Emphasizing the ‘Public’ in Public Affairs
Implementing a bottom-up, blog-centric new media strategy at an institution of public policy

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Introduction: Blogging beginnings at the Humphrey Institute

In the Spring of 2007, the University of Minnesota’s Office of Service and Continuous Improvement (OSCI) approved a grant from its Service and Process Improvement Fund (SPIF) for a grassroots initiative entitled “Emphasizing the ‘Public’ in Public Affairs” (see Appendix A). The aim of the proposal was to use an already existing university resource called “UThink” to build weblogs for the various research centers at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs to enable the centers to better publicize their own research and events and to serve as easily accessible public affairs resources for each center’s particular policy field, policy makers, the blogosphere, the mainstream media, and elite or otherwise highly engaged publics. At $12,125, the grant was the smallest approved by OSCI for the 2007-2008 academic year, and was funded primarily due to the substantial benefit/cost ratio it promised to achieve. Further, the committee which approved the project included the following affirmation of its merits: “Reviewers supported this project because it will further develop the Humphrey Institute as an exceptional organization. It will be a model for other departments to follow and it will demonstrate what is possible through UThink with a systematic and coordinated plan” (OSCI, 2007). Most blogs hosted by the UThink system are deployed in an ad-hoc fashion as personal opinion blogs, collaborative research blogs, or as online complements to offline, traditional courses taught at the University. The Humphrey blogging project, by contrast, is an organized institution-wide effort that seeks to integrate blogs and blogging practices into the core of the organization’s academic research and outreach efforts.
The decision to use the UThink system to rollout blogs for the Institute was an easy one. Based on the industry-standard Movable Type publishing platform from Six Apart, UThink is a robust and well-supported resource that is tied in directly to the university’s universal authentication system, known commonly as “x500.” This integration and the institutional support that accompanies it provides a number of advantages.

First, new users to the blogging system need not go through a registration process, which lowers barriers to entry for the less technologically inclined; to add a new blog author, one must only know the person’s University e-mail address.

Second, that the system is hosted by the University libraries guarantees a certain level of perpetual institutional support; had a third-party hosting solution been used, the Humphrey Institute would itself have to continually support and maintain the websites’ backend from a technical standpoint.

Third, by standardizing on one system, resources devoted to training can be made to stretch further by developing institutional competencies that are translatable among sub-units of the organization and across departments at the University; previous to the launch of the blogging project, for instance, some of the Humphrey research centers had contracted with outside service providers using a variety of web publishing platforms, preventing staff at one center from assisting staff from another center in troubleshooting.

Fourth, the overall goals and values of the UThink system align well with the Humphrey Institute’s organizational priorities; the creators of the system held the preservation of
institutional memory in high regard and consciously sought to promote academic freedom of expression and the dissemination of knowledge generated at the University to the public at large (Nackerud, 2004).

The ultimate goals of the blogging initiative at the Humphrey Institute are: to establish the organization as a one-stop shop for public policy information online, to provide a public forum for discussing issues of public concern, and to help generate a sense of community and opportunities for public action. While the Institute has kept a well-maintained website with details of its various academic programs and departments, biographies of faculty and staff, and other pertinent information, only one full-time position was devoted to web design and content creation for an organization housing hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and fellows. The lack of resources available to create a website that is frequently updated and rich with new content from all corners of the Institute created a bottleneck which discouraged community members from adding content to their own sections of the site or from imagining, let alone creating, new ways of connecting with multiple publics through the web. If members of the Humphrey community were going to connect to the outside world through the web, they were going to have to find alternative routes for online publishing; in other words, they would have to do it themselves.

The Center for the Study of Politics and Governance (CSPG) provided a new model for web-based outreach efforts at the Institute. “Smart Politics,” launched in September 2006, is a weblog which bills itself as “home to timely, pointed, non-partisan discussion of Upper Midwestern and national politics” and provides an accessible entry point for
regional polling and historical election results (Ostermeier, 2006). The blog has become one of the most publicly visible efforts of the Humphrey Institute, often drawing hundreds of visitors each day. The blog is written and maintained by a post doctorate fellow, who devotes about 15% of his work for the center to producing the blog (Ostermeier, personal communication, April 4, 2008). While the blog does not serve as the sole web-presence of the CSPG, it does in many ways represent the “soul” of the center, imbuing it with a personal voice that conveys its mission and goals to a politically engaged public. The main writer of the weblog, however, is precisely the kind of academic for whom the blogging medium constitutes a natural extension of research work—he is young, in touch with rapidly evolving technological trends, and runs his own independent record label on the side. It seems only natural that such an individual would take to the blogging medium with enthusiasm.

The serendipitous confluence of a subject matter geared for public consumption (polling-driven political analysis), center leadership emphasizing public outreach, and a young Internet-savvy producer assisted greatly in making the “Smart Politics” blog a success. The question then became whether similar success could be achieved in the blogosphere within other areas of the Humphrey Institute by an older generation less adept at using the web for purposes of publicity. In an attempt to answer this question and to see how far into the new media landscape a traditional academic institution could be led, I began the “Emphasizing the ‘Public’ in Public Affairs” initiative to develop weblogs for other Humphrey research centers. I used “Smart Politics” as a model, but created an organized plan of action for cross-disciplinary collaboration.
Building a coalition of bloggers within the Institute, across multiple policy areas, and spanning multiple generations and technological competencies has been a challenging undertaking. At every turn, it has required convincing skeptical and non-web savvy would-be collaborators of both the theoretical soundness and pragmatic advantages of using a new media approach to complement and extend traditional outreach efforts. To lay the groundwork for an analysis of how I have implemented the project in practice, we must first consider how such this initiative fits into the larger media ecosystem with which my collaborators and I have chosen to engage.

**Theory: Engaging the blogosphere with expertise**

Weblogs, by the cutting-edge standards of the Internet’s established digerati, are already passé. John Barger is credited with having first coined the term “weblog” in 1997 describing his own site “Robot Wisdom,” which was essentially a frequently updated list of links to other sites on the Internet, with the most recently added appearing at the top of the page (Blood, 2000). Now that much of the Internet-savvy public’s imagination has been captured by the rise of social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace, and even shorter-form one-to-many media like Twitter (limited to just 140 characters per post) have become all the rage, blogging has turned into something of an establishment medium. In the face of this changing environment, the blogosphere has continued to expand and solidify its position vis-a-vis more traditional media (newsprint, television, radio, etc.), which has raised expectations on the part of Internet users regarding the timeliness, transparency, searchability, linkability, and interactivity of content produced by all media outlets and other organizations that seek
to have a well-regarded presence on the web. A younger generation of individuals now reaching maturity and entering the workforce has grown up reading, writing, and circulating texts through new media; they will increasingly come to expect institutions to package information not as those organizations want to produce it, but rather as these individuals want to consume and contribute to it (Shirky, 2008). Aggregation technologies like RSS, which allow users to consume massive amounts of information with little effort, have been adopted by traditional news outlets (e.g. the New York Times) as well as new media outlets and have become standard complements to the traditional web.

This new media environment privileges timeliness above accuracy, accessibility above exclusivity, interconnectedness above internal completeness, and opinion above objectivity. These values run directly contrary to those of academia, where peer review is king, nothing is published until it’s perfect, a neutral or objective stance is assumed, and libraries, books, and journals remain as the primary touchstones of the field. That the work of amateur commentators and professional journalists constitutes the vast majority of content that is available and easily accessible online, puts academia in a difficult position. While the continuing exclusivity of the “ivory tower” maintains the gatekeeper status of higher education, valuable and rigorous scholarly work is finding relatively less exposure in the mainstream media and is nearly altogether absent in the continually developing new media landscape.

The Internet, particularly with the arrival of more engaging and socially driven “Web 2.0” technologies, has altered the composition of concepts of “the public sphere” and has
realigned power relationships among amateurs and experts, individuals and institutions, as well as the public and the private. As explained by Christian R. Weisser in his book *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, “the concept of the public sphere designates a theater in modern democratic societies in which political participation is enacted through discourse. It is the space in which citizens deliberate on matters of common concern and attempt to influence decisions of the state” (2002). The greater potential for the contribution of individual citizens in distributed discussions on topics of public interest expands this theater and reshapes the contours of the discourse within it.

