Best Practices for Using the Cross-Cultural Rhetoric Blog

- **Be careful in how you schedule assignments not to overload the blog.** In terms of blog traffic as well as navigatibility, we've found that it is best not to overload the blog with too many individual posts at one time. When 15 students from each class all post entries on the same day, the result is hard to navigate – the students aren't going to read through all that information, and the blog gets unwieldy. As an alternative, consider
    1. Spreading the blogging assignment over several weeks, so you have only a certain number of students blog each week from each class (i.e., 3 weeks, 15 students = 5 students blogging a week)
    2. Designing assignments around group blog posts – blogging is a great activity to be done in teams, especially since occasionally students become nervous with the interface and they can bolster each other's confidence.

- **Build blog commenting into your assignments.** The best feature about any blog is the opportunity it invites for DIALOGUE on a subject. When designing assignments, be sure to ask students to be part of this dialogue by both *posting* entries and also *commenting* on entries as well. In fact, I would recommend assigning students not only to comment on their own assignment entries, but also to browse the blog to comment on the writing posted by students from other classes and other countries (whom they are not directly working with). This creates a rich blogging community for the entire CCR project.

- **Do not design assignments that require students to use copyrighted images.** The CCR blog, like all parts of the web, needs to be respectful of copyright restrictions. Wherever possible, build assignments that ask students to use their own images, images from photo sharing sources like Flickr (www.flickr.com), or public domain images. If students are working with copyrighted images from the web, they can link to them from their post rather than uploading them to the blog.

- **Do your first blog activity together, in class.** By incorporating the first blog activity into your class time, you can create a supportive environment that helps students through their first encounter with the blog interface. It's often a good idea to start with having students comment in class (have them read a blog post, and then comment on it); once they are familiar with how to comment, then you can move them to creating their own posts, whether individually or in groups.

- **Reinforce the pedagogical applications of the Blog by integrating it into your class.** To avoid the idea that this is something "extra" that students are doing, integrate it into your lesson plans, looking at certain blog posts together as a class for thematic or stylistic purposes (even if you have to print out the blog post to bring it into class) or even referring to certain student's posts or comments on the blog to show that their blog writing matters and that you've read it.

- **If you have a generic class username for the blog posts, forward comment notifications on to your students.** Every time someone comments on a post by someone in your class, you (as the instructor) will receive an e-mail notification. It is helpful for you to forward that notification along to the actual writers of the post since many students aren't checking the blog that frequently, and it's important that they see that they weren't writing in a vacuum and that people respond to their ideas. An alternative (especially if you're doing multiple blog assignments) is to set up *individual* blog IDs for your students, so they can log in as themselves and get notified themselves. [Talk to Christine Alfano at alfano@stanford.edu if you are interested in this option to see if it is a smart choice for your class.] One more note: if your blog posts start to get spammed, notify Christine immediately.

- **Be a participant on the blog yourself!** The more you can model being an active, productive member of the blogging community, the more your students will invest in it themselves. At a minimum, this means referring to certain posts and comments in class to show you are following the blog. However, you could also

    1. Comment on blog posts yourself, so students see you participating in the blogging community and the CCR dialogue
    2. Write your own posts/reflections to the blog – these could be a frame or reflections on an assignment that you've given or could be something totally separate related to the intersection of Cross Cultural Rhetoric and your course theme (see last bullet point below)
    3. Contribute to the Instructor's Blog – this has a pedagogical focus and will be read only by instructors

- **It is strongly advised that when you assign a blog activity that you write an entry that frames the assignment for the overall CCR blog audience.** In other words, create an entry that introduces the assignment and what the students will be doing with it so a casual reader of the blog has a clue as to the context of the posts s/he is going to read on the blog. You can find examples of such framing assignments in the following places:
    1. http://www.stanford.edu/group/ccr/blog/2008/04/cultural_interfaces_research_p.html
    2. http://www.stanford.edu/group/ccr/blog/2007/09/stanford_culture_an_introducti.html

  Reflections on the assignments also work well to synthesize the activity for the larger audience. For instance:
  http://www.stanford.edu/group/ccr/blog/2007/10/reflections_on_stanford_cultur.html

If you have any further questions about blogging on the CCR blog or developing blogging assignments, please feel free to contact Christine at alfano@stanford.edu.

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