Marketing LIS Education through Departmental (DLIS) Blog: A Proposal to Build Relationship with Public and Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the need of exclusive blog for Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) in a university to visualise the courses and their syllabi, to showcase the strength of the faculty, to disseminate the LIS research, and to create an online platform to interact with the department authorities, with embedding Web 2.0 tools into their respective blogs. Also, the paper describes the different strategies to develop and sustain a blog for DLIS in a university. Over all this concept of a blog is to create an interactive platform to publicise the LIS education and research to the existing and prospective LIS professionals in the world and particularly in India.

Keywords: Weblog, blog, DLIS, LIS education, LIS research, departmental blog

1. INTRODUCTION

Now-a-days, Library and Information Science (LIS) education is constantly evolving with information communication technologies (ICTs). As ICTs are more and more embedded in LIS education and research, LIS Departments must provide these technologies to their students/scholars with relevant and contemporary experiences, which prepare them for practical life after their course work. With the advent of ICTs, the LIS professionals have to learn how to do a lot with a little, in order to promote awareness of their programmes and services in their libraries due to shrinking budget. It is no surprise to see that LIS professionals are stepping up to the new Web 2.0 technologies and spreading their world online through blogs. Techno savvy librarians have already identified that the blog is one of the mediums to market library services to their users round the clock.

A blog is a short form of weblog or web log, which is a website where information is frequently updated and arranged in a reversed chronological order[1]. The information can be posted by a blog owner or a group of owners, or gleaned from other websites or sources. Starting a blog is not complicated and it does not require a programming language and also no need to pay money. Only thing is that one should have working knowledge of computer and fundamentals of internet and its usage.

1.1. LIS Education in India

In 105 years of LIS education in India, the first stone was laid by William Alanson Borden, through a training programme in Library Science under the patronage of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad II at Baroda in 1911. In 1915, Asa Don Dickinson, a disciple of Melvil Dewey, laid second stone through a three-month training programme at Punjab University, Lahore (now in Pakistan)[2]. In 1920, a school was set up by Andhra Desa Library Association to deliver lectures on various topics like history, literature and culture of Andhra Pradesh besides the Library movement. In 1929, Madras Library Association (MALA) started a School of Library Science and introduced a 3 months training course for college and school librarians under the auspicious directorship of Prof. Shiyali Ramamrutha Ranganathan, who is the father of Library Science in India. In 1931, the school was taken over by the University of Madras and in July 1938 the certificate course was replaced by one-year full-time postgraduate course. In 1935, Bengal Library Association started a training course, later this coursed upgraded to a certificate course in 1937. The Banaras Hindu University, the Bombay University, the University of Calcutta, and the University of Delhi started one-year postgraduate diploma course in Library science in 1941, 1943, 1945, and 1947 respectively[3]. After independence, lots of societies, associations, schools, colleges, universities and institutes started LIS courses.

After 1950, a large number of departments were established in universities to offer different levels of LIS courses, like Diploma in Library Science, BLISc, MLISc, two-year integrated MLISc, MPhil and PhD programme. There are two national institutes, namely, the Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC),

Bangalore and National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), formerly Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC), New Delhi that are offering two year LIS programmes. In addition to this, a number of distance education programmes in LIS are being offered by national and state level open universities in India[4].

Major stakeholders in LIS education and research in India are universities. According to a recent study in 2014[5], the following are the details of Library and Information Science courses offered by various universities under University Grants Commission (UGC) in India.

- 181 universities are offering library science courses
- 131 are offering BLISc course (one year)
- 136 are offering MLISc course (one year)
- 41 (out of 136) are offering two-year integrated MLISc course
- 21 are offering MPhil degree
- 93 university departments are offering PhD degree.

2. NEED OF CREATING BLOG

At present, the webpages of Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) are embedded with their respective schools on the university websites. But, those webpages are providing little information about courses, faculty, research and activities or obsolescent information due to different reasons like space limits, permission from higher authorities, technical problems, etc. There are lots of differences in LIS courses and their syllabus, duration of courses, announcements of programmes, etc., among universities.They offer very little information about the department and its research. Also there is a question mark about the standard procedure, format, rules and regulations, etc., to update the departmental information from time to time in the university websites.

The exclusive blog created for the department, by the department, will fill these gaps and this type of blog will gear up to bring a change in LIS education and research. These blogs help the existing professionals to know the updated scenario of the LIS education and these are useful to prospective professionals to pursue their degrees, and also create interest in public about LIS profession.