**Losing the public: the degradation of community in modern society**

The idealized “bourgeois public sphere,” as envisioned by Jürgen Habermas, existed only briefly before losing out to overriding commercial and private interests of the print media, where private citizens meet in an arena separate and distinct from the state, the marketplace, and the private sphere of the home. The criteria for a bourgeois public sphere, as put forward by Habermas, included 1) the “social leveling of all participants,” 2) that subjects for discussion would be those of “common concern” to the general public, and 3) that this arena would be accessible to all members of society. Critics of Habermas have pointed out that while these criteria may have been assumed and held in high regard in the salons of Paris and the coffeehouses of London, their actual realization was stymied by traditional power imbalances and the inaccessibility of these public arenas to those of limited means. Subsequent modifications of the original Habermasian notion of the public sphere, such as the work of Nancy Fraser, suggest
that public life cannot exist in a “single, comprehensive public sphere” in either stratified or egalitarian societies. In the case of the former, powerful elements within the society will co-opt the collective “we,” making subaltern groups “less able than otherwise to articulate and defend their interests.” In egalitarian societies, a singular public sphere would result in the “filtering [of] diverse rhetorical and stylistic norms through a single, overarching lens” which would “effectively privilege one cultural group over others,” forcing cultural assimilation (1992). Rather than existing in a single arena, public discourse is considered by contemporary public sphere theorists to take place in a multiplicity of publics and counter-publics, allowing both privileged and non-privileged groups the opportunity to communicate, strategize, and address the broader society.

Much earlier work by philosopher John Dewey bemoaned the eclipse of the public brought about by the consolidation of a national discourse facilitated by a mass-communication regime that over-mediatizes conversations previously conducted through town hall–style forums and in daily face-to-face interactions among citizens. “American democratic polity was developed out of genuine community life, that is, association in local and small centers,” Dewey wrote in The Public and its Problems (1927). How this local tradition translates into national consciousness is problematic: “We have inherited, in short, local town-meeting practices and ideas. But we live and act and have our being in a continental national state” (pp. 113-114). Dewey found that the pressures of the “mechanized” national discourse led to a standardization of opinion and the dissolution of the public into amorphous groups of citizens, generating an apathetic public “so bewildered that it cannot find itself” (p. 122-123). The role of the mass media in this process has been substantial:
Our modern state-unity is due to the consequences of technology employed so as to facilitate the rapid and easy circulation of opinions and information, and so as to generate constant and intricate interaction far beyond the limits of face-to-face communities. Political and legal reforms have only piece-meal and haltingly, with great lag, accommodated themselves to the industrial transformation. (p. 114)

The result, then, is a national identity that arises wholly from the imagination of individual citizens; this “imagined community” is formed by the simultaneous consumption of mass media where civic participation is largely confined to citizens’ being swayed in their political opinions by large, centrally owned and operated mass media institutions (Anderson, 1991). In Dewey’s terms, “the machine age, in developing the Great Society has invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a Great Community” (pp. 126-127). Where have the “real” communities of America’s founding gone? Can they be reconstituted to bring citizens back into a discourse where they have a more substantial and direct impact on the public policies that both enable and constrain their private and public lives?

**Re-imagining publics: challenges in creating online space for civic participation**

Developments in Internet-based media of the past two decades may constitute a new way forward in re-awakening and expanding the classic conception of the “bourgeois public sphere” by enabling mass-participation to complement the prevailing forces of mass-consumption. The introduction of personal publishing technologies such as weblogging creates a platform for conceptualizing identity and civic participation in a new mode: rather than simply consuming information, individual citizens are now
capable of producing, disseminating, and re-circulating information. It is in this redefinition of the public sphere that we can begin to see where new media technologies have enabled a re-imagined and re-constituted public sphere that is more accessible and offers a more level playing field when compared to the traditional mass media. Concerns regarding the (shrinking) digital divide aside, this expanded, flattened, and multiplied public sphere offers citizens an unparalleled opportunity to both access and engage in distributed conversations about matters of public interest. The newly commonplace act of one-to-many personal communication facilitated through new “Web 2.0” technologies promotes a new form of identity based on collaborative production rather than consumption (Lampa, 2004).

Technologies and online news organizations that aggregate information across public spheres in a semi-autonomous fashion create the possibility for the formation of an encompassing public sphere that serves as the “structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place” (Fraser, quoting Geoff Eley). Perhaps it is in this arena where the multiple participatory publics described by Fraser could be mediated, reaching towards the Habermasian ideals of inclusivity, absence of rank, and consensus-driven discussion. These ideals have thus far been unattainable due to power imbalances and prevailing modes of conversation within the blogosphere (Shirky, 2003; Baoill, 2004). In any case, this new medium certainly enables modes of participation vastly more interactive than the predominant modern mass-medium of television, which, had it existed in Dewey’s time in its present form (an even vaster wasteland of reality television and otherwise meaningless or useless content than even Newton Minnow observed), would have been utterly
abhorrent to the philosopher. An inclusive and contested public-of-publics could be a step in the direction of constituting Dewey’s “Great Community,” but whether that dream is realizable in practice remains in doubt.

One potentially troubling aspect of the blogosphere is its tendency to blur distinctions between the public and private spheres, brought about by its emphasis on personal voice and the near-universal absence of editorial control. In his piece *The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument*, G. Thomas Goodnight articulates his concern that, in the twentieth century, “the public sphere is being steadily eroded by the elevation of the personal and technical groundings of argument” (1982). In one way, the rise of the blogosphere further exacerbates the problems leading to Goodnight’s worries; obsessions with popular culture, fads, and novelty news items abound in the blogosphere, clouding issues of the common good. “Denial of the public sphere is accompanied by celebration of personal lifestyle,” Goodnight writes. In another way, topical specialization in the blogosphere adds to the cacophony of narrowly-tailored interest areas that are fully accessible only to those who are in the know; these may be of interest to subsets of the public but generally do not carry widespread appeal or interest.

As Goodnight evaluates the effects of one-way, mass-mediated communication, he identifies as a major stumbling block its presentation of news as personalized, emotional stories that compel but neither invite nor enable action by members of the public. The relatively new availability of online conduits enabling feedback from and participation by the (former) audience in the form of weblogs, YouTube videos,
comments on websites of traditional news outlets, etc. offers new opportunities to overcome Goodnight’s concerns regarding consumption of the mass media of the twentieth century. While personal and technical modes of communication predominate in the blogosphere, as they do in contemporary culture generally, a great deal of that communication is engaged in the discussion of issues of public concern, especially national politics (e.g. the multitude of deeply engaged left- and right-leaning political blogs). The role of the political sphere in guiding public priorities remains intact, and the new media provide openings for individual citizens to help set the political agenda and the policies that result.

As these new media technologies open up new venues for public conversation by regular people, some participants will enjoy natural advantages over the rest. Those holding authority established externally of the blogosphere (e.g. through traditional societally defined status such as subject matter expertise), those predisposed to being able to use media effectively (e.g. members of traditional media institutions), and those with substantial personal or institutional resources (e.g. the wealthy, the educated, the famous) start out with inherent strengths that cannot be completely negated by the flatter nature of new media. In the reconstituted, extended, and multifaceted public sphere of the Internet, academics should occupy privileged positions from the outset in that they hold expertise and enjoy greater personal and institutional resources than most others. Indeed, several of the most-read blogs on the Internet are written by university professors.¹

¹ See, for example, Brad De Long’s “Semi daily journal” and PZ Meyers’ “Phyrangula”
However, the mismatch between the values of academia and the modes of conversation in the blogosphere—typified by an emphasis on personal voice driving informal analyses of a multiplicity of issues—would seem to preclude a great number of academics from effectively overcoming their institutional biases and long-held habits to be able to engage with the blogosphere in any meaningful or significant way. My own firsthand experiences in attempting to convince members of the faculty at the Humphrey Institute to engage with the blog medium bear this out; for many, the freewheeling, often fact-free zone of the blogosphere does not hold much academic merit and therefore forays into its world do little to nothing to generate cultural capital for academics.

**Practice: Implementing institutional change**

While the Humphrey Institute’s dean, J. Brian Atwood, has emphasized public outreach as a priority for the organization, the college has up to now largely failed to effectively leverage its substantial expertise, authority, and human capital on the Internet. Why is this the case?

First, a lack of resources and personnel has created a bottleneck for the production of web-based content, which has prevented community members from even considering using the web for major publicity efforts.

