

The International  
**JOURNAL**  
*of*  
TECHNOLOGY,  
KNOWLEDGE  
& SOCIETY

Volume 5, Number 2

Incorporating New Technologies to Enhance 'Travel  
Learn' International Experience

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY  
<http://www.Technology-Journal.com>

First published in 2009 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd  
[www.CommonGroundPublishing.com](http://www.CommonGroundPublishing.com).

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ISSN: 1832-3669  
Publisher Site: <http://www.Technology-Journal.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY is peer-reviewed, supported by rigorous processes of criterion-referenced article ranking and qualitative commentary, ensuring that only intellectual work of the greatest substance and highest significance is published.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system  
<http://www.commongroundpublishing.com/software/>

# Incorporating New Technologies to Enhance 'Travel Learn' International Experience

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*Abstract: How new technologies such as blogs, websites, digital stories, digital travelogues, digital photography, video packages, and podcasts, help to enhance, focus and share the benefits of international experience for student participants and their audience. The interactive presentation offers sample assignments, course outlines, and demonstrations of student work from France, Italy, Ireland, Wales and England. Dr. Cathleen Londino has led more than 80 participants on Travel Learn in the past two years. Her next Travel Learn experience will be to China in Spring 2009. Travel Learn blogs, featuring student links can be accessed at [www.clondinouk.blogspot.com](http://www.clondinouk.blogspot.com)*

Keywords: Travel Learn, International, New Technologies, Technology, Blog, Podcast, Digital Stories, Video

## Introduction

**T**HE DEPARTMENT OF Media & Film at Kean University offers Travel Learn experience as part of its four B.A. Media & Film options in Broadcasting, International Broadcast Journalism, Multicultural Programming & Management, and Film. International experience and global education are becoming critical for careers in business, communication, and media. According to David B. Pabst,

Today's global companies face tremendous challenges integrating the diverse cultures prevalent in the modern workforce. As projects become increasingly global, project teams must deal with a new range of challenges from language barriers and time differences to religious diversity and differences in eating habits. A Project Manager faced with an international array of customers, suppliers, and team members needs to be aware of these cultural differences and take special care to avoid the potential risks and pitfalls associated with them. For many Project Managers, particularly for Americans *with little or no international experience, this can be a daunting challenge.* (p.24)

The Media & Film program supports the goal that every student should participate in international travel experience, but recognizes that, for a variety of reasons, not every student is able to participate. Therefore, six credits of coursework are offered as part of the major electives. Those courses and associated travel are conducted within the regular academic semester to maximize educational content, contact hours, trip preparation, and technology orientation. Students who do not have the opportunity to participate in the travel itself can still benefit from the international cultural experiences documented and shared by their peers. Those students, along with the friends and families of participating students, can follow the actual trip through student blogs which are regularly updated throughout the trip. Post-trip

meetings allow the opportunity for finishing and polishing projects that document and share the international experience through a student showcase. The following contains a partial list of identified technologies, useful definitions, and tips for integrating technology into a Travel Learn program.

## Technology and Travel

### *Trip Preparation*

In order to maximize the opportunities for students to participate in the travel learn experience, students select from courses that reflect various media skill levels and that directly address the goals of student learning for cultural awareness and comparative media assessment. In 2008, for example, the following courses were offered for a ten-day spring-break trip to Ireland, Wales, and London. Two courses focused on media and culture, comparative media, and film. The other courses were more specifically concerned with journalism and new technologies. All the courses required that students be familiar with and able to use new technologies, but some required advanced levels of skill. Significantly, some courses required specialized equipment that was supplied to the student by the program, or in many cases, students preferred to bring their own cameras, laptops, accessories, etc. The following course descriptions were provided by the teaching professors:

