Recommendations of the Blog Software Search Committee

Charge and Executive Summary

The CUL Blog Search Committee was charged with surveying the current landscape at CUL for library staff using blogs and some associated social software or web communication tools (such as RSS and RSS aggregators); determining the needs for software, support and policies at the library; and making a recommendation to ITEC regarding next steps.

When we began, implicit in this charge we found the question of "What is blogging (and what is it not) and why would we want to do this in the library?" Looking at the FAQ page of UThink (the University of Michigan's university wide blogging initiative at [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/uthink/about.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/uthink/about.html)), this is not a new question. The ability to hold a public conversation around ideas, to inform and communicate with others about our activities, and to keep institutional data and conversations in a place where all can see and comment are motivating factors. These are answers that some find compelling and others are still skeptical about, like any new communication technology. We would come back to this question throughout our investigation; however, we discovered that people in the library (and elsewhere in Cornell) are already blogging institutionally in a variety of creative ways (see Appendix A) and there are many others who are interested but not sure where to start. It seems natural that we should support them in some way.

Another question that surfaced was whether the library should host software when there are services available for free. Blogging is a naturally open, decentralized, and quickly evolving form of communication which does not seem to lend itself to centralized approaches. One of its strengths is its openness and the ability for anyone to join the conversation quickly and easily; other similar initiatives like web design have evolved in an ad hoc manner with library users gaining training, formal and informal, based on interest or mandate. However, even the most independent users have found it useful to have institutional support (for example, some people would like to have more control and customization than a basic blog hosting service will provide or are dealing with sensitive data but don't want to or cannot run their own servers). Though we could continue our current level of support and simply let users continue exploring the blogosphere on their own, there is perhaps a hidden cost to this. Doing nothing creates an environment where the rich get richer (those with technical aptitude and resources excel) and the poor get poorer (those without the financial and technical resources or the time are left behind). If we do nothing in terms of user support, then everyone in the organization has to reinvent the wheel separately on a wide variety of platforms and without support to overcome problems or the ability to share or build upon successes. Doing nothing also does not address intellectual property and data ownership of the institution, and perhaps fosters an environment where we lose control of data ownership as folks look for easy blogging solutions in the freely hosted space. Service to the CUL community would mean hosting blogs in an open, equal and clear process that supports blog administrators and users well and evenly across the board.

A service is made up of many things:

- Software, hardware, the technical expertise to setup and maintain it
- Policies and procedures that create a low barrier to entry and clear, achievable expectations
- Ongoing user support, whether that is professionals supporting the uninitiated, users helping each other, or good documentation, or combinations of all three or more.

This synthesis is what we are recommending.

Centralizing blog software does not have to mean that software or policy infrastructure completely controls usage or stifles users' ability to customize and create ad hoc groupings. A central installation also should not overburden staff with a great deal of additional administration. Neither does it mean completely mandating look and feel, branding, or policy, other than what is needed to promote good service and adherence to university guidelines, nor controlling and regulating conversations or usage beyond basic disclaimers of liability or guidelines on illegal and offensive speech. One of the strengths of blogging is its flexibility, openness, transparency and ability to allow us to converse in a more personal, less institutional voice. However, to smooth the path to usage and allow people to converse in our sphere, our goal is to strike a balance between leaving users to fend for themselves and overdesigning what should be an open process.

After a survey of blogging efforts at CUL and Cornell in general and investigation of software and the needs and requirements for a successful blog software implementation, the Blog Search Committee strongly recommends exploration of centrally-hosted blogging software through a project planning process with CIT. The library should work in conjunction with CIT to identify people to provide technical and user support for existing and new pilot blogs on a shared standalone test server and the immediate installation and evaluation of WordPress MU, the multiuser version of WordPress [http://mu.wordpress.org/](http://mu.wordpress.org/), with the possibility of testing other blogging applications as well. In addition, to ensure that the needs of existing users and those who are currently interested in blogging are met and that users are able to quickly begin testing the software's utility, we recommend that the implementation adopt a workflow similar to that of the National Science Digital Library's rollout of their Expert Voices blogging service (which also utilizes WordPress MU software). An immediate alpha release with a group of existing and new users (with the understanding that this is a pilot, pre-beta service which may change or cease and that they will be participants in the testing for a defined period of time after which it will be re-evaluated) will allow user-centered testing of the software and iterative feedback and development of the service. In addition for immediate support needs, the enterprise technical support available for WordPress MU through the Automatic Support Network should also be considered. For those who do not wish to take part in the pilot or need to implement a service outside of this process, we would recommend the use of the free hosted version of Wordpress, Wordpress.com, which also runs on Wordpress MU software and would allow easy migration to a centrally hosted Wordpress MU installation at Cornell.

