Valuing evaluation through new media literacy: Using AEA365 blog to prepare next generation evaluators

Kankana Mukhopadhyay, Ph.D Candidate

Sheila Robinson Kohn, Ed.D

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AEA365

AEA365 | A Tip-a-Day by and for Evaluators

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Sheila Kohn on Using the AEA365 Blog as a Teaching Tool

3 Comments | Posted by *John LaValle* in Teaching of Evaluation

Hello! My name is **Sheila Kohn**, and I teach Program Evaluation Methods at the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education. I'd like to share a Cool Trick and Hot Tip for other evaluation educators.

I was very excited by AEA's announcement of a daily evaluation blog and have faithfully read each entry since January 1. In fact, it has become part of my morning routine! I have my oatmeal, my coffee, and check out each day's blog.

Cool Trick: I wanted my evaluation students to read and appreciate what the blog entries have to offer, so I created an assignment. Since one of the purposes of the course is for students to "develop the knowledge and ability to become savvy and critical users of evaluation information," having them read the AEA blog is a perfect fit!

Take Action

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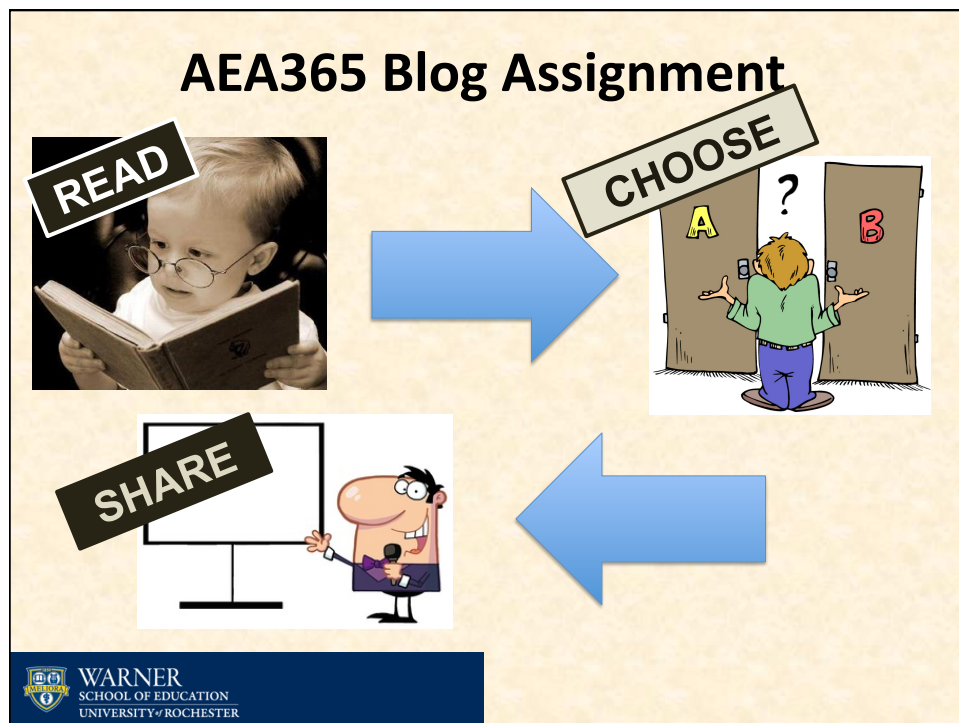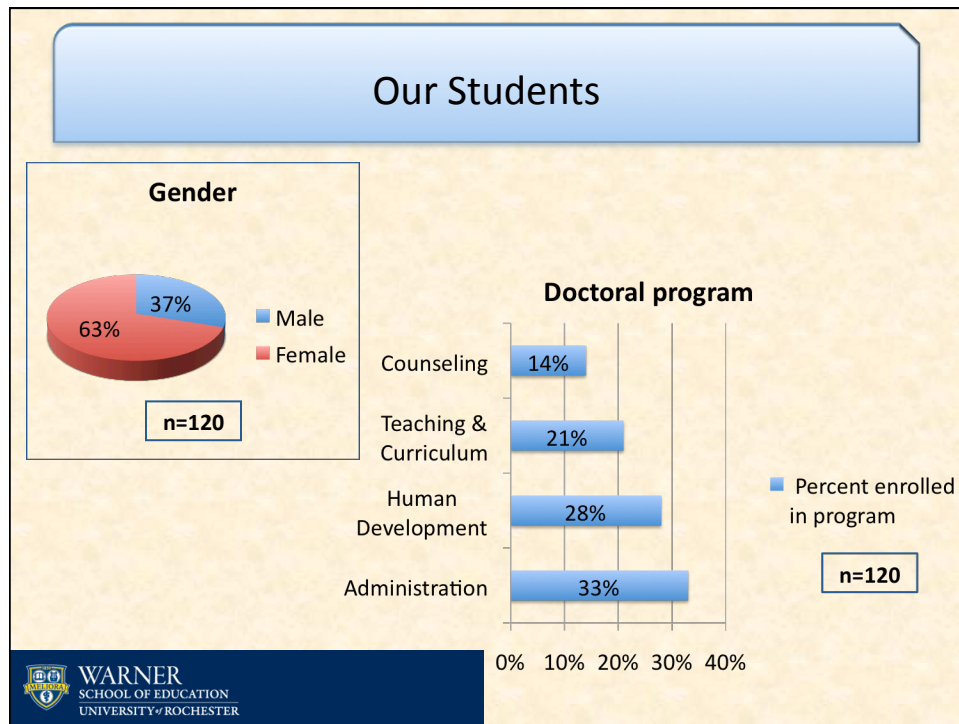
Posts Related to AEA Topical Interest Groups

