CHARGE, MEMBERS, MINUTES and SUBSCRIBE. Home is the welcome screen for the blog and displays the most current post. Agendas contained posted word or Adobe PDF agendas along with any supporting documents for a particular meeting. The Calendar incorporated an embedded Google calendar for the use of the committee moderator. The Charge tab contained the language of the committee’s charge and the Members tab contained a list of members with their office numbers, phone numbers and email addresses. The Minutes tab contained posted minutes from meetings in either Word or Adobe PDF format and allowed members to review unapproved minutes prior to the next meeting as well as look back on previous approved minutes. The last tab was a custom page which allowed users to subscribe to the blog via email in order to receive new posts and/or new comments via email. This page made use of the free service from FeedBurner to accomplish this.

Also as important as the tabs across the top of the blog is the navigation area on the right side bar. The side bar offered links to quickly access any of the eight standing committee blogs as well as the Coordinating Council blog and a main governance page which contained rules, regulations and general information all committee members may need.

Probably the least discussed and most powerful feature that is built into the blog software is the find feature located at the top of the blog page. This feature presents a simple text entry box for users to type keywords into and then click on GO to search all of the content in the blog. Although it was pretty easy to find agendas and supporting documents it often was even easier to just type in the quick search box and press GO.

WordPress comes with built-in support for RSS feeds through their numerous widgets. I chose FeedBurner as the management tool for my RSS feeds. This service enabled me to support the first
request I had which was for the ability to subscribe to the RSS feeds via email. With the free service setup at FeedBurner visitors to the blog could use a simple subscribe page and specify their email address. A confirmation email is sent to their email account and then they are ready to go. The process was very easy for users to follow and FeedBurner manages the load nicely by only sending one email a day with all new comments or posts compiled into the single email message. Users that were looking for this capability were very pleased with the service.

Now that all of the technical pieces were in place and working well I began to meet with representatives of the Coordinating Council and the Governance Sub Committee to discuss how to roll out the project. Since we already had a handful of volunteers to moderate a blog for their committee it was decided to roll the project out as a pilot on a voluntary basis for the first year. We would evaluate the satisfaction level of committee members at the end of the year to determine if the pilot should become an expected part of committee operations.

The survey from the Governance sub-committee in the spring of 2007 already presented me with a good base for member satisfaction in my pilot group. I knew I would rely on the same survey going out in the spring of 2008 to give me some measure of the effectiveness of this new model of managing the group with a blog. I also decided I would directly survey all members in the pilot with a few key questions. I kept the number of questions to a minimum and made use of the online tool, Wufoo, to expedite the process. The questions I settled on were short and very direct and are listed below.

I found the use of a blog in our I.T. Committee:

- Extremely beneficial
- Beneficial
- Had no effect
O Slightly unproductive
O Extremely unproductive

Which aspects of the blog did you find useful?
O Participation anytime from anywhere
O Online conversations between meetings
O Central location for documents
O Updates via email
O None of the above

The blog improved the following:
O Communication
O Organization
O Document management
O Participation
O None of the above

I want to continue using a blog in the I.T. Committee next year
O Strongly agree
O Agree
O No opinion
O Disagree
O Strongly disagree

There were several questions that arose from various governance members and senior management at the college. Through a great deal of cooperation with all involved with the project we were able to come up with excellent solutions. The WordPress software also has so many useful built-in features that it provided the solution to most of the issues. A couple of the more difficult questions and their solutions are presented next.
How will content be controlled?

We have determined that a member from each standing committee will be made responsible for moderating all content posted to their committee’s blog. In most cases this will be the chairperson of the committee, but in some situations there will be an alternative member filling this role. The moderator will forward all communications in their original state to the chairperson of the committee. The moderator then has the permission and responsibility to ensure comments are constructive before posting them on the public blog server. The blog server is a reflection of the college and can be reached from anyone on the Internet. With that in mind moderators were expected to paraphrase or ask authors to rewrite comments that were inappropriate for a public web site representing the college.

How will sensitive information be protected from public consumption?

Although N.S.C.C. is a public institution there are some delicate matters that need to be discussed prior to putting on a public web site for the general public to peruse. The blog server has a built-in feature to password protect these certain sensitive posts while still allowing all general posts to be viewed by the general public. Moderators can share the password securely with their committee members giving each the ability to read the secure article and comment without having to open the conversation to the public at large. The Director of Web Applications & Development is also able to provide a secure route to certain blogs from our secure web-based portal. These two solutions were acceptable to all those concerned.

My last concern was to ensure that a support system was in place to continue blog use into the next year. This was particularly challenging for me as the Web Administrator for the college had left his position early on in this project. I personally was moving on to a new college by the end of the project as well. The Training Specialist in Information Systems rose to the challenge and quickly learned the system
and began supporting current users. By the end of this project the Training Specialist was assisting with basic administration as well as more advanced design assistance.