Second, much of the burden of communicating the research of the Institute and its contributions to the wider field have fallen on the communications office, demonstrating an over-reliance on a traditional public relations framework for publicity purposes; just as nearly all of the web-based design falls on one staff member at the Institute, the
entire publicity apparatus of the Institute amounts to just two staff members dedicated to external communications.

Third, while faculty, fellows, staff, and students have been nominally included in the Dean’s overall emphasis on outreach, they have not been provided with the tools, training, or time necessary to develop the skills required to engage in public discourse outside of the Institute’s traditional circles of public affairs practitioners, academics, and policy makers.

Fourth, the priorities of the University of Minnesota, being a major public research institution, do not align well with the priorities of the blogosphere; performance evaluations for the granting of tenure and the determination of compensation lead faculty to focus all of their efforts on primary research and publishing in peer-reviewed publications—given the explicit values of such an institution, blogging appears to be a mere vanity or distraction from the important scholarly work of academics.

It is no wonder, given all these tensions, that the faculty of the Institute lack the will to engage in significant and time-consuming public outreach efforts. Not only is it not in their professional interest to detract from the scholarly work upon which evaluations of their contribution to the institution are judged, but they have been provided neither the training to develop the skills necessary for engaging with the (online) media nor the institutional structures by which to do so. This sort of public engagement simply does not occur except among individual members who are by personality or previous practice
already predisposed to a broader reading of their duties as members of this particular academic community.

For a school of public affairs focused on issues of general societal concern and situated within a wider culture that is rapidly incorporating more participatory modes of communication and information dissemination, outreach practices must be evolved and extended so as to maintain the organization’s relevance vis-a-vis other (rapidly multiplying) outlets of information in pursuit of fulfilling its public purposes. The Humphrey blogging initiative seeks to leverage the opportunities afforded by new media through the harnessing of daily work efforts of faculty, fellows, staff, and students in ways that align with the priorities of each of these constituencies of the institution. The ultimate goal is to—in some small way—help realize Dewey’s notion of the “Great Community” in which individual citizens can both make sense of the forces at work within the larger society and actively and collaboratively participate in the formulation of public policy priorities. The going has not been altogether easy or completely successful, but small victories have been achieved that have set this vision of a richer, more participatory democratic process as a common goal to be achieved.

In practice, the blogging initiative at the Humphrey Institute has required a great deal of coalition-building and convincing of individual community members that short-term sacrifices of time, effort, and staff resources will have long-term benefits. In my naivety at the outset of the project, I had assumed that everyone would be on board when I called a general meeting of all my initial collaborators during the first week of the new academic year to discuss our overall plans for the project. Much to my chagrin and
embarrassment, only my supervisor on the project and one collaborator from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship were in attendance. It was at that point that I came to the sobering realization that this project would not be as easy to execute as I had expected.

Pierre Bourdieu’s “field theory” provides an illuminating way to conceptualize why academics would be hesitant to transgress the strictures of the “ivory tower” in order to insert themselves into wider conversations continually ongoing in the new media. A field, as Bourdieu describes it, is “a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field” (2005, p. 30). The political, journalistic, and academic fields all “lay claim to the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, they have in common the fact that they are the site of internal struggles for the imposition of the dominant principle of vision and division” (p. 36). Inter-field struggles to define the world around us are particularly important for the Humphrey blogging initiative because the project seeks to have members of the academic field to take on tasks generally considered to be the exclusive realm of the journalistic field. Employing a strategy that uses new media to create a larger impact within the larger media ecosystem presupposes a certain level of complicity on the part of actual journalists in allowing this greater influence. While individual blog posts may, in a way, serve as press releases that could potentially make a journalist’s work easier by providing a prepackaged story nearly ready to be run in the daily paper, blogging as a medium can be threatening to professional journalism overall. The lower barriers to entry, freely
distributed content, and the assumption of an agenda-setting role that have typified the blogosphere create tension for journalistic outfits attempting to remain relevant and profitable.

More relevant to the actual implementation of a new media strategy at an institution of higher learning are the internal struggles within the academic field; these revolve around tensions between two poles—the “autonomous pole” and the “heteronomous pole.” Members of a field who are oriented towards its autonomous pole are considered to be the purists who generate the most cultural capital within the field; in academia, this group constitutes those primarily occupied with primary research and publishing in peer-reviewed articles. Those who are oriented more towards its heteronomous pole engage more freely with other fields and are therefore able to generate greater economic capital; the ability and personal drive to translate terminologies, assumptions, and ways of being and working across field boundaries makes an individual more valuable to society at large. For example, the journalistic field is considered a very weakly autonomous field due to the fact that its members must, on a regular and continuing basis, gain an understanding of new fields and those who work within them. Journalists, for the most part, are therefore considered to be generalists—their knowledge and skills can and must be deployed across a variety of situations to convey the importance of a wide range of social activities, events, and processes. Academics, by contrast, are specialists who have earned their prestige, positions, and rank, by focusing on very particular lines of inquiry. Bringing academics in closer contact with the blogosphere and the emerging new public spheres it connotes would require, then, a shift in emphasis from a very particular and focused way of approaching the world to one which embraces
at least some recognition of the worth of outside perceptions and general public interest in determining the value of academic work.

In achieving the project goal of providing spaces for the collaborative determination of public policy, the differing roles fulfilled by individual community members within the Humphrey Institute play an important part. Faculty, largely adhering to the autonomous pole and focused on generating cultural capital within the academic field, are not well suited to lead the charge into the blogosphere. Fellows, while they may instruct courses (serving essentially as adjunct faculty), are largely non-academic actors within the institution and are instead appointed to administer and set vision for the various research centers. Acting as the leaders of what are effectively small nonprofits within the larger umbrella of the organization, fellows have the freedom to focus more directly on external outreach to generate public interest in the activities of the Institute to bring in financial resources (generally in the form of grant money) to support the work of Institute (J. Sandfort, personal communication, April 29, 2008). Staff, usually fulfilling functions supporting the efforts of faculty and fellows, have the greatest amount of latitude in incorporating new modes of communication and collaboration into their work routines due to the absence of pressures that would be construed as strictly academic.

To adapt these set ways of knowing and being within the community to the purposes of new media outreach, Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is instructive. Habitus, as interpreted by Marie-Léandre Gomez, Isabelle Bouty, and Carole Drucker-Goddard in their article “Developing Knowing in Practice,” is “the knowledge of the game that we previously constructed and that we reconstruct during the game” (2003, p. 119). In other words,
habitus forms a structure for the actions of members in communities of practice but can also *reshape those practices* as necessary to adapt to changing conditions. As one would logically presume by etymological association, habitus is closely linked with the common understanding of a habit, a settled or regular tendency or practice. By introducing new habits into the daily life of an individual, the underlying habitus of practice can slowly but surely be altered to reflect new priorities, goals, and one’s re-imagined role within a larger community of practice. In the words of Gomez, et al: “Knowing is strongly linked to the context of the action. It is embedded in time and space. Should the context change, so will the knowing” (p. 102).

Applying this general principle to our case of altering the practices within an academic institution, we can see a way forward. To even attempt to turn academics into bloggers, they must first be provided with the tools, training, time, staff resources and incentives necessary to support a blog that reflects well on their own academic standing as well as their institution. By incorporating this mode of expression into the workflows of subunits and departments within the larger organization, a critical mass of externally-focused community members equipped with the skills and tools necessary to communicate effectively to multiple audiences can begin to coalesce. Only then can faculty have the necessary support and structures to incorporate blogging into their regular work.

**Building an interdisciplinary coalition: successes and setbacks**

The Humphrey research centers that agreed to collaborate on the project during the grant-writing phase included the Center for Democracy and Citizenship (CDC), the Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy (CSTPP), Center for School Change

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(CSC), the Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center (PNLC), and the Center on Women and Public Policy (CWPP). Each of the centers agreed to join the project for their own reasons, but a common incentive was the opportunity to expand their organizational capacity without the need to draw from their own budgets; here, external funding for the initiative was crucial. Because this initiative was funded by an outside grant, the research centers would need only provide time and labor from their own staff resources to join as full participants. Also, a number of the centers (CDC, CSTPP, PNLC) had already working to overhaul of their more static web-based outreach efforts and this project came along at the right time, allowing them to take full advantage of the opportunity by incorporating a blog into their strategic planning.