Course Description	Equipment	Associated Technology
<p><b>MED 4800: T1 Travel Learn: Media and the United Kingdom (3) credits</b>  <b>Dr. Cathleen Londino</b>                      The class will present an overview of media (particularly radio and television) in British culture, which will prepare students for sampling and appreciating British media while on tour in March. The focus of the course is the tour experience so assignments and meetings are designed to support the actual travel adventure. Students will be given all necessary information about the trip, including all logistics for travel.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared access to computer laptops</li> <li>• Digital still camera</li> </ul>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Digital still camera</li> </ul> <p>Optional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Internet access</li> <li>• Digital Storytelling</li> <li>• Audio/Video recording</li> <li>• YouTube</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• DVD</li> </ul>

<p><b>MED 4800:T2 International Media Journalism (3) credits Dr. Kristine Mirrer</b>          The class will introduce students to newsgathering assignments for audio, video, podcast, blog, and publication formats. Dublin, Wales, and London and the travel experience will serve as inspiration, background, and context for the stories the student media journalists create. Assignments and meetings will support the travelers so that they may get the most from the course and the trip.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital still and video cameras with accessories</li> <li>• Audio recorders</li> <li>• Computer access</li> </ul>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Digital still camera</li> </ul> <p>Optional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Internet access</li> <li>• Digital Storytelling</li> <li>• Audio/Video recording</li> <li>• YouTube</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• DVD</li> </ul>
<p><b>MED 4800: T3 Travel Learn: Travel and New Technology (3) credits Dr. Scott McHugh</b>          The class will present an overview of new media technologies (blogs, podcasts, and digital stories). Participants will learn to effectively use audio, video, and computer production technologies with their travel adventures serving as a basis for assignments. The department will provide all necessary production equipment including Apple computers, digital video and still cameras, and microphones. Participants may bring their own equipment. Class is expected to meet three times before travel and twice after, subject to need/desire for additional contact. The class assumes no previous knowledge but welcomes participants of all technical levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital still camera</li> <li>• Video camera with accessories</li> <li>• Audio recorders and accessories</li> <li>• Computer access</li> </ul>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Internet access</li> <li>• Digital Storytelling</li> <li>• Audio/Video recording</li> <li>• YouTube</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• Video editing software</li> </ul>

<p><b>FILM 4800:T1 British Film (3) credits</b>  <b>Professor Brian Oakes</b>                  This class will expose students to an overview of British Cinema, including significant directors, actors, studios, and films from the late 1800's to the present. Students will study aspects of British cinema and present their findings to the class. British film and mass media will be observed during the trip and observations will be recorded in the form of blogs, papers, and video diaries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DVD player</li> </ul>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Internet access</li> <li>• Film screening formats</li> <li>• PowerPoint</li> </ul>
<p><b>FILM 4800:T2: Film Production (3) credits</b>  <b>Professor Ling-HsuanTung</b>                  Students in this class will document their traveling experience through digital film. Those with production skills will learn how to produce a travelogue according to their own levels of experience.                   Students with no prior production experience will learn the basics of camera operation and editing in the pre-trip sessions. All equipment will be provided by the department.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer laptop</li> <li>• Digital still camera</li> <li>• Video camera with accessories</li> <li>• Audio recorders and accessories</li> <li>• Computer access</li> </ul>	<p>Required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Internet access</li> <li>• Digital Storytelling</li> <li>• Audio/Video recording</li> <li>• YouTube</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• Video editing software</li> </ul>

## Technology

### Blogs

All students were required to set up blogs prior to the trip and to hyperlink those blogs to their professor's home blog page: [www.clondinouk.blogspot.com](http://www.clondinouk.blogspot.com). According to Jo Ann Oravec in *Learning, Media and Technology*, web logs (blogs) are valuable tools that allow

students to become more involved in their own learning and result in greater interaction among students:

Strategic approaches toward blended learning environments are often instructor-centered, with control of the mix of educational approaches in the instructor's hands. In contrast, weblogs are a flexible medium that can be used in approaches that provide educational participants with a 'middle space' of options as to how to integrate face-to-face and online modes. Weblog construction encourages the development of individual, critical voices within the broader context of classroom interactions. (pp. 225–233)

The professors' blogs were also hyperlinked to each other. For ease of use, compatibility, and accessibility, Google's blog service Blogger was chosen as the required program. For easy identification and for easy access by site visitors, students used their names as titles for their blogs. Students were able to customize their blogs, and learned to post and navigate through their sites and others using the appropriate blog tools. Students who had experience with blogs were teamed with novice students to help forge pre-trip working and social relationships.