Blogging at Cornell
Currently, blogging at CUL has been supported on an ad hoc basis with single-user installations of WordPress. These were initially set up by Aaron Suggs, then the ArXiv administrator, who was using WordPress for that project; however he was gracious enough to create blogs and support the software for other users in the library. Since Aaron's departure from the library, the number of blogs at CUL has doubled and CUL's Information Technology and Technical Services division continues to create and provide technical but not design support for blogs for the library community with no associated change in staffing levels. For a selected list of existing blogs at CUL, see Appendix A.

Other units on campus are also hosting blog software or investigating the possibilities. The committee sent a message to the Netadmin list at Cornell soliciting information on other implementations, particularly of WordPress or WordPress MU (see Appendix B) and also solicited commentary on the Library Technology Exchange Forum on blogs and RSS. Based on the response to this and on our other investigations, we discovered that the Academic Technology Center in CIT, led by Clare van den Blink and Carla Shafer, is also exploring the possibility of implementing blog software, particularly for academic support, and hopes to have a rollout within the next year. They currently have five or six single user instances of WordPress installed (used for short-term class needs) and are beginning the process of talking to stakeholders internally and externally about a production-level service. Another department at CIT was also contracted by the Office of Web Communications to install and support several single user installations of WordPress to power the "Life on the Hill" student blogs at http://www.cornell.edu/studentlife/blogs.cfm. The Cornell web redesign effort, done by the Office of Web Communication and the CIT Web Production Group, also has hosted a blog at http://web.cornell.edu/redesign/blog/.

The Engineering School Admissions Office has student blogs on Blogger and was investigating the possibility of bringing these in-house because of concerns over branding, spam prevention, archiving and backup of data. Though they have not pursued central hosting at this time, they have also identified many of the same concerns we note below in terms of what is needed for a successful blog hosting implementation and they are interested in meeting to discuss blogging concerns. There has also been interest from various groups on campus, including Cornell Study Abroad and Sunny Donenfield of ITMC, in using blogs for purposes such as travel blogging/communicating with foreign language classes and a campus-wide IT blog.

The National Science Digital Library (NSDL) is also hosting its Expert Voices blogs using WordPress MU (see interviews with Elly Cramer and Carol Minton-Morris). The Expert Voices blogs allow NSDL users to collaborate in contributing to short-term, educationally focused blogs around particular seminars or theme topics. The discussion and resources compiled in these project blogs can also be added to the main NSDL repository as resources as well. Other blogs in Expert Voices are attached to particular courses or subject communities (Pathways) or serve as news or communication vehicles to the NSDL community. The main gateway aggregates the NSDL blogs and highlights certain groups and recent activity (NSDL used the MacArthur foundation Spotlight blogs on digital learning and teaching as a model). Their installation of WordPress MU in particular provides a useful model for an alpha launch to beta version of a production service.

Current Need for Blogs at CUL

The Blog Software Committee issued a call on CU-LIB in November 2006 asking for feedback both from those currently using and administering blogs and those who were thinking about doing so (see Appendix B). We also solicited feedback from the LTEF on blogs and RSS on February 20, 2007. The responses to this informal survey, the LTEF feedback, and subsequent interviews with blog administrators, as well as the committee's own experience and research indicated the following:

Library staff are currently using blogs for internal constituencies (committees for minutes, communication, group management) and specific projects) and some external constituencies (conferences, national committees, workgroups that encompass members outside the library). In the future, those surveyed envisioned using blogs to interact with the larger CU and external community for news (the Communications department is working on a blog for CUL news which could also be used to feed other websites, such as the Gateway announcements), notices of new acquisitions, subject guide integration and instruction, use as a reference question knowledgebase (the Reference and Outreach Committee is interested in this), feedback (John Saylor pointed out the VCU suggestion blog at http://blog.vcu.edu/libsuggest/) and community outreach for public services, amongst other possible uses. However, users are struggling to figure out which tools are best for their purposes and looking for guidance on the following issues, amongst others (whether institutional or from a group of blogging peers) on issues such as:

- Control and representation: How and whether to separate individual and institutional personas (since blogging is designed to allow those within the institution to bring a more personal face to the organization)
- Blog policies, even as basic as a disclaimer indicating that blog represents the view of the individual not the organization
- Blogging as part of the job: Will the institution give or consider time spent blogging for work as part of institutional activity (especially if you are doing it as part of the outreach and communication function of your job)?
- Training and community
- Intellectual property: Who owns content on an organizational blog?
- Identity and aesthetics: According to Diane Kuberek, the Director of the Office of Web Communications, we need to follow CU identity guidelines. How can users get a CUL template?
- ADA compliance
- Timeline—people are very interested in starting right away (an alpha release during the testing phase of an implementation or free software could address this)
- Differences between wikis and blogs and what functions each type of software best serves

There is clearly interest in using blogs in the library and a need for support and guidance for future activities.

Criteria for Successful Implementation

In the responses to the survey and subsequent research and interviews the following criteria were identified for successful blogging software identification, implementation and support:

- Differences between wikis and blogs and what functions each type of software best serves
- Community outreach for public services, amongst other possible uses
- User need for support and guidance for future activities
Ease of administration and technical support (for staff)

The software should:

- Be stable (strong track record for previous versions, bug fixes, upgrades, availability of patches, etc), scalable, and integrate with existing systems, including single sign-on (LDAP) authentication with our permit server system (NetID). If non-NetID people are expected to need to authenticate, then we may need to allow hybrid (either-or) authentication, such as is implemented at CIT's SourceForge service, or use of Guest ID
- Allow easy administration, both for IT staff and blog administrators but most particularly for requests that users can not implement themselves (Can users create basic blogs automatically or will it be easy for IT staff to quickly set them up (NSDL uses the latter model)? Can we easily upgrade without rebuitling the whole database? Can we create a selection of plugins and add new ones without significant conflict with existing versions?)
- Have robust documentation and/or user community (Some open source software has a very active user community (i.e. Wordpress) but is that good enough?)
- Have some guarantee of sustainability (If the software is open source, how strong is the community? If commercialware, what is the company commitment to future support and development?)
- Easily migrate to another software package if necessary

Other Features we'd like to see in any blog software we choose:

- Superior spamblocking (comment moderation and blacklists, spamblocking plugins like Wordpress' Akismet)
- Categories and tagging
- Blogroll
- Trackbacks and Pingbacks
- RSS for both posts and comments
- Support for wide variety of plugins, media enclosures, and widgets (easily implemented and maintained; for features such as RSS-to-email and E-mail-to-RSS, podcasting, screen casting, YouTube videos, Flickr, Google mashups)
- Active plugin creation and support from the community/developers
- Flexibility of themes/templates for those power users who want to customize their layout and to add plugins and widgets
- Spell check
- User permission levels (ability to define with granularity and flexibility what certain groups of users can do---i.e. locking certain posts to different user levels, allowing only certain people to post, edit, etc.) and
- Overarchiving administrative control (ability to define with granularity and flexibility what individual blog administrators can do and what they must request of central blog administration)
- Notification to blog search engines
- Ability to export selected data in other formats (XML, Word, PDF)
- Javascript bookmarklet for one-click publishing
- Ability to upload materials
- Calendar

Interviewees indicated that some features that users wanted or needed (password protection, ability to organize by hierarchies, collaborative editing, website management, exporting of data to Word and PDF, etc.) would perhaps not be best served by the use of blogging software (for example, in one user's case, password protection broke the functionality of other important tools such as RSS-to-email (though this can probably be fixed) and users have found tracking and aggregating group changes to documents is difficult). Other applications such as an online group management tool may be needed for these functions. However, blogs can coexist with other tools (Carla Shafer and the review from James Farmer of edublogs.org (http://blogsavvy.net/multi-user-blog-tools-overall-ratings-and-reviews) indicated that tools such as Elgg (social software platform) that combine or allow various social software applications to interact are in development. Further investigation on which tools are appropriate for various uses (such as the Commonsot SIG wiki page at http://wiki.library.cornell.edu/wiki/display/CSpot/When+to+use+Common Spot) is needed. Reaction was also mixed on the use of associated tools such as RSS readers/news aggregators and blog editors. Some find tools like Bloglines or SharpReader for news/feed reading; ScribeFire (formerly Performing for Firefox) or Blogjet for blog posting; and FeedBlitz for RSS-to-email useful though others do not use them. However, provision of some pointers to resources and a way for users to share information on those tools that work well for them would be useful for those who want them.