In addition to the research centers who signed on as partners from the outset, additional internally-focused community weblogs have also been added to the project over time; these include weblogs maintained by the Humphrey communications office, career services, and the Institute’s student association. The reasoning behind adding these blogs to the docket was twofold. First, as the project began ramping up with the launch of CDC’s “By the People” in October 2007, it became clear that the general unfamiliarity with weblogs among Institute community members in general would constitute a obstacle to rapidly rolling out the project. In order to see the value of blogs, people needed to be thoroughly convinced of their value. Converting career services’ regular internship and job postings e-mails and the weekly internal newsletter the “Institute Insider” into blogs demonstrated to the community how the medium could be used to reduce overall the volume of e-mail, which had been a common complaint at the Institute for quite a while. Beyond simply helping to alleviate existing problems with
internal communications at the organization, the blogs also offered new features—such as content categories, automatic archiving, and commenting—that provide functionality previously unavailable or inaccessible using the medium of e-mail. Changing the context in which these internal communications occur constituted an alteration of long-existing social habitus at the Institute that has privileged e-mail as the primary means of communication among community members. By exposing community members to the medium as content consumers, they will be more likely to feel comfortable with using the medium as content producers (Lampa, 2004).

Beginning with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, whose research and outreach efforts, being centered on civic engagement, are best aligned with the goals of the blogging project, I engaged in a strategy that developed working relationships with individual collaborators representing two different roles within each center.

First, because the establishment of publicly oriented weblogs necessarily affects the public perception of the research centers, at least one collaborator in each center must hold the formal authority necessary to be able to make decisions about issues pertaining to center identity. In practice, this has meant consulting with managers regarding aspects of each weblog that define the voice of the weblog. For instance, discussions with center leaders have been vital in determining blog names, color schemes, header images, and thematic content. Also, the involvement of center leadership is crucial in establishing the blog as a priority for all other staff, faculty, and fellows within the center. Without the strong endorsement of the overall project and its goals by these leaders, I would have needed to do the legwork of convincing many
more individuals of the value of blogging. These leaders have served as strong allies in solidifying broad institutional support of the project’s objectives.

Second, I have worked closely on a technical and practical level with center staff whose main focus involves either traditional outreach or the coordination of overall center work. These collaborators form the participatory backbone of the project—they have learned how to use the UThink system on a very technical level and help to train and coordinate the efforts of faculty, fellows, and other staff members within their respective centers in producing the center blogs. They have also played key roles in discussions relating to the visual and thematic identities of the blogs and continue to contribute in inter-center brainstorming sessions regarding increasing the publicity of the blogs, sharing resources among the centers, and developing new uses for the medium.

The importance of these two roles—leaders and workers—have become quite clear in difficulties experienced by two centers in getting their blogs up and running within the first year of the project. In the case of the Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center, there are a multitude of leaders pursuing differing thematic focuses—some concentrate primarily on practice, some on theory, and others on professional development—which has somewhat stymied efforts to create a unified sense of common direction (K. Borton, personal communication, May 6, 2008). As one of the largest research centers at the Humphrey, the PNLC has been difficult to wrangle due to its multitude of competencies, issue areas, and directions. Additionally, while the PNLC has been systematically contemplating a relaunch of their web-presence (as mentioned previously), the center has contracted with an outside service vendor in this process which, rather than
complementing the Humphrey blogging project, has thus far led to complications of coordination. As plans for the relaunch of their “official” presence at the Humphrey Institute’s main website have developed, determining the role of the blog within that new structure has been difficult to ascertain. Work with the Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy experienced similar complications, as they were also in the middle of working with an outside consultant to rebrand their center with a new identity system (including a new logo, color schemes, typefaces, letterheads, etc.). In both cases, these outside contracts have contributed to delays in the deployment of center weblogs, but in the case of CSTPP their rebranding process was completed with time enough to launch their blog “Policy Catalyst” before the end of the academic year. The would-be PNLC blog has been delayed until the summer of 2008 as part of an extension of the project made possible by strong institutional support from the dean’s office, detailed below.

In the case of Center on Women and Public Policy, the lack of human resources has been a major stumbling block in developing the center’s weblog. The demands of student instruction and primary research on the work of the center’s primary faculty have largely precluded work on this collaborative project due to the lack of the time needed to develop the blog’s identity and thematic content areas as well as the lack of permanent support staff to coordinate the center’s blogging efforts. These tensions have resulted in complications and misunderstandings in largely e-mail-based interpersonal communication and the almost complete breakdown in collaboration on the project. My experiences in attempting to work with CWPP reflect Bourdieu’s theoretical framework concerning the concept of the field—the values inherent to the academic pursuits of faculty cannot be easily aligned with the blogosphere in the absence of support
personnel whose job descriptions are more malleable and can therefore be adapted to take advantage of new modes of external communication. The successes achieved in collaboration with CDC and CSTPP, each of which have been able to devote substantial human resources to external communication and program coordination, demonstrate the importance of staff resources in beginning a robust new media strategy.

On a more positive note, however, an agreement has been arrived at with the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance to bring the “Smart Politics” blog into closer alignment with the other Humphrey blogs established as part of this project. This partnership will be commenced during the extended phase of the project in the summer of 2008 and will include: redesigning the CSPG blog, tightening its integration with the other blogs, and pooling resources to help promote all of the blogs to the news media, the blogosphere, and the general public. Additionally, preliminary plans have been made with the Institute’s State and Local Policy Program to develop a blog focused on issues of local concern over the summer of 2008 and other centers and areas will be brought on board with the project as well. A timeline detailing the blogs’ launch dates, URLs, and designs can be found in Appendix B.

**Securing institutional support: turning the bottom-up upside-down**

As buzz about the blogging initiative began to spread within the Institute, I was invited by Humphrey Institute Dean J. Brian Atwood to present on the project’s goals, progress, and future to the Institute’s advisory council, which comprises external community leaders and stakeholders. Presenting the project to this audience proved to be challenging, as its older and less technically-inclined membership required the very
deliberate explication of what a blog is, what the blogosphere represents, and how new media interact with traditional media, in addition to the details of the project’s main thrust of inserting the Humphrey Institute into that wider conversation. The presentation was, however, well received by the advisory council and I was invited back again to present later in the year to showcase the “Institute Insider” blog (launched January 2008) and “Policy Catalyst” (launched March 2008).

During this phase of the initiative, in which closer attention has been paid to establishing the project as a central feature of the Humphrey’s overall outreach rather than focusing on bringing new individual blogs online, I have made efforts to connect my work to the wider University community. As a participant in the Office of Service and Continuous Improvement’s Quality Fair, I had the opportunity to share the knowledge I had accrued during the course of the project with members of other departments and offices at the University. This exposure served to increase the visibility of the Humphrey blogging initiative and put me in personal contact with individuals interested in new media from various colleges, disciplines, and work roles within the University.

Simultaneously, I have been working with the system administrator for UThink to lobby the libraries for greater technological capital and personnel support for the blogging platform, so as to strengthen the system overall and to advance the interests of the Humphrey blogging initiative. Slow-downs and glitches in the UThink system began to interfere with the productivity of my collaborators, frustrating their outreach efforts. Due to the increased institutional reliance of the Humphrey Institute on the UThink system (along with the continuing extensive use of the system by the University’s Political...
Science department, the School of Public Health, the School of Continuing Education, and other departments), UThink supporters have been able to more effectively push for upgrades to the system. Now that departmental reliance on the system has reached critical mass and could threaten to overwhelm the existing technological capacity of the UThink servers and the human resources devoted to managing them, plans are underway to upgrade UThink to version 4 of Movable Type and to provide faster and more robust web servers for the system. I have suggested that these upgrades be planned for the Summer of 2008, and I have offered my assistance in upgrading, coordinating, and testing the new system.

The increasing importance of the blogging initiative and the UThink system for the Humphrey Institute has prompted Dean Atwood to offer me limited-term employment through the summer of 2008. As the original funding from OSCI’s Service and Process Improvement Fund will run out at the end of the academic year, this support of the project from the Dean’s office will be essential in solidifying its successes, extending its scope to the remaining Humphrey research centers, finishing blogs that have been delayed, and further promoting all of the blogs within the blogosphere, with politically engaged and elite publics, with the traditional media, and with the public at large. Future plans for the project will be discussed in greater depth in the conclusion of this paper.