Faculty used blogs to post trip information and course outlines, as well as to clarify assignments and provide samples, itineraries, photos, hotel links, travel links, instructions, timelines, deadlines, meeting places, emergency information, etc. With mobile phone web access students were constantly in touch and informed. Internet access made it reliable and easy to add or update information. It was also well received by parents and friends who were interested and anxious for trip details. Parents, in particular, appreciated the reassurance that came from regular communication. Blogs became the go-to source for all related information before, during, and after the trip.

Blogs are more interactive and less formal than many websites, allowing visitors to post comments or responses, often giving excellent feedback to the blogger. Students can add a variety of educational, interesting, and fun items to their blogs, including photos, slideshows, digital stories, videos, and related links, taking advantage of such utilities as *Frappr Maps* and *YouTube*. In addition, professors were able to post course outlines, assignments, and links to suggested films and reviews, to faculty and student blogs, and to travel information sites with resources on history, currency conversion, etc. Students were also required to post their assignments and projects on their blogs. Professors could then use the blog as a kind of online portfolio of work.

### **Website**

A website can often be a more formal space than a blog. Faculty can create Travel Learn websites to provide an overview of the program. Visitors can access pages devoted to specific trips, including policies, courses offered, frequently asked questions, forms, requirements, photo libraries, costs, testimonials, samples, contact information, previous trips, upcoming trips, and so on. *Weebly* at [www.weebly.com](http://www.weebly.com) offers a user-friendly program that allows even a novice designer to create a professional looking site quickly and easily.

## **Skype**

Even with recent improvements in mobile phone technology, it can be difficult and expensive for students to make international phone calls — some cell phones have international capability or service, but many do not, and the service itself can be expensive. An excellent alternative is Skype, an inexpensive online phone service that uses the internet to make phone calls. Students are not charged for calls to other users of the service, and may pay a fee to call most landlines and cell phones. A computer or laptop with a microphone is capable of excellent phone service, and the price and convenience make it well worth setting up an account. Students were informed about the advantages of using Skype with laptops, and prepaid accounts were set up before the trip.

## **Webcam**

Many laptop computers have built-in webcams that can be used with Skype, giving the added benefit of real-time video along with audio. According to Andy Taylor, from KOLD News 13, the *Live This Morning* technical expert,

If you have never used [a webcam], it gives you the ability with a broadband connection to not only have a text conversation...but also conduct a face to face video call with voice or just a video stream to a friend or family member.... Users can share and swap photos live with other users, add special effects to your webcam presentations and even utilize the live features to snap a pic with the webcam and upload it to your [blog]. No need to get an additional microphone for your audio to be reproduced, a microphone on the webcam body picks up audio from the room easily.

Webcams are especially useful for journalism reporting purposes, as students can make such reports and then post them directly to their blogs.

## **Using Technology to Document and Share Content**

### **You Tube**

Another very popular and useful tool for students is YouTube. Wikipedia provides a helpful summary of YouTube, its inception, uses, and restrictions:

YouTube is a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips. Three former PayPal employees created YouTube in February 2005. In November 2006, YouTube, LLC was bought by Google Inc. for US\$1.65 billion, and is now operated as a subsidiary of Google. The company is based in San Bruno, California, and uses Adobe Flash Video technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. Most of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by members of the public, although media organizations including CBS and the BBC offer some of their material via the site. Unregistered users can watch the videos, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. Videos that are considered to contain potentially offensive content are available only

to registered users over the age of 18. The uploading of videos containing defamation, commercial advertisements, pornography, copyright violations, and material encouraging criminal conduct is prohibited by YouTube's terms of service.

