

# **USING A COURSE DIRECTOR'S *BLOG* TO ENHANCE LEARNING AND FOSTER PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS – INITIAL IMPRESSIONS AND SURVEY RESULTS**

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## **Introduction**

A pre-clinical medical school course is typically directed by one course director who coordinates the participation of dozens of faculty lecturers. Critics contend that this style of course organization lacks continuity and inhibits the development of relationships between faculty and students. In an effort to address these communication concerns we created and evaluated the use of an online *Course Director's Blog* in one five week second-year medical school course, Digestion and Nutrition.

## **Abstract**

A blog (or *web log*) is a web-based daily journal, typically by a single individual. This unique form of online communication tends to be topical, personal accounts and opinions presented by one "expert." There are now more than eight million blogs on the internet with the most popular ones focusing on current events, hobbies, politics, and social issues. At our institution a Course Director's Blog was created, consisting of a daily interpretation and synthesis of lectures, clarification of difficult concepts, and answers to frequently-asked questions. This blog was posted on the course's home page, as part of an existing online course website.

In a post-course survey students reported that the blog made course material easier to understand, helped them study for the exam, and addressed their course-related concerns. The answering of questions raised by other students was given the highest value. Overall value was positive in 92% of students and eighty-eight percent felt strongly that the blog should be used in other courses. Students' comments on this survey stated the blog not only helped their studies but also fostered a closer, more personalized relationship between them and the course director.

Based on this feedback, the Lab for Educational Technology at our institution will make blog technology and guidelines for use in medical education available to other courses. They will port data from these blogs to students' web portal, personal digital assistants and cell phones using standard RSS and XML protocols.