However, these considerations are just the beginning of a successful software rollout. Many of the considerations for deploying a software package deal less with the specific technical aspects and functionality of the software and more with the user experience and the organizational, policy and procedural changes or additions needed to adequately support this new service.

Ease of use and technical support (for users):

A successful implementation will provide:

- Low barrier to entry: Someone who knows nothing about blogs should be able to create or request one in a matter of minutes. Authentication or log in should be easy (as few “extra” log ins as possible to remember) and should not impede software functionality. Posting should be as easy as possible and blog administrators should be able to easily allow posting and commenting by the groups they designate (either using the blog's built in functionality or that provided by software upgrades performed by a programmer). For example, John Saylor contracted an outside programmer with his KMODDL grant to implement a Write post link on the front page of one of his blogs rather than force users to enter the blog dashboard; and to make posting less confusing, Elly Cramer changed the Save button to Save as Draft-a small change which eased a great deal of confusion. There is currently no one in the library with the expertise or mandate to create this kind of end-user enhancement.
- Good documentation and ongoing user support: Some “handholding” for getting started should be available, including basic instructions for beginning users on how to start a blog, choose options and user levels, think about posting policies and copyright, etc.
This could take the form of a wizard or “getting started” guide to walk blog owners/admins through the creation process and allow them to make decisions about access and privacy, commenting, etc. Examples of blogs are also instructive for users who are trying conceptualize how to use these. The interviews from NSDL also emphasized the need for this kind of basic support and indicated that after this most users were fine. It might also be useful to have basic support for customization and training for users who would like more than the basic configuration. See below for examples of documentation and support for blogging initiatives:

- NSDL Help pages: [http://expertvoices.nsdl.org/help/faq](http://expertvoices.nsdl.org/help/faq)
- University of Minnesota’s UThink [https://wiki.umn.edu/twiki/bin/view/UThink/WebHome](https://wiki.umn.edu/twiki/bin/view/UThink/WebHome) and [http://dmc.umn.edu/technologies/uthink.shtml](http://dmc.umn.edu/technologies/uthink.shtml)

There should also be a central place for technical support.

- **Some guidance on use, policies and procedures**: This should cover not only “How do I set this up?” or “Who do I talk to if I have questions?” but also information on blog policies and procedures (see below); some notes on what blogs are useful for (communication; discussion, feedback and the ability to “archive” it in one place; current awareness; and publishing/content management with editorial control, etc.) vs. other tools (either additional blog-related tools such as aggregators or tools that might be better suited for purposes like group management). Policies should provide just enough guidance to help avoid administrative troubles and help new users understand blogging and its open conversational aspect; users we talked to avoided restrictive policies or overt policing.

- **Some control and customization within a standard set up**: If technical support staff provides a choice of vetted plugins, themes and templates, etc., the individual blog administrator should have the ability to control their own settings within that basic configuration without overburdening technical support staff. The ability to customize the look and feel and to add functionality without having to wait for central administration was an important one for users. According to Carla Shafer, widgets should make “mass customization” easier in the future.

**What this will require of staff independent of the software package**

We envision a collaboration of professional and IT staff (possibly from both the Library and CIT and may include outsourced help) to provide for the following:

- **Need for dedicated staff for technical and user support and customization/help**
  - Dedicated staff effort to:
    - Setup/configure/manage/upgrade service
    - Respond to user requests and questions
    - Help users learn system and provide documentation and training (public services staff may be able to help with training and documentation)
    - Help users with basic setup and provide guidelines/templates for basic posting, permissions/users, themes and default plugins
    - Find, vet and customize plugins; check for conflicts with old plugins
    - Give guidance on what blogs can and cannot do as well as information on issues of copyright, privacy and public posting, etc.
    - Certain level of support and involvement with/knowledge of user community: Particularly with open source products there is a need for someone to be responsible for investigating and contributing back to the larger and Cornell-based user communities (perhaps using a blog, listserv, or message board to connect CU(L) users of blog software).