Students as well as faculty find YouTube a handy way to upload their video files and post them on their blogs. It has the added advantage of being nearly instantaneous and readily accessible. Students can post a range of video types from simple clips to polished video packages. There are a number of excellent software programs, such as iMovie, that facilitate quick and simple editing. YouTube is especially useful for faculty because it lets them view video assignments without the video needing to be converted into DVDs or other formats.

### ***Frappr Maps***

One fun and useful item to add to a blog is a Frappr Map. This application allows blog visitors to locate exactly where the trip is taking place and to add themselves and their location to the map. It is interesting for students to see who has checked out their site and where they are from. Frappr Maps is owned by Platial and is a widget associated with Google Maps. According to Google,

Frappr! Maps give Web site owners and visitors an easy and unique way to visualize and interact with each other. Visitors can add their name, photo and message directly on a Web page embedded with Frappr! Maps, and the Web site owner gets real-time stats on where visitors are coming from and how often they visit.

### ***Google Earth***

Google Earth is another useful gadget or widget item that many students add to their blog. It allows students to visualize the trip and distances by simply putting in city names or specific addresses. It is useful for visitors to the site to follow the tour and have a visual representation of distances.

## **Content Delivery**

### ***Podcasts***

A useful tool for media students who want to record and distribute audio content is to turn the content into podcasts. The term originally came from combining the words iPod and broadcast. Apple was the original format but today podcast can also mean, "personal on demand" broadcast. More specifically, Wikipedia defines a podcast as:

a series of audio or video digital media files which is distributed over the Internet by syndicated download, through Web feeds, to portable media players and personal computers. Though the same content may also be made available by direct download or streaming, a podcast is distinguished from most other digital media formats by its ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added. Like the term *broadcast*, *podcast* can refer either to the series of content itself

or to the method by which it is syndicated; the latter is also called podcasting. The host or author of a podcast is often called a podcaster.

Because of the ease of audio-only production, podcasts are relatively simple to incorporate on a trip. Software programs readily convert content to a correct format which can then be made available to subscribers. The limited specific content of a podcast is ideal for “real time” events such as a narrated tour of an historic site or personal impression of the cultural experience.

### ***Digital Stories***

Digital stories are typically short narrated stories accompanied by a “personal voice” used to convey the personal experience of the storyteller. According to Dr. Kristine Mirrer:

“Digital Storytelling” is a term and course of study distributed throughout varied academic disciplines, community services, and business settings. The relatively recent generalized use of the term and application the techniques is clearly tied to the technological advancements and economic affordability which allow the average person to tell their stories in an effective and affecting manner. With increased availability and access to the tools of the medium, the structure and technology have been adapted internationally for a wide range of projects: broadcast projects such as the focus of the BBC initiative *Capture Wales*, documentation of personal experiences such as oral histories, a new means for children to tell their stories, psychological expression and intervention, career, creative or academic portfolios, and an archive of individuals participating in news or historic events.

Digital stories are powerful tools for students to express their own views. It is one of the most effective uses of technology to capture the essence of human experience. It is also a skill that requires a minimum of technological expertise. A wealth of tips, examples, and training are available to anyone interested in digital storytelling from The Center for Digital Storytelling at [www.storycenter.org](http://www.storycenter.org).

### ***Video or News Packages***

Unlike the personal voice in digital stories, a news package is an objective, journalistic — usually informative — report on the country, city, site, or event, somewhat similar to a travelogue feature. It usually involves research and incorporates interviews, comments, observations, and on-scene reporting. It is an opportunity for students to use broadcast journalism skills to objectively document another culture. It helps students to see other cultures in their local context, free from prejudice or personal preferences.

### ***Logistics and Planning***

To incorporate such new technology into an international travel experience, careful preparation is critical. The professors who have accompanied over one-hundred students on Travel Learn trips offer the following observations or questions designed to facilitate planning:

### Equipment

- What kind of equipment is needed, how much, and how will it be transported?
- Will every student need their own equipment or can they share by working in teams?
- What adapters/converters will they need?
- Who will be responsible for physically transporting the equipment?
- Who is responsible for security of the equipment?
- What insurance or liability covers the equipment?
- What is the size or weight of the equipment?
- Are there airline restrictions or security issues?