3. OBJECTIVES OF CREATING BLOG

The main objectives to create a blog for DLIS are to:

(a) Publicise the history and courses offered by the Departments
(b) Disclose the research topics of PhD and MPhil which were awarded and registered from time to time
(c) Visualise the contributions, research and strength of the faculty

(d) Engage the scholars/students to learn Lib 2.0 technologies
(e) Connect LIS alumni with the new students
(f) Build an active online platform among LIS professionals and prospective professionals.

4. ADVANTAGES OF DEPARTMENTAL BLOG

Following are some advantages of departmental blog:

- It is very easy to host blog, that also without any financial compliance for domain, space, use, and maintenance.
- It is very easy to disseminate information about department to the world without any time delay
- It helps to avoid the duplication of research in LIS when departments update their research topics in the blog from time to time
- It helps to control the syllabus anomalies across the universities
- All the prospective students get up to date information easily to pursue new courses
- It is easy to store (upload) and get retrospective information about department activities, events, programmes, research, etc., whenever they require like a logbook
- Through the alumni (old students association) meets and contacts, departments can explore new avenues like jobs, industry demand about course, etc.
- It is easy to showcase department track record to others,especially, at the time of NAAC visits.
- It is useful to know the achievements and activities of DLIS of other universities, which will encourage and motivate others to do the same.
- This type of blog helps to maintain a standardisation in education and research in LIS programmes

5. CHALLENGES OF DEPARTMENTAL BLOG

Some of the challenges to host a blog for DLIS are:

(a) Primary challenge is the strong determination required from the faculty to host a blog for their department.
(b) The faculty should be acquainted with the Web 2.0 technologies to teach and train the students
(c) The department should take permission from the university authorities to disclose the department information to the public, if any.
(d) It requires a computer with good configuration and an internet connection.

4. DISADVANTAGES OF DEPARTMENTAL BLOG

One major disadvantage is that the website URL will have a suffix with the blog sponsor's name, in addition

to our chosen name for blog. For example www.dlisou.wordpress.com, or www.dlissvu.blogger.com, etc.

5. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To initiate a blog for DLIS, the following are the different strategies to maintain and sustain a blog for life time.

5.1 Hardware and Software Requirements

One computer with office suite installation (good configuration), internet connection.

5.2 Committee

The DLIS should constitute a committee to manage the blog and its content from time to time. This should be selected by the whole Department and the committee may consist of:

- Chairman of the committee may be the Head of the Department by default. (Blog owner)
- A Vice-chairman of the committee may be one of the faculty members nominated by Chairman (one year/two years term)
- Two bloggers: one from Scholars community and the other from students community (one year/two years term) who are techno savvy.

5.3 Content of the Blog

The committee should take care of the blog content like history of the department, courses, faculty, PhD and MPhil research, activities, events, photographs, etc., since the inception of the department. The committee should decide about the static and dynamic content on the blog. The committee should make a plan for content collection, sources of content, hosting content, updating blog, etc., before and after initiating a blog for department, as, starting a work is very easy but sustaining it is very difficult.

5.4 Structure of Blog

A blog is nothing but a web site. It consists of dynamic and static web pages (and also links to other interlinked pages). While creating an interface of blog, the committee should do the following:

5.4.1 Blog Name

The name of the blog or domain name should be DLIS followed by university name to recognise easily, for e.g. DLIS-SVU, means Department of Library and Information Science, SV University. It will automatically be followed by the blog sponsor's name, e.g. www.dlissvu.wordpress.com. This is tentative strategy to choose blog name, however, it may change according to the availability or choice.

5.4.2 Blog Sponsor/blog Platform

There are many blog sponsors or blog sites available online free of cost. The committee should choose the appropriate one according to their feasibility. The following are the some top blogging toolkits to choose from to create a blog for department:

(a) www.wordpress.com
(b) www.blogger.com
(c) www.tumblr.com
(d) www.livejournal.com
(e) www.weebly.com

5.4.3 Static Pages on Blog

These static pages should be kept under different Tabs, which can be edited whenever required. The committee should take care that the content should be from the inception of the department. The following are some important tabs:

(i) *About:* About the Department
(ii) *Courses:* Courses offered by the department and admission procedure of those courses
(iii) Faculty: About Faculty with full details like contributions, research, specialisations, etc., in two categories like: (1) Present faculty and (2) Previous faculty
(iv) Research (since the inception of Department)
    (a) Projects completed and ongoing with details
    (b) PhD topics completed and ongoing with details
    (c) MPhil topics completed and ongoing with details
    (d) Titles of dissertations of MLISc students
(v) Alumni—Under this tab, the committee should track the passed out professionals and their job details, communication details, etc. from time to time. It requires continuous updating and the committee should maintain relations with alumni members through conducting alumni meets, get-to-gathers, etc., on timely basis.
(vi) Programmes: Memories and achievements with photographs either by faculty or students/scholars
(vii) Useful links to LIS resources

5.4.4 Dynamic Page

This dynamic page gives the day to day activities of the department and also will be arranged in reverse chronological order by the blog site automatically. Only thing required is that the bloggers update their activities with photos frequently or whenever any activity happens in their departments like seminars, lectures, PhD viva-voce, workshops, any fest details, etc.