- **Need for standard procedures and policies**:
  - Policies for blog creation: There should be a standard mechanism for blog creation, URL naming conventions, CUL templates and instructions on how to modify other templates to comply with identity guidelines, and some basic decisions on how many blogs someone can create and how big a file size each user gets (in both the pilot and production phases), etc.
  - Policies for blog administration: A responsible designate (usually the blog owner/requestor) will manage each blog and be responsible for content (much as email lists are set up - there is a designated list owner that does much of the day-to-day management). At this secondary level, the individual “blog owner” or administrator needs to consider policies for blogs - who can comment/post/edit/delete, how to handle comment moderation, if and when comments and posts are edited/deleted, etc. These policies need not be very formal but should be considered.
  - Archiving—data retention policies and schedules; technical and legal issues of data ownership
  - Legal issues—disclaimers and statements of use (all views are the authors’ not the organization’s), policies on posting and removal (only slanderous or libelous material? copyright violations?), FERPA and privacy if student data is involved (u.e., permissions, use of nicknames instead of full names or NetIDs), intellectual property (NSDL has users agree to a Creative Commons share and share-alike license at registration; Jon Phipps suggested that intellectual property could be shared between the organization and an individual (more difficult for groups) but the individual should be able to post material written on organization blog to other areas and should be able to take their information with them when they leave (and should have an easy way to get their data out).

- **Need for other hardware and technical considerations**
  - Run on its own server (on a server with multiple other packages, the reaction to upgrades and interaction with other applications is uncertain)
  - Server maintainence, storage, backup
  - Network usage
  - Staff with necessary experience in database administration and programming languages to install, upgrade and administer

- **Need for funding**
  - For use of a server and its maintainence, storage, and backup; network usage costs; the staff time necessary to support this initiative; and the cost of the software (or staff time if we use open source), a certain amount will need to be set aside from the budget
Recommendations and Possible Solutions:

Possibilities for implementation and support
As various areas of CIT, in particular the Academic Technology Center, are exploring blog hosting, it would be greatly beneficial for CIT and the Library to collaborate on the exploration of a shared service:

- to prevent duplication of effort and confusion on the part of the campus community;
- to leverage existing knowledge, material and efforts; and
- to provide shared resources and support.

Ideally, a faculty member or librarian could go to one place to get blogs for class, research or committee use and have a single base of support.

The Blog Search Committee strongly recommends exploration of centrally-hosted blogging software with CIT. The library should work in conjunction with CIT to set up a standalone test server running WordPress MU and to identify people to provide technical support (software installation, configuration and support) and user support (training, documentation, and troubleshooting) for existing and new pilot blogs and for testing and implementation of a possible shared service.

The committee recommends the following steps:

- Implementation of a shared standalone test server; the library can provide an existing server from Discovery Systems and Services
- Installation of WordPress MU (and possibly other LAMP [Linux/Apache/MySQL/Perl/PHP/Python] blogging applications which would not conflict with one another)
- Provision of support in the interim for existing and pilot projects using dedicated staff effort (possibly from a combination of Library and CIT staff and outsourced support)
- Beginning of a formal project planning process to discuss the scope of the possible implementation, the needs of the various stakeholders/user scenarios, and the timeline, amongst other issues
- Immediate launch of an alpha service by importing existing users into the WordPress MU installation and solicitation of participation from a limited group of new users. These users would form the core of a user testing and support group who would provide user feedback on the implementation, information on its use for varying purposes, and a collaborative support network for each other. Their participation would be predicated on their understanding that the service is a pilot implementation with limited support and no guarantee of longevity and that they would be expected to contribute feedback in the evaluation process. Evaluation of the service should occur after a defined period of time and will determine its continuation.

While we have much in common, each group needs to address specific stakeholder needs (for example, because of FERPA and support issues the Academic Technology Center's blogs may need differing archiving and privacy policies and because of the library's need for more password-protected or group management-oriented tools more than one software installation may also be needed). Proper consideration of all stakeholder needs (for academic support, for staff use) and support models (such as Blackboard's) would be key to a successful implementation for all sides. However, it is clear that collaboration on a shared service could provide great benefits to both units.