**Evaluation: Initial impact of using blogs at the Humphrey Institute**

To assess the impact of the blogging initiative at the Institute, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed (for a more thorough explication of the
methodology of the project and its evaluation, see Appendix C). The qualitative portion of the evaluation includes structured interviews with key collaborators on the project from the research centers and the communications office reflecting on the process of building the weblogs and considering the effects the weblogs have had on their day-to-day operations, how they see their units’ goals and vision being shaped and carried forward by the weblogs, and how they plan on using “Web 2.0” technologies in the future. Due to the rolling nature of the project, in which the weblogs were brought online one after the other, interviews were limited to the two centers—Center for Democracy and Citizenship and Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy—and the Humphrey Institute’s central communications office, whose blogs have been online long enough to have provided the collaborators with a good sense of how the blogs have impacted their outreach work. The quantitative portion of the evaluation will examine the preliminary web-tracking statistics available for the weblogs.

Qualitative Evaluation

During structured interviews conducted in April and May, both vision-oriented center leaders and operations-oriented support staff reflected on the collaborative process in which they participated to build their weblogs. The interview questions were tailored to address these different roles, but the questions were analogous across roles to allow aggregating responses along topical axes (see Appendix D for a schedule of interviews and Appendix E for interview questions). Each of the topics will be considered in turn, so as to best compare and contrast the responses of the interviewees.
Impacts on outreach work

Since the original aim of the project was to grow the capacity of the research centers in terms of their external outreach efforts, I was particularly interested in learning how the introduction of the center weblogs impacted communications and the shaping of the centers’ overall identities. Overall, the collaborators found the weblogs to be important tools that have helped to organize their centers’ efforts by providing a single, accessible platform for their content.

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship, which was the first center to launch a weblog under the umbrella of the Humphrey blogging initiative, has positioned their blog at the center of their overall communications strategy. “The ‘By the People’ blog has really become the core communication tool that we use for the center for all of our different audiences that we want to communicate with,” said the CDC’s program manager. Not only has the blog become the primary platform by which they communicate the work they are doing, it has also altered the form that content takes and has helped to strengthen connections with their audience. “It has definitely changed how we communicate, because we are putting out these shorter pieces and doing more so frequently whereas in the past if we tried to put something new on our website it was always longer and more theoretical, so we are trying to be more ‘newsy’… It ties people to us more because they receive more frequent communication.” The program manager also reported that the weblog has helped to more publicly expose aspects of the centers’ work that might otherwise go unnoticed: “Because the center does work that is both practical and philosophical, what the blog has done for us is allow us to be much
more public about the practical work that we do… It has definitely changed how we frame some of our programmatic work, because we are starting to think about events and projects in terms of how they will be communicated—even before they happen—and that is a shift” (E. Eschenbacher, structured interview, April 29, 2008).

The practical day-to-day work of operations staff has been aligned with the new weblog platform to best utilize the medium as a communications tool. The CDC’s communications and partner coordinator, a new hire brought on shortly before the blog was launched, reported that previous to the centers’ involvement in the project, their externally hosted website (publicwork.org), their official Humphrey Institute website, and their e-mail listserv had not been regularly maintained: “We had a couple of online outreach methods, but we were not using them very effectively. The blog has been great because sometimes it’s nice to start with a clean slate. We have invested a significant amount time and energy to develop the blog as a primary electronic communications tool. As someone who is supposed to be communicating with our different partners and helping them feel connected, it has been a useful tool.” While the blog has not replaced e-mail, it has become a means by which the duplication of efforts has been minimized. “I might send an e-mail to someone and say ‘Check this out on our blog.’ It’s packaged in a way that is attractive and accessible. While people are on the blog looking at something I may have sent to them directly, they may see something else that catches their eye that might be useful to them” (E. Tveit, structured interview, May 2, 2008).

In the experience of the Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy, their weblog, “Policy Catalyst” has provided a means with which to coordinate and combine the
efforts of various elements of the center on one project. “By giving various participants in the center—both faculty and staff—the opportunity to participate in the same communications outlet, it provides a way of counteracting the centripetal forces that sometimes busy people experience. It’s a convenient way of getting different viewpoints and get different parts of the center as thinking of themselves as parts of the [whole] center,” said the CSTPP’s director. The concurrent redesign of the center’s overall visual identity and an institute-wide focus on envisioning the future of public affairs were complemented by the introduction of the weblog as a concrete way to begin the practical implementation of ongoing abstract considerations of center identity and purpose: “Trying to bring together the use of technology with the visual and strategic planning we were doing was a lot to do at once, but trying to see the pieces as a whole was consistent with the systems approach. It reminded us of the multiple ways in which we could establish our identity, both visually and in our communication.” The blog has constituted a tangible “small victory” in “making progress on our goals in being more active and communicating our activity level and making new audiences and new partners” (S. Kelley, structured interview, May 9, 2008).

From the viewpoint of the operations staff of CSTPP, participation in the Humphrey blogging initiative helped define a focus for their overall outreach efforts. “Within our center, everybody needs to touch everything, but often when we bring outside people in, it makes it easier to progress with a project. Participating in the project made my workload more efficient and quicker,” said the center’s outreach coordinator (S. Ginis, structured interview, May 9, 2008). As in the case of CDC, the particularities of the weblog medium have allowed CSTPP’s outreach coordinator to more easily
conceptualize how to package and tailor information about the center’s initiatives and programs for external audiences.

**Generating buy-in among center participants**

As alluded to by the CSTPP’s director, elevating the weblog as the main focus of outreach work has helped to bring together potentially disparate areas of research within the center on one centralized project. Getting other staff and faculty on board with using the technology has, however, been challenging for both of the centers. “There are a few members of our staff who have not been as exposed as much to the technology who have been more resistant to posting,” said the CSTPP’s outreach coordinator. Only a few faculty have fully embraced the medium as of yet: “Our area chair has really bought into the blog—I think it took her some time—but it has also been a good tool. Most of our faculty are conscious of the work they are doing in promoting their own work—many of our grants have outreach as a component. It dawned on our area chair that feeding this information—having me write about their work in a non-academic way—was a wonderful way to promote their work. So as soon as she realized that, it was like ‘Go time, blog!’” The outreach coordinator pointed out that much of the blog’s content has been repackaged through her own efforts and that there is very little direct posting to the blog being done by the faculty. (Ginis)

The CDC’s experience has been somewhat analogous—the operations staff member has been doing the majority of posting to the blog and makes posts on behalf of the center’s director who, while very comfortable with public writing, is not eager to learn yet another new technology., as he comes from an older generation not as well acquainted
with the Internet. “He’s not necessarily comfortable with the technology side, but he doesn’t need to be,” said CDC’s communications and partner coordinator. The issue has been sidestepped by a feature of the Movable Type publishing platform—called “power editing”—which allows changing the authorship of posts after they have been saved to the system. This allows posts to appear to the public as if they have been made directly by one user, while in actuality they have been made by another user in the system using content written by its actual author. Other staff and faculty within the center have become regular consumers of the blog, but have not yet seen how they can make a worthwhile contribution: “We have some people who are reading it, but are not necessarily at the point where they are thinking ‘Oh, I could post this kind of content to the blog.’ We have at least one person who is intimidated by the technology and the thought of having to write content for it. I think in her case, it may seem like just another to-do list item” (Tveit).

One strategy employed to generate excitement about the blog within the center has been to get her fellow staff members and faculty involved in promoting the blog to program partners and the general public. “We created postcards—I think it’s helpful to give those to other staff members to have them pass them out at events… It’s this idea of creating a culture where we are all promoting the blog and contributing to the blog, so the more some of our core staff can make that process more visible brings us closer to the day where we are all posting something every week” (Tveit). CSTPP has also employed a similar promotion strategy, mailing postcards and passing them out at events (these promotional items can be seen in Appendix F).
For CSTPP, the outreach coordinator says that the issue for their faculty is not the technology—they are, after all, scientists—but rather a lack of time and external rewards to provide motivation to blog. “A lot of faculty members feel pressured to focus on what adds to tenure, and unless a blog can be seen as adding to that, it won’t be a focus, especially when they are crunched for time and are already doing a lot of writing” (Ginis).

