

# I WANT MY WEB 2.0

## Reflections on the CS-SIS Web 2.0 Challenge

By Deborah Ginsberg, Meg Kribble, and Bonnie Shucha

Since Tim O'Reilly coined the term "Web 2.0" in 2004, the Internet has exploded with Web-based applications for communicating, networking, organizing knowledge, and streamlining current awareness. From wikis and RSS to social bookmarking and virtual worlds, Web 2.0 technologies are touching all aspects of the library. As information stewards, law librarians must become capable of assessing and implementing these tools to expand our outreach and educate our patrons about the new social context for information.

Unfortunately, for many law librarians, Web 2.0 technologies are overwhelming and intimidating. With so many tools available, it can be difficult to determine which ones are worthwhile and which are simply passing fads. Even after being convinced to try a certain technology, many librarians are unsure where and how to begin.

Recognizing these barriers, the AALL Computing Services Special Interest Section (CS-SIS) developed the Web 2.0 Challenge, an online course to introduce social software and its use in libraries. The Challenge provided a free, interactive online learning opportunity designed specifically for law librarians that directed them in hands-on exploration of several useful Web 2.0 technologies. In this article, the coordinators of the Web 2.0 Challenge will describe the course, explore participants' reactions to it, and consider future directions for the course.

### About the CS-SIS Web 2.0 Challenge

The Web 2.0 Challenge, which took place between July 21 and August 18, 2008, was divided into a series of five weekly lessons, each covering one or more Web 2.0 technologies:

- Week 1: Blogs and RSS
- Week 2: Wikis
- Week 3: Social Networking and Second Life
- Week 4: Flickr and Social Bookmarking
- Week 5: Next Steps: Web 2.0 @ Your Library

Each week, participants were required to complete a series of self-directed activities, including viewing an instructional screencast explaining how to use the technology, completing hands-on exercises based on the lesson, blogging about their experiences, and participating in a weekly small group chat session. They were also encouraged to explore how libraries have used these technologies through

links and readings. The course culminated with participants developing proposals for implementing a Web 2.0 tool in their libraries. The course was conducted completely online through the Moodle course management system.



To encourage participation, CS-SIS offered a number of incentives. Participants who completed all course activities each week could win a prize. Weekly prizes included the choice of a \$25 Amazon or iTunes gift card, a

Flickr Pro membership, Linden dollars (Second Life), or merchandise from our Café Press Web 2.0 Challenge store ([www.cafepress.com/web20challenge](http://www.cafepress.com/web20challenge)). Those who completed all activities before the end of the course were also eligible for our grand prize drawing for an iPod Touch. (The iPod, which was also contributed by CS-SIS, was awarded to Cindy May from the University of Wisconsin Law Library.)

Over 125 law librarians participated in the Web 2.0 Challenge. There were 100 enrolled participants, 20 small group facilitators who each led a small group of five participants through the course, nine instructors who designed the weekly course content, and three course administrators. The Challenge brought together a diverse group of law librarians from different types of libraries, geographic regions, and levels of experience. Participants represented all branches of law librarianship—academic, court, firm, and public. They hailed from 33 U.S. states as well as Alberta and Ontario, Canada, and Nottingham, United Kingdom. There were at least three library school students, several heads of departments, and at least one director. Years of experience in law librarianship ranged from nine months to 37 years.

## Reactions to the Web 2.0 Challenge

Reaction to the Web 2.0 Challenge was overwhelming from the start. Less than 24 hours after posting the registration form, more than 100 people had applied. Ultimately, more than 200 law librarians applied for our 100 participant slots. Those 100 who had the most interest, need, and time to devote to the Challenge were enrolled in the program. Given the tremendous level of interest, CS-SIS has decided to offer the Challenge again this summer.

We decided to survey our participants so that the lessons learned from the Challenge could be easily shared. Participants were surveyed at both the beginning and the end of the Challenge. Of 100 enrolled participants, 84 completed the initial survey and 52 completed the final survey. Twelve facilitators also completed the final survey.

At the start of the course, we asked them how familiar they already were with several Web 2.0 technologies. We found that many in the group were very comfortable with using Web 2.0 technologies—two-thirds used RSS feeds, and nearly as many used wikis for research and subscribed to some kind of social network. Not many participants, however, had actively created Web 2.0 content. Fewer than one-fifth wrote personal or professional weblogs, edited wikis, posted videos on the Internet, or shared bookmarks. One noted, “I’m relatively experienced as a ‘consumer’ of content, but not so much as a ‘creator’ of Web 2.0 content, and am hoping to jump start that a bit.”

At the beginning of the Challenge, about half of the participants reported that their libraries were not currently using any Web 2.0 applications, although many had plans and ideas for doing so. About one-third of the participants said they were enthusiastic about the potential of Web 2.0 applications to reach their users in “new and powerful ways,” and another third believed that “many, but not all, of these applications could be useful for our library.” Other participants were somewhat more uncertain. Said one:

I think several Web 2.0 applications have potential for library use, but I’m still a little skeptical about their application to the service of my library’s primary users—law students and law faculty. I don’t think our students are using Second Life for example, or are interested in/have time for editing wikis. I’m also not sure I see the utility of a library Facebook page, although we have one. So far not a single student or faculty member is our “fan” on Facebook.