Other collaboration possibilities with CIT include:

- Sharing cost of outsourced support (for example if we use WordPress's enterprise-level Automattic Support Network [http://automattic.com/services/support-network/]
- Library members of blog software project planning team
- Reporting on user needs within the library
- Participation in pilot projects
- Joint training opportunities (Mann currently offers a class on blogs and RSS as current awareness tools)
- Help with publicity and communication about importance of blogs as information medium
- Help in evaluation of software
- Invitation of outside experts for consultation (e.g. James Farmer of edublogs.org, Blogsvay)

Though the library is not currently in a position to discuss major initiatives, due to the search for a new university librarian, later there may be the possibility of discussing issues such as funding, storage space and support at Rhodes Hall, help with data archiving, and the like.

If we decide not to pursue a centrally hosted service, our options are more limited and, from the perspective of end users in terms of convenience and of staff in terms of duplication of effort and expense across campus, less than ideal. We can:

- Use current software (though not scalable) with some dedicated staff effort for both technical and user support issues and financial support (not recommended)
- Upgrade to WordPress MU (which will require dedicated hardware to answer security concerns), and either use WordPress’s enterprise-level Automattic Support Network [http://automattic.com/services/support-network/] or dedicate staff effort to technical support. In either case, user support would still require dedicated staff effort.
- Use of commercially hosted service such as Movable Type (Enterprise version) and outsourced technical support. Some local user support would likely be required.

Software
In terms of software the committee recommends the initial testing of WordPress MU and possibly other LAMP applications.

The group discussed the possibility of allowing library staff to use free third party hosted applications (Blogger, Wordpress.com, Typepad, etc.) to fulfill their needs for blog software. This may be a cost-effective and adequate solution for some library staff activities, particularly for those activities which are not central to CUL, which may require the participation of multiple outside partners, and where privacy or archiving are not of paramount importance. For these purposes, we would recommend WordPress.com particularly for those who may work with or switch to the
central hosting implementation at a later date. (Again for the reasons enumerated in the summary and below, this option is not recommended as a long term solution; however if users have a need for a blog that is personal or falls outside the scope of CUL’s organizational purview or do not wish to be part of the test implementation, then use of WordPress.com would allow them to work with an identical interface and one that would be easily exportable and compatible with the central installation if WordPress MU is our ultimate solution).

However, for official library activities, external hosting presents issues in terms of data archiving, privacy, institutional memory, branding, and avoidance of advertising. Other concerns, such as awareness of current and future privacy policies and terms of use for commercial services, and a proliferation of platforms, log-ins, and models of training and support, make external hosting a problematic long term solution for mission critical activities.

As for server-based software, the group surveyed reviews of several multiserver blogging packages, including a general literature search, James Farmer’s review (http://blogsavvy.net/multi-user-blog-tools-overall-ratings-and-reviews) and the University of Calgary’s wiki on multiserver blogging packages (http://wiki.ucalgary.ca/page/MultiUserWeblogComparison), and compiled a list of other possible solutions, including:

- WordPress MultiUser: http://mu.wordpress.org/ (Harvard, Arizona State University, and USF are using this)
- Movable Type: http://movabletype.org/ (Uthink at UMinn, Princeton, University of Sydney, IUPUI, Case Western, Williamette are using this)
- Drupal: http://drupal.org/ (EDUCAUSE is using this for EDUCAUSEConnect)
- Elgg: http://elgg.org/ (Elgg is in use at MIT, USC, and University of Brighton)
- Moodle: http://moodle.org/ (Moodle is in use at several universities including UMinn and several UC campuses and departments)
- Manila: (by the makers of RadioUserland): http://manila.userland.com/
- Confluence

Movable Type is a powerful and popular commercial package used at institutions such as the University of Minnesota for its UThink implementation. The features and functionality it provides are enterprise class (including LDAP authentication and integration with Oracle DB) and they also provide enterprise level support. Of course, this does come at a cost. On their website, education and non-profit licenses are listed at $300 for up to 300 students and $149.95 for 20 non-profit users with custom pricing for additional users and for priority support (as a benchmark, hosted business solutions run at $89.95/mo for unlimited hosting and support). Also, Movable Type is reported to be a bit difficult technically to set up.

Drupal, Elgg, and Moodle are all CMS or social networking products whose functionality goes far beyond blogging. Though these might be useful for other applications, for simple blog hosting they may be more than we need.

Manila, formerly known as RadioUserland, was earlier a good package but development has slowed, and at least in the instance of the Harvard blogs, the installation has been problematic (Harvard switched to WordPress).