**Building bridges within the Humphrey Institute, within policy communities, and with the public**

As most of the content of the research center blogs is geared towards external audiences, they have not drawn a large internal audience from the Institute or strengthened direct collaboration across centers, according to vision- and operations-oriented staff within the centers. That is, while the blogs have supplemented and extended the centers’ individual outreach efforts, they have not had a significant effect on reducing the “siloing” effect inherent in having multiple centers and areas dealing with disparate policy focuses under the larger umbrella of a school of public affairs. The director of the CSTPP, however, views the aggregated blog content as a boon for the Humphrey Institute as a whole in exposing the work going on at the college to the general public, work which would otherwise generally go unseen: “Doing the blogging doesn’t necessarily draw in people from other centers, but what struck me when I saw the collective blog [the Humphrey blog digest] was the impression that we will give to external audiences about the cool stuff happening at the Humphrey and how much of it there is, but also that there are all these disparate elements that are all operating under the heading of public policy for the common good” (Kelley).
In addition to the inclusion of content from all of the blogs in the Humphrey blog digest, the centers have also included links to the other center blogs in the “blogrolls” on the sidebars of their blogs to help cross-promote the other blogs to their own particular audiences. Plans for having greater cross-posting and cross-linking of content across the blogs are being developed by an cross-institution working group of bloggers from the individual centers and other offices, intending to leverage the audience of each blog to grow readership among the others. (Tveit; Ostermeier) The working group itself will meet regularly to provide its members with collaborative technical support related to the UThink system, generate ideas for sharing resources, and strategize to better publicize the blogs to the media and the general public.

The transformation of the long-running internal Humphrey newsletter, the “Institute Insider,” into a weblog has had a more immediate impact in building stronger connections within the organization, according to the communications’ staff member tasked with maintaining the newsletter/blog. Primarily by including news clippings where faculty, staff, and students are quoted in the media, the communications staff feels the newsletter/blog has created a greater sense of community involvement. “I try to pick different people every week, and if there’s a student, I make sure to put the student in, so it’s not just faculty and staff, but students and alums as well… I know from our statistics that the news items are of interest.” The “Quickpost” feature of the Movable Type system allows easy one-button bookmarking of websites for posting to a blog, enabling the communications staff member to keep a frequently updated log of all mentions of Humphrey Institute community members as they appear in the news media. Google News searches to which she is subscribed via RSS alert her to these mentions,
which she can now easily include as part of the “Institute Insider” on a daily basis. Previously, the staffer would assemble links and headlines in a large locally-stored electronic document that then needed to be formatted and proofread before it could be disseminated to the community via e-mail, which would only be done, time permitting, on an irregular basis (bi-weekly or monthly, at best). The result was broken links to subscription or membership sites such as the *Star Tribune* or the *New York Times* and news stories that were generally out-of-date by the time community members were exposed to them. The more easily employed blog-driven system has helped keep the news items fresh, timely, and relevant for the community, prompting members to send more story tips her way. “It encourages other people to let me know what is going on,” the staffer said. The presence of the other center- and student-produced blogs has helped the communications staff keep better tabs on what is going on at the Institute generally, allowing a fuller picture of the activities of the entire community to be disseminated within the Institute (J. Proulx, structured interview, 2008).

The Center for Democracy and Citizenship has been deliberate in its efforts to link to other blogs dealing with issues of civic engagement and public achievement. These other sites have already driven some traffic to the “By the People” blog, yet the full potential of networking opportunities has yet to be realized. The center has gained readers in places like Bosnia, Australia, and Japan, and have received some feedback from readers working in their policy area in these places and others around the globe. “There is this unknown public readership out there” (Tveit). Better understanding these audiences will provide avenues for expanding readership by tailoring content to the
interests of these readers and increasing the relevance of the research centers as comprehensive public policy resources for the public.

For CSTPP, the blog has allowed the center to keep up with its peers, but much work is left to be done to bring its web efforts closer to the cutting edge. “In my field, our website, compared to some of our peers, is not nearly as interactive. I think in the world of IT and science a lot of what we are doing, if we weren’t doing it, it would be bad,” said the center’s outreach coordinator. In order to fulfill the director’s mission of pursuing “active public outreach,” which engages people in the work of the center rather than simply getting the word out about the work the center is doing. For these reasons, CSTPP considers their blog to be only a first step in connecting with their wider policy community and the public, and it plans to deploy other “Web 2.0” technologies such as wikis in the near future (Ginis, Kelley).

**Quantitative Evaluation**

By the very nature of web-based outreach work, numbers are easy to come by. For the Humphrey blogging initiative, we have used Google’s Analytics software to track hits to the weblogs and have used the company’s Feedburner service to track the number of readers who have subscribed to the weblogs via RSS. These services provide concrete metrics for measuring the audience reach of the weblogs and can be used to help tailor content to appeal to these audiences; for instance, posted items that generate greater readership can be used as guides for producing similar content in the future that may also draw in more readers. As the centers continue to promote their blogs, the Google Analytics tools can be used as resources for continual and ongoing evaluation.
Center for Democracy and Citizenship’s “By the People”

Being the first weblog to be created under the umbrella of the Humphrey blogging initiative, “By the People” has the longest history of web statistics, providing a good sense of how the centers’ readership has grown over the months. Over the entire history of the site, “By the People” has drawn an average of 22.65 visitors per day, with numerous spikes in traffic when CDC staffers have sent out e-mails promoting the blog and its content to their previously established constituencies, when the blog had been linked on popular Internet sites such as MetaFilter, or when other bloggers working in civic engagement, public work, or public achievement have sent their readers on to the CDC blog. As of mid-May 2008, “By the People” had 43 RSS subscribers.

The geographic reach of the CDC’s blog has been impressive. Visitors from all over the United States as well as Europe, South Asia, and Australia have read the blog. The blog’s primary readership, however, is concentrated within Minnesota, particularly within the Twin Cities metropolitan area, with the overwhelming majority of visits coming from this geographic region.
Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy’s “Policy Catalyst”

“Policy Catalyst,” launched at the end of March 2008, has had less time to develop its audience, which is reflected in its metrics. The site has garnered only about 8 visits per day on average. As of mid-May 2008, “Policy Catalyst” had 8 RSS subscribers.
Similarly, the CSTPP blog has had limited reach internationally, generating only a handful of visits from outside of the United States. Again, the greatest amount of visits have come from the Twin Cities area.

HHH Communication’s “Institute Insider”

Having its origins as a long-running weekly e-mail newsletter, the “Institute Insider” blog continues to garner an internal audience that visits the site on a weekly basis. This can be seen in the regular traffic spikes which occur on Mondays when a digest of the postings from the past week is sent out to the Humphrey community:
Still, the blog has regularly received almost 25 visits per day since its launch and as of mid-May 2008, had 18 RSS subscribers. As the “Institute Insider” continues to serve as a central tool for internal communication at the organization, efforts will be made to increase readership during the week. Due to the large amount of internal e-mail communication that occurs at the Institute—many community members often complain about the massive amounts information they receive on a daily—the weekly digests will likely remain the primary means by which individuals stay acquainted with what is going on at the Institute. For many members of the organization, there is little pressing need to keep up with community news on a daily basis, and the weekly e-mail is a convenient and minimally taxing way for individuals to keep themselves apprised of upcoming events and community news.

Overall, the audiences of the blogs constitute a good start, particularly in the case of “By the People,” but there is much room for growth. Additionally, the blogs have largely failed to garner comments and participation from their readers, which has been a disappointment for the administrators of the blogs. The centers and Humphrey communications have begun to formulate plans by which to increase participation by the public, but at this point, the Humphrey blogging initiative has not generated the kind of
Conclusion: Looking ahead to greater integration and visibility

The research centers have expressed a desire to increase the interactivity of their weblogs and to have more of the staff and faculty within their centers directly involved in producing content for the sites (Eschenbacher; Ginis; Kelley; Tveit). To help facilitate this and to increase the visibility and impact of the blogs generally, one future goal is to increase readership for the blogs. By drawing in more readers, the likelihood of garnering more comments on the sites increases, which will in turn impart to the more skeptical or hesitant members of the centers that the blogs are gaining in influence within the blogosphere. This greater visibility and interactivity can then be used to leverage greater buy-in from center faculty and staff by giving greater weight to the argument that producing content for the site would be a worthwhile investment of their time and effort.

