

Here are a couple of quick thoughts on why a WordPress blog is more preferable to any of the other blogging options on campus. There are quite a lot of reasons, but it really boils down to three large ones: 1) it works; 2) it's *easy*; and 3) it's ubiquitous. I'll break down what I mean by each of these in the following

1) WordPress Works.

This is not to say that the other solutions on campus don't work. There are many that do work very well for their specific functions. Though, to be honest, there are only two venues that I'm aware of that faculty currently have available to display their work on the web. The first, and seemingly default option we get presented with whenever asked, is the LMS -- Angel. Angel does work, indeed, for what its designed for. My other comments on Angel as an LMS don't belong in this venue, but it does function and certainly has blogging tools. But an Angel blog is not meant to be a wide-reaching, public, easy to view, easy to publish, visually pleasing blog. The Angel blogs are simply not something that I could ever point to and proudly say "I did that." And that's even if I were able to give global permissions to be able to distribute it broadly. The beauty of wordpress is that it works for much more than simply a common space of sharing between a limited group of individuals. Angel allows you to share locally, wordpress allows you to share globally -- *if we want to*. The last part is the most attractive piece to the WordPress installation on campus. Because of the integration with Active Directory, we can restrict access to the WordPress blog via Royal ID (and eventually by group), which allows me to create a blog viewable by only those individuals that need it, or I can create a blog that can be shared widely. Or, I can create a blog for/with a small number of individuals and *then* share it widely without any hassle or problem with formatting or style. With a metaphorical "flip of a switch" exactly what I have already created can now become viewable to a larger community, however large that community might be.

For the Pedagogy group that I am involved with, this will be an ideal solution. We are a group of interdisciplinary faculty who meet regularly with the intention of improving our pedagogy and classroom performance. We have come across many articles, blogs, tools, and even personal discussions that have been very valuable to us as individuals. We would like a venue to share this broadly both across our campus as well as to individuals at other campuses. We can easily create a WordPress blog off-campus, but since we are a University of Scranton group, with funding from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, we feel its important to keep that connection *within* the university. It allows us to promote the information that we are gathering from within the University, giving a larger scale focus to the work that's going on right here at the University of Scranton. As a University of Scranton group, we would like to have the support of the University in order to create that avenue.

Yes, all of the above can be done with the Content Management System. But, as much as it may be advertised otherwise, the CMS is *difficult to use*. For a group of busy faculty who are not web developers, do not wish to spend hours training to use the CMS, designing a suitable website, and remembering how to use it each time we wish to make a post, the CMS simply is too much of a hurdle to use effectively. The fact that we have to relearn the interface each time

we use it (since each person wouldn't likely be posting more than once a month), there is a steep learning curve that we just don't want to confront. When such barriers exist to the sharing of information, it is often much easier to simply not share, which all too often occurs at our University.

WordPress accommodates users of any proficiency level: beginner, intermediate, advanced, etc., and it is scalable with your knowledge of its ins and outs. The more you know, the more you can do with it. *But*, even without any advanced computer knowledge you can start a blog and begin posting. There are customizable tools that allow you to embed social media feeds and many other tools or widgets *all without needing to know anything about coding*.

Which brings me to the second point:

2) WordPress is Easy.

The wordpress site is easy to use, simple to set up, and has a pleasing interface. I have use the WordPress site for the Technology Advisory Group (TAG) for a number of years now. I post on it less than once a month, and it takes me no time to do so. There is no learning curve. There is a text editor that looks just like any other web form out there, a preview button, and a publish button. It can be done from anywhere: on campus or off. It can be edited or viewed on any device, smartphone, tablet, or PC, without any extra intervention from the creators or administrators. It's a fast and easy interface that takes next to no training to use. With Active Directory, it is easy to add posting permissions to people as they join or leave the group. It is a collaborative content creation tool that removes all the barriers to sharing that information worldwide.

And when I say "sharing" I don't simply mean allowing people to view the content. WordPress has tools that make it easy to import and export its content so that it can be used with or in other blogging tools. Thus, even as technology moves out from under our feet, the portability of WordPress content will make it easy to move from one platform to the next.

It's easy to edit. It's easy to create. It's easy to post. It's easy to share. It's easy to restrict. It's easy to customize. This is the ideal tool for groups small and large to share information with their community in a way that is accessible for all the users: viewers and content creators.

Because of all of the above, and when looking around most blogs on the web, we find that

3) WordPress is Ubiquitous.

WordPress has become a dominant platform for blogging but also for other forms of web development. As more individuals, companies, and institutions adopt WordPress (and similar tools) for their web presence, it becomes more and more likely that we (faculty, staff, and students) will encounter it in other aspects of our professional lives. Employers may soon expect that applicants for positions have familiarity and experience with WordPress just as they currently expect basic knowledge of Microsoft Office. Our students need to be able to practice and experiment with web publishing via WordPress, as do our faculty and staff, if we want them to have a basic understanding of how much of the web functions.

Furthermore, even other tools that are not WordPress use interfaces and design aspects that are very similar. WordPress is an easy (see above) way to learn a large number of transferrable skills. The barriers to entry for a CMS website is very high, and the number of transferable skills is small. The barrier to entry for a WordPress site is low, and the number of transferable skills gained is large. Using this technology in the classroom can allow students to get those transferable skills in a safe environment (a local server will even be FERPA compliant with restrictions on access from Active Directory). We can help and encourage students, using a tool such as this, to develop and create a digital portfolio, which will be more and more important in the years to come. Some faculty already use WordPress blogs in their classroom, which has thus far been largely successful. But the availability of a safe sandbox for student development and support could be a valuable tool.

One final note related to the ubiquity of WordPress: Because it's so ubiquitous, it is flexible and usable for any number of purposes. WordPress can't and shouldn't be relegated to use for faculty groups or departmental purposes. It can and should be used for many things. Since it brings down many of the barriers to the responsible sharing of information, it can be used for: small faculty learning groups (e.g., the pedagogy cohort), campus committees (e.g., [TAG](#)), departmental news feeds (e.g., [the history blog](#)), classroom presentations, student portfolios, research groups, and many, many other things.

In conclusion, WordPress is an excellent tool that opens many doors (and closes none) for faculty, staff, and students. It is head and shoulders above any of the other tools currently available, and we should take advantage of that. Its functionality, ease of use, and ubiquity will give a myriad of benefits to the user, and will be incredibly valuable in the years to come.