Filling the Gaps With a Virtual Learning Commons at an Online University

Jon Dron & Terry Anderson

Technology-Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute
Athabasca University, Canada

ECSM 2014

Athabasca University
FACULTY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
School of Computing & Information Systems

Technology Enhanced
Knowledge Research
Institute (TEKRI)

Athabasca University

everywhere.

well, actually in the middle of nowhere

(-40°F = -40°C)

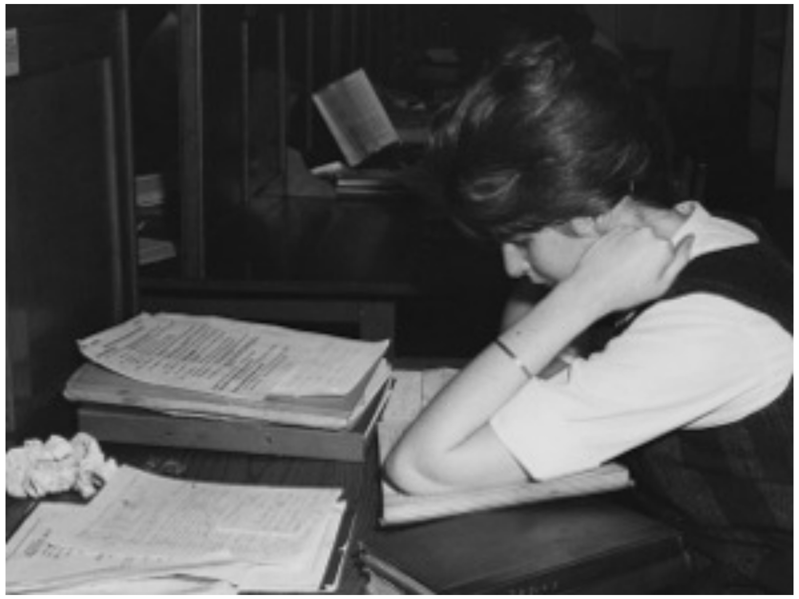
Athabasca is a fully distance institution, mainly online - but less than 80% of Canadians have Internet access so, as an open university committed to open access, we also have offline versions of most courses. One notable feature is that we have self-paced (undergraduate) courses: students choose when and where to engage. Structured process based on Otto Peters's industrial model.

Important point - we have no face to face communities - even teachers are often separate at a distance

distance education is great

There are many great things about distance education

any time



anywhere

any pace

anyone

anyone can do it - limited barriers to entry

with anyone

and you don’t have to be in a classroom – you can learn with or around family and friends

under your control

but...

What is missing?

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

A lot of the value of a traditional university happens **outside the classroom**. Partly its because of the people you meet. …A lot of learning goes on outside the classroom, in **bars, libraries, benches, cafes , parties, parks and societies**….it's about **doing things together**, not just sitting in classrooms

but this is not about having fun - we can achieve that in other ways. It's actually about the richer learning experience of being a student. Of being able to **engage with others in a learning dialogue** that goes beyond what is being taught...you can **see people around you learning**, gain **motivation** and enthusiasm, be drawn into a **culture of learning…**just hanging out in a quad, having conversations about many things…A university campus is **filled with learning opportunities, embedded throughout….It's about conversations, often heated,** about a lot of things that may or may not have anything to do with your course of study...A place where other people share the knowledge and ideas, not just a place to absorb knowledge but to actively create it….people help you to **connect ideas, discover new things, enthuse you…**you are part of a **learning community**, engaged in helping one another to learn…other people probably **inspire** you, **challenge** you, make you **think differently**

it's not just outside the classroom that unplanned learning with other people happens

it happens in classrooms too...

a lot of a traditional learning experience in a university involves **discussion, exploration, dialogue and debate**