To increase readership, direct outreach efforts to the vibrant Minnesota political blogosphere as well as the traditional media will be made during the Summer of 2008 to help drive traffic to the site. By having other more established bloggers link to the Humphrey blogs, we will be able to bring more eyes to the blogs than has been possible so far using more traditional promotion methods, such as word-of-mouth, sending notices by e-mail listserv, and printing the sites’ web addresses on promotional materials produced for the centers (as seen in Appendix F). Additionally, greater efforts
will be made to take advantage of the blogs’ individual audiences to draw in readers to the other blogs.

Another step yet to be accomplished is the full integration of the content from the various websites with the more static, official Humphrey Institute website. Plans for this integration includes pulling in headlines from the research center blogs and news clippings from the “Institute Insider” blog to the front page of the Institute’s website. This will help reduce the duplication of efforts by the Humphrey communications office and keep these features of the website more up-to-date. Since the main Humphrey site is already a well-trafficked page, presenting visitors to that site with more frequently updated content driven by the UThink system will potentially draw them into the blogs and give these visitors a more comprehensive sense of the work being done at the Humphrey Institute and how they, as individual citizens, can benefit from and contribute to that work.

Ultimately, the worth of the overall Humphrey blog initiative will be found in the degree to which it increases the visibility, renown, and influence of the Institute within the new and traditional media and with the public at large and to what degree it can engage the average citizen in discussions about the direction of public policy and the priorities of public affairs work for the common good. While the blogs have indeed helped focus the efforts of the research centers in counteracting the “centripetal forces” found among their own faculty, fellows, staff, and students, much work must yet be done to solidify the “small victories” achieved during this initial start-up year to help do our part as an
institution of both higher learning and public policy to build the “Great Community” envisioned by John Dewey.

The groundwork has been laid in terms of building capacity through the deployment of these technology-driven outreach platforms and skill-building among center staff, but the habits of faculty within the academic must still be brought in greater alignment with the blogging initiative to create a strong and lasting outreach program that fully draws on and amplifies the expertise, authority, and resources of the Humphrey Institute.

In the end, the ultimate vision of this project is to bring the Institute into direct conversation and collaboration not only with politically engaged and elite publics, but with the citizenry at large in collectively determining public policy priorities and considering the very nature of the common good itself. It constitutes no less than a re-imagining of the meaning of public affairs and the role of an institution of higher learning engaged in and leading the field. As publics and academics become more comfortable and familiar with new media that empower them to not only consume but to also produce, recirculate, and repurpose information, the walls of the ivory tower will become ever more porous as these groups come into more frequent and more intimate intellectual contact. That the Humphrey Institute has taken the lead in transforming itself into an organization better-suited to survive and thrive in this new media environment stands as a testament to its commitment the multiple publics and communities it serves, and to the common good of all.
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Appendices

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Appendix A: Initial grant proposal (submitted March 2007 to OSCI)

**Project Title:** Emphasizing the “Public” in Public Affairs:
A proposal to use UThink to revitalize and extend the Humphrey Institute’s online presence and identity

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**Project Summary:**

Faculty and students at the Humphrey Institute continually produce a great deal of research, but **much of this work goes unnoticed** by the wider community simply because it is not widely publicized. This project will make use of the University’s existing UThink blogging system to create dynamic, easy-to-update, interactive, and frequently refreshed webpages for offices and centers within the Humphrey Institute to **showcase this rich content**, with the ultimate goal of **improving the Institute’s public outreach**, which has been established as a top priority by Dean J. Brian Atwood.

The funding of **$12,125** will be used to support the following:

- A 10-hr/week appointment for the project lead, MPP candidate Graham Lampa, whose technological abilities have been acknowledged by the Humphrey student body in his election as technology chair of the Public Affairs Student Association
- A small technology investment (e.g. an academic license for Adobe Photoshop)

In-kind contributions from the Institute include two work hours per week from HHH Information Technology Manager William Bear to assist the project in a technical and administrative capacity as well as printing costs for workshop and training materials.

The project’s timeline will run throughout the entire 2007-2008 academic year, with the first semester being used primarily to design, implement, and produce weblogs for the centers and the second semester for training staff to use the UThink system and incorporate it into their own workflows. There is no need for funding in subsequent years, as the project’s output will be absorbed into the various research centers to be maintained by their respective staffs and supported by an inter-center working group comprised of the lead bloggers from each center.

*Note: When printing or copying, please output document in full color.*
Project Description

In this 21st century world, institutions of note are expected to have dynamic and effective web presences that provide up-to-date information about their accomplishments, current projects, and future initiatives. The Humphrey Institute’s current web presence (www.hhh.umn.edu) suits the interests of the organization in attracting prospective students and providing other interested parties with information about the Institute’s mission and organs, but it does not suit the interests of the Institute as a leading center for research in the Midwest and within its various policy fields. This project proposes to use the University’s existing UThink weblogging system to create easily-updated websites that, once established, will require little technical maintenance and will act as companions of and extensions to the Institute’s existing centralized website. The centers are already pursuing improvements in their web presences, but as staff members have acknowledged, there is a general lack of the skills necessary to create and maintain “best-in-class” websites that demonstrate professional design, modern structure, and fresh content. The Center for the Study of Politics and Governance already has its own weblog, Smart Politics (blog.lib.umn.edu/oster017/smartpolitics/), which serves as a good illustration of the sites that will be produced for the other centers.

Goals

• Provide an effective method for the Humphrey Institute to improve its contribution to the University’s inherent mission as a land-grant institution to reach out to the wider community
• Increase the visibility and notoriety of the Humphrey Institute as a respected center for policy research by emphasizing the “public” in public affairs
• Better organize the various centers’ findings, upcoming events, and media-focused publicity into a coherent and standard system that is tailored for each center’s individual needs and initiatives
• Create an institutional memory of past accomplishments that will automatically be generated via the UThink system and will be easily accessible and searchable

Stakeholders

• Research Centers – The following HHH centers have agreed to be project partners:
  o Center for Democracy and Citizenship
  o Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy
  o Center for Women and Public Policy
  o Public and Non-profit Leadership Center
  o Center for School Change

The centers have wanted to improve their web presences for some time but have lacked the necessary resources and skill sets to do so. CDC Programs Manager Elaine Eschenbacher, for one, is excited at the prospect of using a weblog as a frequently updated complement to the center’s static webpages. The remaining centers are currently being approached and are expected to be on board by May.

• Graduate Programs Office – The Humphrey GPO has agreed to participate in a pilot program for the larger project next year. Graham Lampa is currently working with Career Services Advisor Martha Krohn and Administrative Specialist Jane Vega
to convert the current listserv-based dissemination of internship/job opportunities to use the UThink system. The new system will be launched soon alleviating “e-mail fatigue” and providing students a **better organized and more effective resource** for finding suitable positions. This will also allow **greater connection with alumni** by providing them access to these opportunities that was previously not feasible.

- **Faculty and staff** – The Humphrey Institute’s exceptional faculty and staff will have expanded opportunities to take their continuing research and publicize it more widely, to their own **professional benefit** and to the benefit of the institution overall.

- **Students** – In addition to the academic and professional benefits of having their own research publicized, by engaging in outreach and media relations, students will learn **marketable skills** that are essential in today’s increasingly media-driven world and critical to being a well-rounded graduate of a public affairs institution.

### Project Evaluation

Timelines and design criteria for the production of individual center weblogs will be developed in collaboration with the various research centers. As each weblog will be tailored to the needs of its center, the center’s administrative staff will be the prime evaluators of the product’s effectiveness. **Deliverables from this project** are, then:

1. Well-functioning weblogs that suit the publicity needs of the various centers
2. Trained staff capable of maintaining their weblogs in the long-term
3. Establishment of a working group comprised of the centers’ lead bloggers

### Sustainability, Dissemination, and Cost-effectiveness

Upon the project’s completion, the staff in the centers will have been trained extensively in producing rich media content for their weblogs (pictures, video, audio, etc.), so as to continue the project as an integrated part of the centers’ missions in the years to come.

Essentially, the SPIF-funded project year will “ramp up” the centers’ web presences by means of Graham Lamp’s highly skilled web development (XHTML/CSS programming, Movable Type templating) and media production work (graphics, photo and video editing, etc.); after that, the websites will be updated by the centers’ staffs. This maintenance will be possible, even for those with little-to-no web development skills, due to the user-friendly nature of the UThink system, which is already used regularly by thousands of students, faculty, and staff at the University, and which has already received a $50,000 investment from the University, according to system manager Shane Nackerud. To further ensure long-term viability of the project, an inter-center working group of lead bloggers from each center will be established to provide a lasting resource and institutional body for continual training and re-training, technology troubleshooting, and further improvement of the project. This working group will also be available to advise other units within the University that are interested in undertaking similar projects.