After the Challenge, we surveyed the participants again and were gratified that some of our participants’ attitudes had changed. In the introductory survey, a number of law librarians said that they were uncertain about implementing Web 2.0 technologies in their libraries, but by the end of the Challenge, 98 percent said that they planned to implement at least one Web 2.0 application in their libraries.

The usefulness of certain applications surprised the participants. For example, before the course, few had used social bookmarking tools, but the lesson on bookmarking applications like Diigo and del.icio.us clearly impressed them. Nearly 60 percent said they planned to use these tools in their libraries after the Challenge. It was clear from the exit survey that many participants clearly enjoyed the program, getting much more out of it than they had expected. “I am

## Organizing a Course for Your Organization

So, you want to challenge your local library or institution? Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Check out similar programs to find a model to customize. Both *23 Things* and *Five Weeks to a Social Library* are Creative Commons licensed, so you can re-use or re-work them, or programs based on them, to fit your needs.
- Seek the approval and support of your organization’s management.
- If you have a large group, consider inviting Web 2.0-savvy colleagues to help run the program.
- Make sure your course materials appeal to a variety of learning styles and that there are hands-on assignments.
- Although these programs are intended to be self-directed, provide opportunities for participants to get help or discuss what they’re learning in weekly open labs or online chats.
- If you can budget for them, incentives and prizes are a fun way to motivate and reward your participants.
- Relax. This is supposed to be fun and though there will be challenges for course organizers too, it’s ultimately rewarding to see the participants get into the material and hear their fresh perspectives on Web 2.0.

no longer afraid to go back to school,” said one, “This course was the best thing to happen to me all year.”

The survey also revealed that there were some areas for improvement, mostly concerning the technical problems related to the course management system. Moodle took up too much of our commercial host’s server processing time, and a few important features, like the chat program, did not work well as a result. Future Challenges should consider hosting Moodle on a specialized Moodle server or use some other program altogether like Blackboard or Drupal.

In addition, some lessons were more resonant with the participants than others. The least successful was the lesson on Second Life. It was not that Second Life has no place in libraries, but the program was too complex to explore during the Challenge. One facilitator said:

Second Life was the only significant flop as far as my group was concerned. I've been able to poke around in SL, but everyone in my group either didn't have the computer power or had access restricted through work and couldn't use it. I think the idea of virtual worlds is something important for law librarians to be aware of, but the barriers and learning curve to SL get in the way of people realizing their potential (IMHO).

Participants remained skeptical about Second Life even after the Challenge. Not one reported that they planned to use Second Life in their libraries.

Both participants and the facilitators provided some great ideas for the next Web 2.0 Challenge. Many recommended specific technologies:

[D]iscussion on topics like [Skype] and VOIP, fiber optics, [technologies] that level the playing field for persons with disabilities that can apply in libraries for both staff

and patrons: Internet CapTel, Video Relay Services, new browsers for those with low vision and the like. Some warned about maintaining an objective attitude:

All tech is not useful in every library, so a little less of the "here's something wonderful, so now how are you going to plop this into your environment" would be appropriate, I think. It has to be all right to say, "interesting, but not for me," without feeling like you just kicked a puppy.

More captions and transcripts for the screencasts were recommended, as well as a wish for a little more consistency in how individual facilitators worked with the participants.

Despite the glitches and suggestions for improvement, both the participants and the facilitators responded very positively to the Challenge. *One hundred percent* of the participants indicated either that "It was excellent" (48 percent) or "I liked most of it" (52 percent). Similarly, all of the facilitators felt that either "It was excellent" (75 percent) or "I liked teaching most of it" (25 percent). One participant concluded:

The course was well designed. Lots of help available whenever it was needed. I think if you approached each tool with an open mind you couldn't help but have a wonderful

time. Not everything we covered is something that you might see in use in our acquisitions department, or our academic library—but it's important to look at the broader picture. Several of my "hmm, what if fantasies" lead me to uncharted territories—a good place for me or my avatar.

## A Success

Even though Web 2.0 tools have been around for several years, the Web 2.0 Challenge gave many librarians who might not otherwise have had the time or inclination to explore them a chance to experiment with some of the most popular applications and services. The hands-on aspect of the course offered law librarians the opportunity to actively explore Web 2.0 technologies for themselves. "The most important thing I learned," shared one participant, "is that most of these technologies are best experienced first-hand by simply diving in and trying them out."

The diversity of our participants also helped bring a variety of new perspectives together from different branches of librarianship, years of experience, and library departments. As one of our participants noted, "it is so important with emerging technologies to learn from each other's successes and failures."

Even some Web 2.0 skeptics participated and found the Challenge worthwhile. “Not everything was applicable to our library,” one said, “but now I KNOW that to be the case, rather than just guessing that something might not fit.”

With two-thirds having received certificates of achievement for completing the course, and 94.3 percent of participants reporting in our exit survey that they learned something new in every—or almost every—week of the course, we feel that the Web 2.0 Challenge was an overwhelming success. In addition to learning that Web 2.0 tools “can be used for serious library work,” several reported having fun on the journey. We hope to include some of the 2008 class as teachers and facilitators of a new edition of the Web 2.0 Challenge this summer. Stay tuned! ■

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