

## BuddyPress: A university's social network

(single item mixer test)

Submitted at 2/17/2009 9:15:57 AM

To cut to the chase, this post is about using WordPress MU and BuddyPress with enterprise authentication (LDAP) to create an internal/private social network while leaving the blogs, by default, public.

Since May 2008, I've been running WordPress MU on the Learning Lab, a Linux server I maintain at the University of Lincoln, for experimenting, trialling and evaluating software that may enhance and support research, teaching and learning. It's a great job

Of all the software we've looked at over the last few months, 'WordPress Multi-User', has clearly shown the most potential for use by staff and students at the university. It's a mature, well maintained, very popular open source blogging platform. In fact, it's more than that. It's a web content management system that runs 5 million blogs on wordpress.com and 280,000 blogs on edublogs.org. While evaluating WPMU on the Learning Lab, 65 blogs were registered by 123 users. I didn't advertise the service at all during this period, preferring to work with individuals on specific projects and get their (informal) feedback. The feedback has been positive. People initially need support but once they're set up and running, they only tended to contact me when they wanted to push WordPress to do more for them

through plugins and custom themes.

During this period, I've been watching and doing my best to help with the progress made on BuddyPress, a set of plugins for WordPress MU, developed by Automattic, the company behind WordPress. It's been interesting trying to get everything to work together at times but over the last few weeks it's all come together.

Automattic also develop open source forum software which integrates with BuddyPress, too. Jim Groom at the University of Mary Washington pioneered the integration of all three products and I've had it working here at the University of Lincoln quite nicely. However, bbPress is still beta software and I'd like to be able to offer privacy options on forums, too, which is currently unsupported (there are some plugins, but they're not mature enough for our use yet). So currently, we're running WordPressMU, BuddyPress, an LDAP plugin for WPMU and a privacy plugin that's commonly used on WPMU installations. It works really well.

I've documented some of the set up on our wiki. It's not been difficult. For the time-being, while BuddyPress matures, I've chosen to stick with the default home and members themes, changing just the logo. Forums are, as mentioned above, turned off for now. I wonder if we'll ever turn them on as the 'Wire' (similar to the Facebook Wall) is available and people are used

to using services like Twitter and the Facebook Wall to communicate these days. We'll see what demand there is for forums.

The final set up is really quite sweet. A member of the university goes to <https://blogs.lincoln.ac.uk> for the first time and logs in with their usual credentials. The first time they login, they are signed up. That's it. No sign up page needed. It's as if they were already a member of the social network, which, being members of the university, they are of course. From there, they see the BuddyPress home pages, can join groups, change their profiles and, when they're ready, create or join a blog.

I've finally finished setting it up for general use today. The few people that know about it and have already joined, instantly see the benefits of having the social networking layer on top of the blogs. I'm excited to see how this works out over time. It's not something we're going to launch in a big way just yet (it's only me supporting it at the moment), but I'm guessing that it will spread quite quickly through word-of-mouth.

The university web team are supportive and are sending staff and whole departments my way when they want a web site. The IT support team have been trained to use WordPress, should they get enquiries their way. We've got a few projects that have been waiting patiently for the new home of the blogs and a

number of the Learning Lab blog users are migrating across already. The potential for supporting personalised and group online learning is now better than it's ever been and the social networking element only helps bring peers together for collaboration and discussion.

Many thanks to Jim Groom and D'Arcy Norman who have been working on WordPressMU at their universities in ways which I hope we can emulate and contribute to here at the University of Lincoln.

- Related posts
- Developing BuddyPress for education
- My revised ALT-C proposal
- OAuth, OpenID, XMPP with WordPress
- ALT-C 2008: A different approach.

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## Single Item RSS Feeds on WordPress blogs: RSS For the Content of This Page

(single item mixer test)

Submitted at 7/8/2009 9:46:19 AM

At Mash Oop North yesterday, Brian Kelly asked me how I got the "RSS for the content of this page" link onto my (hosted) WordPress blog:

Clicking the link on an arbitrary blog post page turns up an RSS feed containing just a single item: the content of that blog post.

The trick is quite simple, and relies on a couple of things.