JRoller, used by Sun, Yale and NC State, seems to be a possibility; it was briefly installed by both Mann IT and DSS but not enough testing has been done for any firm conclusions. Similarly, not enough information was found about lifetype (formerly pLog).

In terms of software that Cornell has already implemented and is supporting, both CommonSpot and Confluence are two other options. According to Paul Davis in Engineering, the next version of CommonSpot (Version 5 due early in Q2, 2007) is supposed to support blogging, but not a great deal is known about it at the moment. He would not recommend installing CommonSpot just for blogging, but suggests that units already using CommonSpot may want to find out about it before adopting an alternative. In addition, Confluence has basic blogging features available (it is possible to post and allow comments and get RSS for both). However, its functionality is very limited and does not cover most of the criteria that we have identified as a need. Like the CMS/social networking products mentioned above, these products are designed for other purposes, not blogging primarily.

There are a number of other packages available and some interesting developments (including Lyceum, a fork of WordPress being developed UNC-Chapel Hill's Schools of Information and Library Science and Journalism and Mass Communication); however, many of these packages are small or open-source initiatives and in development.

Most users we surveyed at Cornell are using single user versions of WordPress (currently installed) and seem to be happy with its functionality in large part. WordPress has a large user base and an active open source development community which WordPress MU (the multiserver version) has inherited and WordPress MU appears to be stable since the 1.0 release. The software meets most of the criteria stated in our requirements either in its basic configuration or with the addition of plugins (of which there are a large variety and which can be added to by others). Elly Cramer noted that they were able to create a plugin that would add blog posts as resources to the NSDL library and others, which they are offering to anyone who is interested for modification. Other features that users particularly praised included the Akismet spam blocking plugin, the flexibility of WordPress’ themes, its standards compliance, ease of administration, etc. The users we spoke to were very complimentary about the usefulness and responsiveness of the developer community, including NSDL, which was able to resolve most of their issues and needs themselves or with the development community; when they contacted the main developers in a few cases, they received prompt help. The creator of WordPress also now has a company that provides additional enterprise level support through the Automatic Support Network (http://automattic.com/services/support-network/). The network costs $2500/contact/year for basic support (which includes upgrade and update notifications, a professional service provider directory, access to the knowledgebase and private forums, and unlimited web and e-mail access by a single contact/person to problem resolution support within a day) and $5000/contact/year for premium service (all of the above with problem resolution in 6 hours as well as consultative support on plugin selection and configuration, scaling and performance tuning and spam protection and security).

It is also possible to purchase additional contacts by more than one staff member per year. At this point, there are only a few main concerns about the software. WordPress MU creates several data tables for each new blog; this is an item of concern for computer scientists and programmers since the numerous data tables may make scalability an issue with a large number of blogs. However, the software is used to run Wordpress.com on an unknown number of servers and that service currently hosts 802,333 blogs as of March 2007. Also, there is a potential security issue with
PHP with the current version of WordPress MU and problems with WordPress with Macs running Safari (which may be resolved in a forthcoming version). Further investigation is needed on these points. However, given the significant existing base of investment and expertise with WordPress both within CUL and campus-wide, **WordPress MU is a logical starting point for a pilot implementation.**

**Summary**

With good software, judicious use of policies and procedures and adequate support, CUL has the opportunity to speak and hold conversations in a new and exciting way. Many of those we talked to or interviewed emphasized their excitement that CUL was taking this step into this form of social software. The chief message has been “Just do it,” as Jon Phipps put it. Though it is useful to spend time on planning and policies to avoid obvious pitfalls and to make sure that we are clear on our goals and content model, as Carol Minton-Morris advised, she and others have also emphasized the importance of the willingness (depending on your goals and your organizational context) to experiment and the immediate, conversational, and error-forgiving nature of blogging. She noted that NSDL’s content model had changed from their initial ideas but that the concepts that resonated would stay. We think that that the idea of a way to support library staff in better reaching out to each other and to our communities will resonate for a long time to come.

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For more information on the Blog Software Committees research and activities, please see our wiki at [http://wiki.library.cornell.edu/wiki/x/M10](http://wiki.library.cornell.edu/wiki/x/M10).

**Appendices**

**Appendix A.**

Select list of existing blogs at CUL.

**Appendix B.**

Copies of memos to solicit input and information regarding blogging services from CUL staff and the broader Cornell community.