### Computers

- Laptop computers are essential to the success of the trip.
  - Will the program supply computers or will students need to bring their own?
  - If students bring their own laptops, what issues and concerns that apply to equipment do they need to be reminded of?

### Internet Access

- How will the students be able to access the internet?
- Does the hotel have access and if so, is there a fee for service?
- Is service available throughout the hotel in rooms or in specific designated areas?
- Is wireless connection available?
- Are there internet cafes or other internet services available other than at the hotel?

### Assignments

- Specific types of assignments with clear parameters should be determined prior to the trip.
- Students can view samples, watch videos or see what worked successfully from previous trips.
- The format can be predetermined but the content will be different.
- Students and faculty can anticipate specific sites and events associated with the travel destination and pre-trip research can make the actual experience richer and more effective.
- Students can set up their blogs, and conduct comparative media research prior to the trip.
- In the pre-trip class meetings, faculty can facilitate learning about the countries or places to be visited.
- Faculty can motivate students to stay focused and perform at a high level through a post-trip showcase of student work.
- Awards for best work in a variety of categories can be further incentive for students to take advantage of the cultural opportunities that come with travel.

### Time

- How much time is expected to be devoted to blogging, uploading, editing, or other media-related activities on the trip?

- It is very important to be clear and realistic about the expectations. Using new technology can be very time-consuming, frustrating, or unreliable — certain technologies may be impractical or impossible in certain locations.
- Try to anticipate being flexible if necessary. There need to be several alternative plans that depend on the circumstances encountered.
- Worst case scenarios can rely on simply capturing photos, video, etc., that can be used at a later date for producing into finished projects.
- Students can also share photos and files with each other and across the various classes.

### ***Post-Trip Shared Experience***

#### Showcase/Award Event

- A critical component of travel is the opportunity to share the experience with others.
- It also showcases the students' work and allows them to reunite for a final exchange of memories and shared group experience.
- The showcase can be an incentive for students to do their best work.
- Prior to the trip award categories can be announced in such areas as Best blog, Best Video Package, Best Photo (Group), Best Photo (Scenery), Best Digital Story, Best On-Scene Report, Best Podcast, Best Interview, Best Feature

#### Display Case/Bulletin Board

- Display materials gathered on trip including souvenirs, maps, newspapers, magazines, photos, books, etc.
- Displayed materials can be used to reinforce the Travel Learn experience for the travelers and help to attract new participants for the next trip.

### **Conclusion**

Program review and assessment of student learning, in the Department of Media & Film, has identified participation in international travel with increased global and cultural awareness to be a high priority goal. To reinforce that goal, faculty have created a Travel Learn program designed to combine the academic discipline with international experience. The plan incorporates new technologies into the Travel Learn coursework, resulting in greater participation by the students in their own learning, better results in student work and projects, increased awareness of the program, and a culminating showcase of student work that allowed non-travel participants to share and benefit from the experience of others. Further research, based on the experience and positive feedback from professors and students from educational trips that included France, Ireland, Wales, England, Argentina, India, Dubai, and South Korea, showed that incorporating new technologies enhanced the educational experience for all involved. Results also verified the importance of preparing for the trip including a working knowledge of new media technologies, and finally, sharing the experience through a variety of technological venues. Further study will be to create assessment instruments to determine critical standards of performance among the new technologies.

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Dr. Cathleen Londino, holds a Ph.D. from The University of Michigan in Radio-TV-Film, and a member of Phi Kappa Phi. She recently returned to faculty as Chair of Media & Film after serving as Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences. She has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in media at Kean University for twenty-five years including Broadcast Journalism, Studio and Field Production, Film, and Broadcast Regulation. Her interest in International Media have included a visiting professorship at the University

of East Anglia UK, an invited speaker on American journalism at Wonkwang University in South Korea, and presenter at the Technology, Knowledge & Society Conference in Hyderabad, India, She has led or participated in Travel Learn programs in England, France, Egypt, and Italy. In Spring 2009, she will take another group to China.

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