

**TITLE:** "Using Seminar Blogs to Enhance Student Participation and Learning in Public Health School Classes"

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**REFERENCE:** Goldman, R., Cohen, A., & Sheahan, F., (2008). Using Seminar Blogs to Enhance Student Participation and Learning in Public Health School Classes. American Journal of Public Health, 98(9), 1658-63.

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**PROBLEM**

Introductory classes at public health schools have a lecture format that don't reinforce best practices in teaching such as active learning in the form of collaboration, debates, problem-based learning and simulations. The authors suggest that "seminar blogs" can enrich the learning experience for these graduate school students. To do this they introduced seminar blogs into a course and reported their findings in this journal article.

**CONTEXT**

Number of Subjects	60 students
Number of Groups	1 class
Location	Harvard School of Public Health
Date of Study	2006 (date not specified)
Parameters of Study	Sixty students in an 8 week, public health course were divided into six blog groups. Students posted their assignments throughout the semester. Assignments composed of case studies and debate topics which students debated and provided commentary on each week. At the end of the course students were surveyed on the blogs impact on their learning.

**FINDINGS**

Total Response to Survey	83% (n=50)
Ease of Blog Use	85% easy or very easy
Did blog enrich learning?	50% yes, 78% of the non-native English speakers said yes
Easier to post a blog than speak in class?	60% yes, 80% of non-native English speaker said yes
Can apply blog to current or future work?	60% yes
Did personalities come across in the blog?	8% not at all 60% small amounts 32% quite a bit

Did you feel like a group member?	34% not at all 62% slightly 4% quite a bit
Did any dynamic develop?	40% no 50% slightly 10% yes

The findings show that the seminar blogs contribute to student learning which they say broadens a students learning outcome. The blogs were very successful in supporting non-native speaker and this that are visual learners. Students were able to receive feedback from TA's and their peers. It also provided self-direction and autonomy. The blog increased the ability to share views. Some students thought that others personalities were shown through the blog although many said that they didn't feel like they were apart of a group. The blog adds another dimension to facilitate learning.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

I think that seminar blogs are a very good idea in large lecture formatted courses. I recommend the following:

- My first recommendation is to have some sort of interactive blogging board in every large lecture hall. It is hard for students to participate in these formats and creating an avenue for them to do so will enrich their learning experience.
- My second recommendation is to modify the requirements for blogging. Although seminar blogs don't seem to foster a sense of being in a group the course format can be modified to do so. For example, the lecturer could provide a question in class, which the different groups discuss in postings and which they bring together in one coherent answer for grading.
- My third recommendation is to not only set group expectations for the seminar but also individual expectations which will encourage those that normally don't contribute their ideas in class an opportunity to do so.
- Lastly, I recommend they be used in other modes of teaching such as distance learning and video conferences where the learning experience involves very little interaction. This would create a blended learning experience for these individuals and ultimately add value to what they are learning.