USING COURSE BLOGS TO IMPROVE INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION OF FRESHMEN STUDENTS

Annu Prabhakar[1]

Abstract *—According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 75 percent of young adults aged 18 to 24 use online community sites. The young generation consider technology as an integral part of their daily life. They keep in touch with their friends through social networking sites on a daily basis, they get news from blogs and offer their opinions and comments on what is happening around them through blogs. When MySpace was introduced in 2004, the current freshmen in college were high school students. When they come to college, they encounter faculty who are trailing them in online community experience and usage. To take advantage of the new freshmen's affinity for online community sites and to get them engaged in discussions, the author started blogs for her freshmen courses in fall of 2009. Through this "Work in Progress" paper, she will share her experience to the conference audience.*

Index Terms — Blogs, Freshmen, Course Blogs, First year students.

INTRODUCTION

In the Information Technology curriculum at the College of Engineering and Applied Science, a course titled "Programming Logic and Methods" introduces freshmen students to fundamentals of programming. The computer skills and knowledge of the students vary greatly. This is largely because of the disparity in high school computer curricula. Some high school offer computer classes ranging from programming to networking. Others do not offer any computer classes at all. This presents problems for the instructor and the learner.

Mixing students who have familiarity and skills in programming with those who are new to computer programming can create an uneven playing field. The latter may feel inadequacy and question their choice of the degree program. For the former, some topics in the course may seem less challenging, since they have already been exposed to some topics.

The students who are not familiar with programming tend not to ask questions fearing that it may be too basic and they were supposed to know it already. Only a few of them come to me personally and ask questions and they tend to do better eventually. However, there is a large number of students who are not even comfortable coming to talk to me risking revealing the fact that they need help with basics.

THE EXPERIENCE

To take advantage of the new generation freshmen's affinity for online community sites [1] and to engage them in discussions, I started course blogs for the two sections of Programming Logic and method class in fall of 2009.

My main observations and experiences are summarized below. During the presentation, I will explain those in detail, using the blog entries (http://plmfall09section1.blogspot.com/2009/10/new-reading-2-extra-points-comment-by.html#comments) from students.

1. Students who were not very active in the class found it easy to ask questions through the blog.
2. The blog served as a feedback mechanism for me.
3. I got better information about the students' background through blog.
4. Blog entries revealed their enthusiasm about the subject matter.
5. Blog was a way for me to give additional information about the topic I was covering.
6. Students could learn from the comments made by fellow students.
7. I also observed that if I provided extra points for commenting on blogs, it increased the participation.

I learned from this experience and I am planning to incorporate this tool more effectively into my future classes. Overall, I felt that students were more comfortable discussing their experience and concerns through blogs than face-to-face.

REFERENCES

[1] http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Adults-and-Social-Network-Websites.aspx.

1 Annu Prabhakar, Associate Professor of Information Technology, College of Engineering and Applied Science, University of Cincinnati, OH, USA, Annu.Prabhakar@uc.edu