you talk about things **in and between classes**

you **solve problems** together

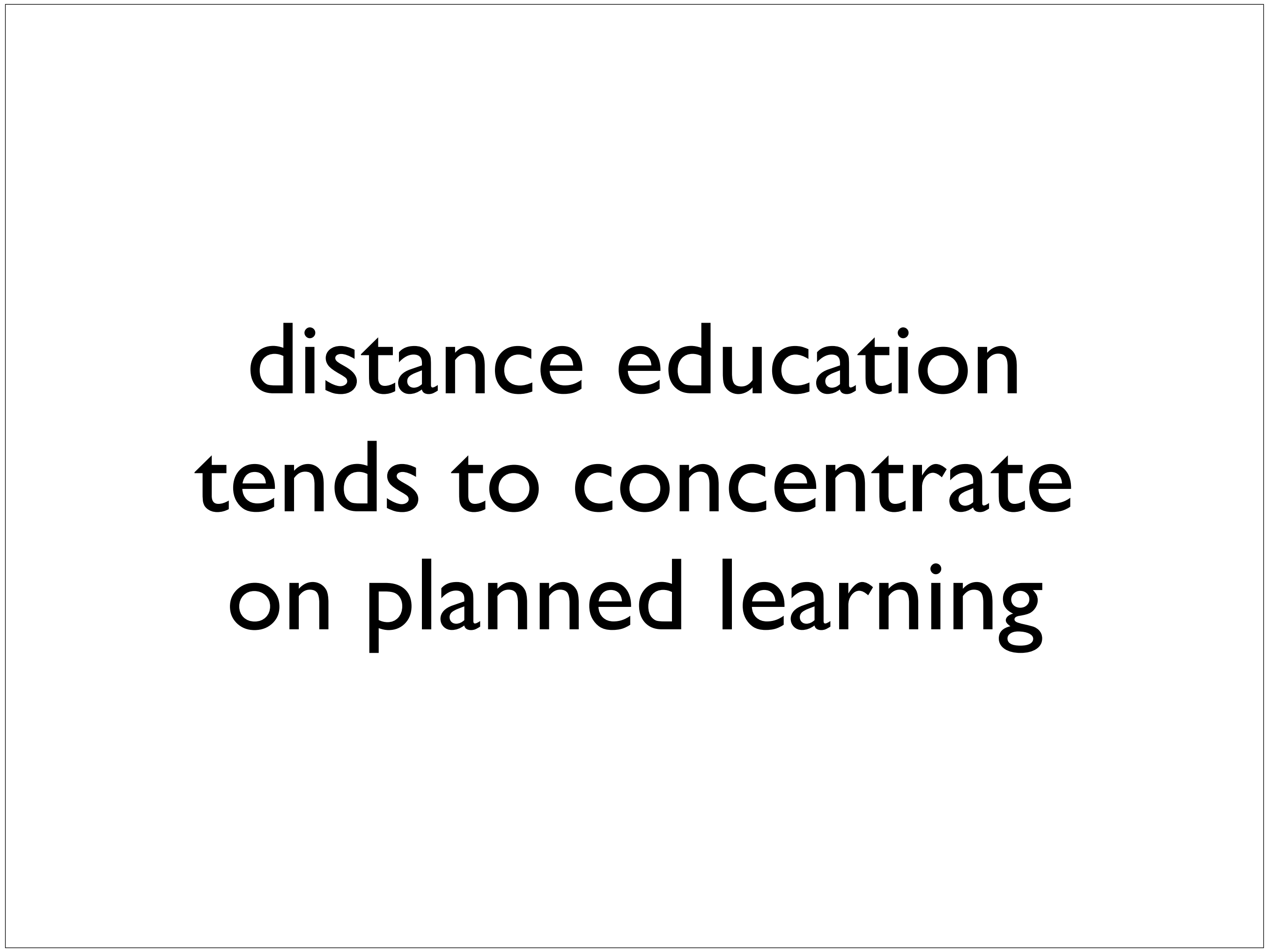
you engage in learning conversations, **ad hoc, unplanned, interactive**, with professors, other students, tutors and others

a lot of a traditional learning experience in a university involves **discussion, exploration, dialogue and debate**
you talk about things **in and between classes**
you **solve problems** together
you engage in learning conversations, **ad hoc, unplanned, interactive**, with professors, other students, tutors and others

a lot of a traditional learning experience in a university involves **discussion, exploration, dialogue and debate**
you talk about things **in and between classes**
you **solve problems** together
you engage in learning conversations, **ad hoc, unplanned, interactive**, with professors, other students, tutors and others

a lot of a traditional learning experience in a university involves **discussion, exploration, dialogue and debate**
you talk about things **in and between classes**
you **solve problems** together
you engage in learning conversations, **ad hoc, unplanned, interactive**, with professors, other students, tutors and others