The position funded by the SPIF grant will be attached to the Humphrey’s IT Department, Compstaff, under manager William Bear, whose staff currently does not have the required resources or time to undertake this project. A similarly skilled, non-student, outside contractor would likely cost a great deal more money than what this project is requesting to produce the same outputs. Therefore, the end result will not only be valuable to the Institute and the University as a whole but also quite cost-effective.
Humphrey-UThink Project summary

Rolling action plan/timeline

Fall 2007 to Spring 2008

Time allotment for RA position

Funding breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25% RA Salary and Fringe Benefits for Academic Year 2007-2008</td>
<td>$11,926</td>
<td>To conduct and coordinate all aspects of the project listed above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Photoshop (academic license)</td>
<td>$199</td>
<td>Necessary software tool for graphics/photos creation/manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total SPIF request</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,125</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-kind contributions

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donated center staff work hours</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Time employed by center staff in blog production, training, general content creation, maintenance, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2hr/week from IT Mgr. William Bear</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
<td>Estimate of donated time for technical and administrative assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training documentation publishing</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>Printing costs for manuals necessary to maintain project outcomes to be provided by Humphrey Institute and the centers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Blog details (launch dates, personnel, URLs, designs, themes)

An Affair to Remember
Public Affairs Student Association

Administrator: Dan Craigie
Launched: April 2007
Purpose: Provide a platform for the student association to communicate with the students

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/pasa/blog

Internship Opportunities
HHH Career Services

Administrator: Martha Krohn
Launched: July 2007
Purpose: Provide up-to-date and archived internship listings for Humphrey students

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/hhhgpo/internships/

username: hhhpostings
password: postings
Job Opportunities
HHH Career Services

Administrator: Martha Krohn
Launched: July 2007
Purpose: Provide up-to-date and archived job listings for Humphrey students

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/hhhgpo/jobs/

username: hhhpostings
password: postings

By the People
Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Management: Elaine Eschenbacher
Operations: Ellen Tveit
Launched: October 2007
Thematic areas: Civic engagement, public achievement, public work

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cdc/bytheprople/
Institute Insider
HHH Communications

Administrator: Jamie Proulx
Launched: January 2008
Purpose: Provide up-to-date and archived community news items and media clippings for the Humphrey community

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/hhhevent/insider

Policy Catalyst
Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy

Management: Steve Kelley
Operations: Sophia Ginis
Launched: March 2008
Thematic areas: Science and technology research and their intersections with public policy

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cstpp/policycatalyst
Humphrey blog digest
Humphrey blogging initiative

Administrator: Graham Lampa
Launched: March 2008
Purpose: Aggregates all Humphrey blogs in one centralized location

http://blog.hhh.umn.edu

School Change Exchange
Center for School Change

Management: Laura Bloomberg
Operations: Sheena Thao and Naima Bashir
Launched: April 2008
Thematic areas: Post-secondary enrollment options

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cschhh/exchange
Planned blog launches

Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center
Planned launch: Summer 2008
Operations: Kim Borton
Thematic areas: Resource center for regional nonprofits, promotion of PNLC initiatives and programs

State and Local Policy Program
Planned launch: Summer 2008
Thematic area: State and local transportation and urban planning
Appendix C: Methodology

The methodology of the project itself can best be described as “participant observation.” Through my direct, collaborative work with the research centers and other offices of the Humphrey Institute, I not only produced practical outputs in the form of the weblogs themselves, the increased technology and media skills of my individual partners, and the increased capacity of the research centers, but also continually reflected on my experiences in order to develop “best practices” for future weblog collaborations and the retooling of existing weblogs as well as for the development of this document. These observations were supplemented by the structured interviews I conducted with my key collaborators within the partnered research centers and other offices at the Institute.

For the paper, I conducted a literature review in communication and organizational theory to produce the theory- and practice-oriented portions of the document. These sections were further informed by Prof. Catherine Squires’ course entitled “Media Institutions and the Audience/the Public”, which I participated in during Spring semester, 2008 in the Journalism department of the University of Minnesota as well as the Humphrey Institute’s “Leadership and Management” course, in which I participated as a student of Prof. Jodi Sandfort during Fall semester, 2006 and as a teaching assistant for Prof. Sandfort during the Fall of 2007.

The quantitative portion of the evaluation section was driven by web usage statistics provided by Google Analytics and Feedburner, free services provided for webmasters. The software packages provide metrics on daily pageviews and visits, the geographic locations of visitors, and other useful descriptors of a sites’ audience.
Appendix D: Interviewees

Structured Interviews

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Elaine Eschenbacher, Program Manager (April 29, 2008)

Ellen Tveit, Communications and Partner Coordinator (May 2, 2008)

Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy

Steve Kelley, Director and Senior Fellow (May 9, 2008)

Sophia Ginis, Outreach Manager (May 2, 2008)

Humphrey Institute communications

Jamie Proulx, Assistant Director (May 6, 2008)

Informal discussions

Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center

Jodi Sandfort, Associate Professor (April 29, 2008)

Kim Borton, Associate Director (May 6, 2008)

Center for the Study of Politics and Governance

Eric Ostermeier, Research Associate (April 4, 2008)
Appendix E: Structured interview questions

Managerial/vision oriented

1. How has your participation in the Humphrey blogging initiative contributed to your department’s overall outreach efforts? In what ways has it contributed to shaping your identity as a center?
2. Has your participation in the project changed the way you think about pursuing your center’s goals?
3. In what ways has the project brought you in contact and collaboration with other units of the Humphrey Institute? With your policy community? With the public at large?
4. What has been the most rewarding aspect of the project for you or your center?
5. What has been the most challenging aspect of the project for you or your center?
6. With the wisdom of hindsight, what would you have changed about the collaborative process in which we engaged?

Outreach/practically oriented

1. In what ways has your participation in the project affected your personal work as a staff member of the center? What was the nature of your web-based outreach before joining the project?
2. To what extent do you feel the faculty, fellows, and other staff within your center have bought in to the idea of blogging? Have you encountered issues regarding your colleagues’ level of comfort vis-a-vis this new medium? Have those feelings changed over time?
3. In what ways has the project brought you in contact and collaboration with other units of the Humphrey Institute? With your policy community? With the public at large?
4. What has been the most rewarding aspect of the project for you or your center?
5. What has been the most challenging aspect of the project for you or your center?
6. With the wisdom of hindsight, what would you have changed about the collaborative process in which we engaged?

Communications

1. In what ways has your participation in the project affected your personal work as a staff member of the Institute? What was the nature of your internal communication before joining the project?
2. In what ways do you feel has the project contributed to the sense of community at the Institute?
3. What has been the most rewarding aspect of the project for you or your center?
4. What has been the most challenging aspect of the project for you or your center?
5. With the wisdom of hindsight, what would you have changed about the collaborative process in which we engaged?
Appendix F: Center-produced promotional items produced

Center for Democracy and Citizenship postcard (not to scale)

Front

Back

Emphasizing the “Public” in Public Affairs
Connecting science to policy

The Center’s mission is to improve people’s lives by improving the application of science and technology to solving public problems. We use three strategies:

- **Educate** students in effective ways to apply science and technology to policy problems
- **Explore** best practices for applying science and technology to solving public policy problems and for engaging citizens in science policy issues
- **Engage** in outreach to improve public understanding of science and the public’s ability to make decisions on issues that involve science and technology

We support efforts to strengthen science literacy in education and sponsor events that improve public understanding of science and technology policy.

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Partner with us

The Center for Science, Technology and Public Policy may be able to assist you or your organization.

If you need more information or research on issues at the intersection of science and technology with public policy, we can organize and conduct research projects with scientists in other colleges of the University of Minnesota that can blend cutting edge science and technology with policy savvy.

If you need to engage the public on science or technology issues, we can deliver our knowledge, experience and alliances with Humphrey Institute experts on sophisticated methods of public involvement and decision making.

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cstpp/policycatalyst

Contact:
Steve Kelley, Senior Fellow and Director
612-626-6629
kelle644@umn.edu

Contact email: cstpp@umn.edu