As the pilot in governance was running smoothly the strategic planning process also came on board with heavy use of the blog server by October of 2007. Strategic planning was broken into a steering committee and five goal teams. Each of these groups were setup with a blog and a moderator was trained in each group. As with the governance project we used the same sidebar feature to allow members and non-members to easily jump from one goal team blog to another. Although my research did not focus on this area it is important to point out that the strategic planning process utilizing blogs allowed the College to reduce the length of the process from nearly two years to about eight months. The process was very inclusive and most certainly allowed individuals to easily participate in the process on their own schedule thanks to the blogs.
Findings and Conclusions

“Blogs are good”

This was one of my favorite quotes from the pilot group survey results. In the end the data was very supportive of the blogs. Many participants commented that they appreciated there was a good amount of work for the moderator, but provided that work gets done the blog was certainly beneficial.

Would you like to continue using a blog to facilitate the committee?

![Pie chart showing response to survey]

94% AGREE
59% STRONGLY AGREE

Figure 4
(85% response to survey)

The response was overwhelmingly in favor of continuing the use of the blog in the committee. When I asked what specifically about the blog was beneficial to members I found:

- 76% Anytime, anywhere
- 71% Document management
- 65% Online conversations
- 41% Email updates
I also wanted to ask a bolder question. I wanted to determine if members of the pilot felt the blog had actually improved aspects of the committee. The results were once again very positive and shown below.

The blog improved:

- Communication - 76%
- Document Management – 65%
- Organization – 53%
- Participation – 47%
- None of the above – 6%

I also turned to the governance survey of all standing committees in the spring of 2008 as another measure of the effectiveness of the blog. There were numerous factors that changed from the previous year including the rewriting of the committee charge and a new chairperson but I do feel the blog use had something to do with the substantial improvement in the I.T.C. In figure 6 you can see the average scores of all standing committees in governance compared to the scores of the I.T.C. in 2007 and in 2008. In one area the group improved nearly 300%!
It appears evident to me that the blog was an excellent tool for improving communication and participation in the governance process. Being a tool the blog will require regular support and maintenance by an assigned moderator. WordPress provides a user-friendly set of tools for moderators which should make it easy for others to continue the good work and also encourage new moderators to jump on board.

I have since left the college but it is my hope that the Coordinating Council will further expand on the use of blogs in governance and provide informational sessions as well as training for new moderators. I am very pleased to hear that N.S.C.C. will extend use of blogs to the new accreditation process that will be starting up in the coming year. I feel confident they will be met with the same level of success we enjoyed with the pilot group and strategic planning blogs.
Unexpected Outcomes

Accreditation will make use of a similar blog structure as that of the strategic planning process. Many of the same individuals involved in the strategic plan will again be involved in the upcoming accreditation process and are already asking for the same blog capability to facilitate the process. I am sure with the experience of the users this time around the process will be even smoother and the community already being familiar with blogs will only increase the amount of participation.

Library tutorial – After completion of the initial blog layout for governance I was left with an easy to replicate system that could be used by the library. A new request came in from the library for an online environment that would be easy to update by Library personnel. Essentially they needed a content management system that would allow their staff to directly update content without having to use technical software or tools. In about five minutes I used the template and architecture from my project to build a blog for the library.

Diversity Leadership Council – Another request came in from the D.L.C. wanting a “Faces of N.S.C.C.” photo contest web site of some kind that would be easy to update and allow the community to participate in a photo contest online. I applied the blog structure I had built in this situation and had a functional site for them in about 5 minutes. My C.I.O. was able to spend a short hour and a half with them and they were fully functional.

Green project – This project has also caught the attention of the green initiative on campus and is already saving the college in paper as the Information Technology Committee and Strategic Planning Committee are posting all documents in electronic form only in the blog.
My Learning and Development

This project helped me grow as a leader in many ways including but not limited to a better understanding of college shared governance, communication models, group organization, and delegation. Governance is far reaching and all inclusive and working with the standing committees brought me face to face with a representative of every division and most departments throughout the college. Communication is looked at differently from department to department and in the end all were looking for a better way to do it.

I have been a successful leader in the role of Director for the last 13 years and have always been successful getting a great deal of work done in a short time. At the conclusion of this project I came to realize that the vast majority of projects I had worked on in the past I either touched every part of them or had a clear understanding of what needed to be done. Although I would delegate parts I knew exactly what the parts were and how they needed to fit together. This project brought me in contact with many pieces I was not familiar with and could not learn quickly. I had to rely on many individuals with their own expertise to accomplish several parts and ensure the project time line was met.