5.4.5 Social Networking Tools

The blog should be tagged with all the possible social networking tools like Facebook, RSS feeds, Linkedin, Twitter, etc.

5.4.6 Interactive Mechanism

The committee or blog owner should allow the viewers to leave their feedback, queries, suggestions

regarding courses and activities of the department. The blog owner has to keep entire control on this mechanism as to what to disclose or not disclose, etc. Because this is very important to the phenomena of interaction with existing and prospective professionals, and also with the public.

5.5 Support from Faculty

The basic need to create Department blog requires a proper dedication and determination from the Department faculty. All the faculty members should co-ordinate and co-operate with each other to show case their own department strength to the world. This will give credibility to the Department and also to their faculty and students. This, in turn, brings high impact on contributions of faculty, scholars and students of the department through the blog.

6. SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

Before starting a blog, the committee has to chalk out some guidelines with the following information:

(a) Departmental committee has to keep ready the whole content which they want to post on blog under different tabs the first time.

(b) Frequency of further updates and content which has to be posted on blog at regular intervals

(c) Before posting the content it requires to be reviewed, because it shows the strength of department

(d) Selection of blogging website and themes are playing a key role to attract the users and to look world class.

(d) It is always better to keep an instruction manual that documents who should do what and when to post, committee meetings durations, etc.

(e) The successors must be trained by the predecessors; otherwise its continuation will be affected.

Some screen shots of library blogs for reference

Figures 1-5 are some of the screen shots of library blogs, and other LIS-related blogs for reference[6,7].

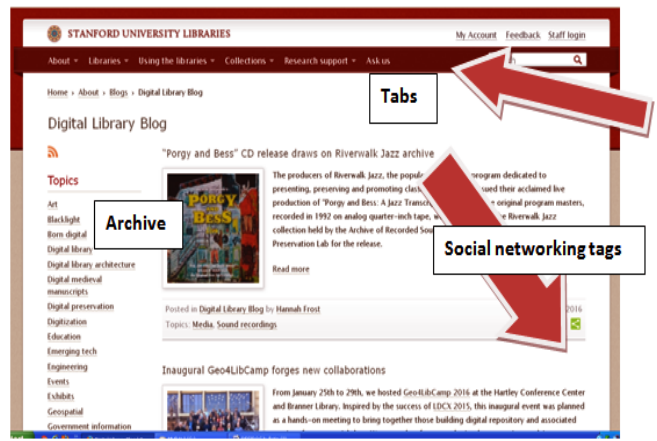Figure 1. Screenshot of Wellcome Library.

Figure 2. Screenshot of Digital Library Blog of Standord Unversity Libraries.

Figure 3. Screenshot of Library Soup.

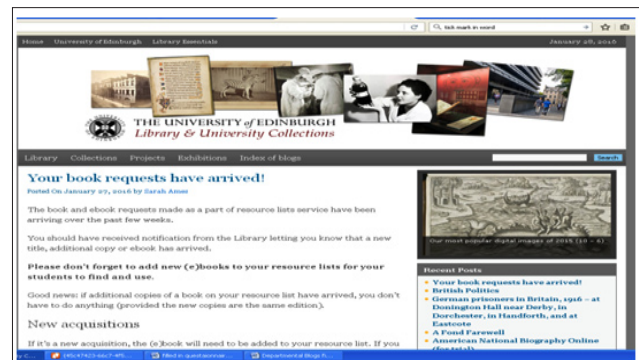**Figure 4. Screenshot of Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) Library.**

Figure 5. Screenshot of University of Edinburgh Library & Univesity Collection.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The LIS professionals always offer value-added services to their users at their working places after their course work. The department blog is started at the department level to provide value-added service to visualise the department's credibility to their existing and prospective professionals, and also to the public. This initiation requires proper commitment, determination and collective co-operation at department level. This type of initiatives will take LIS education and research to great heights and will make it reach world class level. For this all the LIS associations, faculty and LIS fraternity should provide their support and encouragement to the LIS schools/departments in India.

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