The first thing you need to know is that you can get a single item RSS feed containing an RSS version of a single WordPress blog page by adding `?feed=rss2&withoutcomments=1` to the end of the page URL.

So for example, the RSS version of the post that lives here:

<http://ukwebfocus.wordpress.com/2009/07/06/enthusiastic-amateurs-and-overcoming-institutional-inertia/>

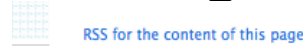
overcoming-institutional-inertia/ on Brian's blog can be found here:

<http://ukwebfocus.wordpress.com/2009/07/06/enthusiastic-amateurs-and-overcoming-institutional-inertia/?feed=rss2&withoutcomments=1>

The second thing you need to be aware of is how web browsers handle links that appear in a web page, and in particular how they handle relative links. Relative links are most easily thought of as links in a web page that do not specify the domain of the link. So for example, on this blog, the domain is `ouseful.wordpress.com`. Links to posts on OUseful.info look something like the following:

<http://ouseful.wordpress.com/2009/07/07/mash-oop-north-pipes-mashup-by-way-of-an-apology/>

An absolute way of writing this as a link in a web page would be to write

 RSS for the content of this page

ulls Pages  
rom About  
Search

the link in an HTML anchor tag as follows:

That is, we specify the domain (`http://ouseful.wordpress.com`) and the path to the resource as well as the resource page itself.

A relative link would be written as follows:

with the browser filling in the gaps using the domain that the page itself is served from (`http://ouseful.wordpress.com`).

(For a basic grounding in how browsers handle relative links, see Absolute vs. Relative Paths/Links. If you want the hardcore standards stuff, you should read the original RFC: RFC 1808: Relative Uniform

Resource Locators.)

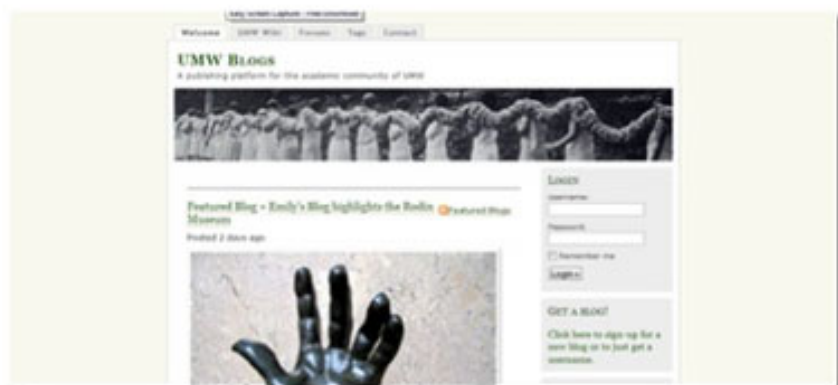
One further thing to know about relative links is that in you use something of the form `?foo=bar` in the link (e.g.), the browser will add the argument to the end of the current page's URL. So if the page `mypage.html` being served from `http://example.com` contains the relative link that link will actually point to `http://example.com/mypage.html?foo=bar`.

Putting these two things together (how to create a URI for the single item RSS feed version of a post, and how to construct relative URIs), we are now in a position to add an 'RSS version of this page' link to a WordPress blog sidebar.

So, to get the single item RSS feed link, go to the Widgets settings area of your WordPress blog and add a text widget as follows:

Okay, Brian?;-)

**UMass at Amherst:** Después de ocho meses de experimentar con una versión beta, acaban de anunciar oficialmente que el servicio es uno oficial.



**UMW Blogs de University of Mary Washington:** El entusiasmo y la magia de Jim Groom ha hecho que este sitio sea mi favorito. He aprendido mucho de los experimentos de Jim con WPMU.



## Universities using WPMu

(single item mixer test)

Submitted at 10/15/2007 7:22:15 AM

Mario A. Núñez Molina did some research on Universities that are using WordPress Multi-User in this post. There are at least ten colleges and universities on that list that I wasn't aware of before reading the post. Something that is extremely exciting for me, because there are far more universities experimenting with WPMu than I originally thought - though not nearly enough.