A truly good leader will have a good understanding of all working parts of their college. In a sense they are a jack of all trades and a master of leadership. In order to lead a community college effectively senior management should have a good understanding of each division’s daily operations as well as their challenges each year. This project brought my focus up to the level of the institution as a whole and made me aware of the many intricacies that make of the community college system. I now know one of my most important jobs is to communicate with everyone that I possibly can in order to make the best decisions for the institution as a whole. In the end the experience I gained from this project was certainly
a strong factor in my successful appointment as Chief Information Officer at Northern Essex Community College in May of 2008.
References


Appendix A.

PowerPoint Presentation Slides
College Governance Greater than Before

Modernization & Simplification through Web 2.0 Technologies

Presented By
Jeffrey R. Bickford
Northern Essex Community College

“Blogs are good”

- So why use a blog in governance committees?
  - What is a blog?
    - Online conversation
  - What does a blog have to do with governance?
    - Communication
  - Why is a blog better than other technology?
    - Web 2.0 features (interactive, real-time, versatile)
    - Ease of use
    - Central location
## Governance Survey Results 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that the time I invest in my committee is well spent and productive</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting once per month provides my committee with adequate time to undertake its business.</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a clear understanding of the responsibilities that have been charged to my committee.</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The business undertaken by my committee adheres to its stated responsibilities</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The business undertaken by my committee results in outcomes that benefit the College.</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
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</table>
The Needs

- **Governance Chairperson kickoff meeting 2007**
  - Let’s email all agendas, minutes and materials to all!
  - Let’s keep all of this information in a central drive and limit the emails!
  - We need to involve more people and keep more of the community informed

- **Blogs give the ability to**
  - Subscribe and receive all posts via email
  - Locate documents & conversations in one central location
  - Communicate with anyone with an Internet connection

Four Key Areas of Focus

- **Document Management & Organization**
  - Email can be difficult to keep organized when you receive dozens of messages a day (tracking revisions)
  - A central campus network drive is great but difficult to access from off-campus
  - Existing groups feature in portal involves many “clicks” and you must login before you can see content
Four Key Areas of Focus

- Communication & Participation
  - Meetings held once a month for 1.5 hours
  - Difficult to form working sub-committees (time)
  - Not enough time in meetings for in-depth conversations
  - Full schedules made it difficult for visitors to make committee meetings
  - Difficult to communicate work of the committee to the community

How did we build it?

- WordPress (free)
- Feedburner (RSS)
- Dell GX745 ($1,000)
- RedHat Enterprise ($150)
- MySQL, PHP (free)
- Google Calendar (free)
- Existing backup system

- Total investment = $1,200
Who did we need?

- Coordinator of Project
- Trainer for moderators and general awareness
- Marketing for design aspects
- Web Developer for development tweaks
- Governance sub-committee to embrace project
- VP of Administration & VP of HR to approve policies and running project as a pilot

So Let’s See it Already!
Still Not Excited?

Let’s Take a Test Drive!

- http://blogs.northshore.edu
- http://blogs.northshore.edu/itc
So what was the outcome?

Members found the following benefits:

- Anytime, anywhere
  - 76%
- Document management
  - 71%
- Online conversations
  - 65%
- Email updates
  - 41%
- None of the above
  - 6%

85% Response to Survey
Now for a more bold question

The blog improved:

- Communication - 76%
- Document Management – 65%
- Organization – 53%
- Participation – 47%
- None of the above – 6%

85% Response to Survey
Would you like to continue using a blog to facilitate the committee?

94% AGREE
59% STRONGLY AGREE

And what about the IT Committee?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</table>
The Surprises

- Strategic Planning Embraces Blogs
  - [http://blogs.northshore.edu/sp](http://blogs.northshore.edu/sp)
  - Previous process took 2 years, with blogs took only 8 months
- Other Interest Groups
  - Talent Search
  - Library Resources
  - Academic Technology
  - Faces of NSCC Photo Contest
- Accreditation Process Will Use Blogs

The Surprises

- Blogs integrate easily into Campus Portal
  - Specialized channels in the portal accept RSS feeds from various blogs
  - These channels are specialized for the audience
  - Allows easy access to add content to portal indirectly with control and moderation
Questions?
Appendix B.

Survey of Pilot Group
CCLA Quick Survey
A very brief survey about your experience with blogs in the I.T.C.

Name *

First

Last

I found the use of a blog in our I.T. committee
- extremely beneficial
- beneficial
- had not effect
- slightly unproductive
- extremely unproductive

Which aspects of the blog did you find useful? *
- Participation any time from anywhere
- Online conversations between meetings
- Central location for documents
- Updates via Email
- None of the above

The blog improved the following: *
- Communication
- Organization
- Participation
- Ability to find relevant documents
- None of the above
I would like to continue using a blog to facilitate the ITC *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Additional comments

Submit