Advocacy and Policy Change (11)
AEA 365 Team (1)
AEA Local Affiliates

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Our Students

Gender

37% Male
63% Female

n=120

Doctoral program

Counseling 14%
Teaching & Curriculum 21%
Human Development 28%
Administration 33%

■ Percent enrolled in program

n=120

0% 10% 20% 30% 40%

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AEA365 Blog Assignment

READ

CHOOSE

A ? B

SHARE

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Blogs as New Media Literacy

- Focus on
  - Collaboration
  - Distributed expertise & authority
  - Building shared knowledge
- Technology-based new literacies by specific users in specific contexts afford new forms of participation
- Tools provide the means > students & teachers construct meanings dependent on ways they choose to put tools to use

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Student Perspective
– Summer 2011 students

5 Themes:

- Selecting blog entry to present
  - Primarily selected by title
  - Every selection an outcome of several reads of the same blog or other blogs
  - Start w/ entry of the day, tagged for TIGs, uncategorized
- Reading entries generated further interest in evaluation & invited them to read more & know more about evaluation

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Student Perspective (continued)

- How blogs help understanding of evaluation
  - Multiple perspectives
  - Theory > Practice connection
  - Perspective on breadth / vastness of field
  - Wealth of resources shared in entries
- Evaluation community
  - Seems more approachable & accessible
  - Students develop sense of belonging & connection to community

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Student Perspective (continued)

- Presentation of the blog
  - Random topics – different every day
  - Entries demonstrate authors' passion for evaluation
  - Simple structure, casual language, brevity make blog accessible
  - Variety of authors (not just "experts") makes blog feel more "grounded"

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Student Perspective (continued)

- Challenges
  - Selecting entry to present was overwhelming
    - Breadth of evaluation so great students get lost
  - Difficult for slower readers to read enough to choose (limited time to spend)
  - Blog entries did not connect directly to assigned readings

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Student Perspective (continued)

- Connection to course
  - Helped students understand evaluation
  - Makes clear to students how and what programs are evaluable
  - Helped ground theory & practice
  - Opportunity to learn from each other, get to know classmates, build community – formed "third space"
  - Gave students confidence that they could contribute to field
  - Students suggested they be required to write entry, even if not submitted

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Advantages / Benefits of Using AEA365 as a Teaching Tool

- Presenting evaluation concepts through blog offers new form of participation
  - Legitimate peripheral participation
  - Catalyst for rich classroom discussions
  - Uncover "hidden curriculum"
  - Engenders collegiality, builds community
  - Explore evaluation through voices of "real-world" practitioners
  - Access to evaluators

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Next Steps

- Continue to evaluate AEA365 as teaching tool with structured research design
  - Data collection may include:
    - Survey past students
    - Conduct additional focus groups
    - Develop performance assessment
    - Interview other evaluation instructors
    - Analyze blog entry choices – do students gravitate toward a particular theme, TIG, etc.?

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Contact information

- Sheila B. Kohn, Ed. D.
sbkohn@rochester.rr.com / 585-455-5228

- Kankana Mukhopadhyay, Ph. D. Candidate
kankana.m@gmail.com / 585-362-5666

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