Mario even Features my favorite WPMU blog installation

If you don't read Mario's blog, you really should. Not only is he as prolific as they come, but he has his pulse on the world of education and technology like few other blogs do. Nonetheless, he really doesn't need anyone promoting his blog for him because his readership seems far more extensive than most other EdTech blogs I read on a regular basis written in English. Which raises a question for me: how important is it to starting reading blogs from other cultures written in other languages. I have gotten so many resources, tips, and possibilities from tapping into Mario's blog, which has opened me up to a whole other world of Educational Blogging that I would have not had access to otherwise. And while my Spanish and Italian are worse than rough, when I saw all the cool things that they are doing I was

immediately driven to see the innovations happening on a broader international stage than just Canada, the US, Britain, and Australia. In fact, I have been using my rusty language skills more than ever before.

In fact, at the Open Education conference I met a great guy and absolute EdTech maverick (thanks you Brian for introducing us) in Pedro Perná-as Peco from University of Alicante in Spain. Pedro is hot on the trail of EduGlu and is doing an unbelievable job with making RSS do his bidding, if you haven't heard his talk from Open Ed 2007 here, be sure to check out his awesome slides as well.

Excuse my necessary digression and now back to my original post idea, I have at least four more schools to add to Mario's WPMu list:

- Otis College of Art and Design is one of my personal favorites. Sue Mayberry has done an unbelievable job at Otis and needs to be applauded. The policy and the documentation is wonderfully done. And, as with most things from Otis, it looks so good!
- University of Alicante, Spain (Pedro showed me the link for this, and it is beautifully integrated into their homemade LMS, but I can't find it currently - maybe Pedro will send the link?)
- Bryn Mawr College (thanks to the trailblazing work of Laura Blankenship)
- University of Buffalo (They are

almost using WPMu as an departmental blogging/CMS space - interesting stuff)

- University of Calgary (in Clandestine Alpha thanks to D'Arcy Norman, but making real headway as I understand)

- Keene State University has recently introduced WPMu into their learning environment, thanks to the inimitable Mike Caulfield. Expect much more from these folks.

- University of British Columbia (unconfirmed, but from what I understand they may be taking the jump)

- The University of Richmond has some WPMu action stewing in the pot, it may have been recently released, though I don't have a URL for this one just yet. Any help?

- Update: The College of William and Mary is now running WPMu, and these cool cats are even hosting it externally, very cool! I just wish they would open up the comments on the front page so I could tell them as much.

So, between Mario's list and mine, are we ready to have an informal, distributed meet up to start talking about what we're doing with WPMU in the educational realm? And perhaps in more than one language...

Hey, we might even have a panel at Northern Voice 2008...

## WPMU as OCW Platform

(single item mixer test)

Submitted at 7/3/2009 6:39:37 AM

We've been using WPMU to power our OCW project in the David O. McKay School of Education for a year now. It's been extremely straightforward and simple to run - every course has its own blog on the WPMU instance. Tons of plugins, drop dead simple migration... I love it.

However, as we ramp up to include more participants this year I've started wondering about the URL structure of having multiple departments participate. What I would love to do is still assign one blog per course, but be able to organize these under "subdirectories" as follows:

<http://open.byu.edu/ipt/692/>  
<http://open.byu.edu/comd/411/>  
<http://open.byu.edu/eime/515/>

&c. You get the idea. I haven't been able to spend a ton of brain power on it, but I can't figure out how to get the /ipt/ or the /comd/ in the middle there. Any thoughts?

Also, I'm wondering what to do URL-wise about courses like IPT 692. This is an Advanced Issues seminar and is taught multiple times each year by different faculty. Multiple times each semester, in many cases. How should I proceed? /ipt/692/wiley/? And how should I archive these? /ipt/692/wiley/2009/fall/?

## WPMu in Education

(single item mixer test)

Submitted at 3/12/2008 9:07:27 AM

There are many, many examples of enterprise publishing/blogging in higher education. Below are a list of several universities and colleges that are using the application WordPress Multi-User. Keep in mind there are numerous other options for enterprise bogging for educational institutions, such as Movable Type and Drupal.