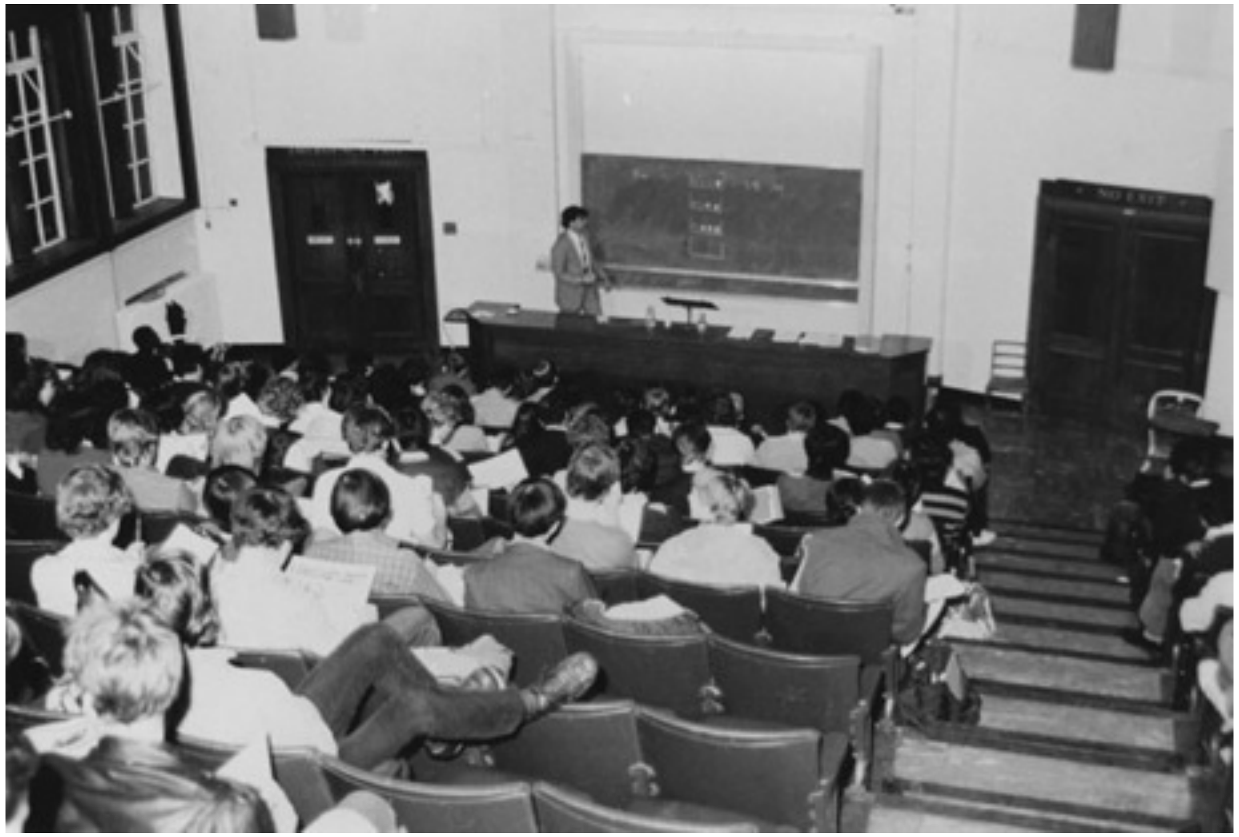
a lot of a traditional learning experience in a university involves **discussion, exploration, dialogue and debate**
you talk about things **in and between classes**
you **solve problems** together
you engage in learning conversations, **ad hoc, unplanned, interactive**, with professors, other students, tutors and others



distance education tends to concentrate on planned learning

not just what we tell, but also the activities we require and the methods and pedagogies that demand engagement with content and other students

distance education tends to **focus on teaching** the subject
it suggests methods, approaches, ways of coming to terms with a topic
there is a lot of focus on **targeted** learning activities
you are expected to **absorb** and use what we tell you
it tends to be a **transmission** model – we have knowledge that we are imparting to you



distance education tends to **focus on teaching** the subject
it suggests methods, approaches, ways of coming to terms with a topic
there is a lot of focus on **targeted** learning activities
you are expected to **absorb** and use what we tell you
it tends to be a **transmission** model – we have knowledge that we are imparting to you

distance education tends to **focus on teaching** the subject
it suggests methods, approaches, ways of coming to terms with a topic
there is a lot of focus on **targeted** learning activities
you are expected to **absorb** and use what we tell you
it tends to be a **transmission** model - we have knowledge that we are imparting to you

distance education tends to **focus on teaching** the subject
it suggests methods, approaches, ways of coming to terms with a topic
there is a lot of focus on **targeted** learning activities
you are expected to **absorb** and use what we tell you
it tends to be a **transmission** model – we have knowledge that we are imparting to you

distance education tends to **focus on teaching** the subject
it suggests methods, approaches, ways of coming to terms with a topic
there is a lot of focus on **targeted** learning activities
you are expected to **absorb** and use what we tell you
it tends to be a **transmission** model – we have knowledge that we are imparting to you

distance education tends to **focus on teaching** the subject
it suggests methods, approaches, ways of coming to terms with a topic
there is a lot of focus on **targeted** learning activities
you are expected to **absorb** and use what we tell you
it tends to be a **transmission** model – we have knowledge that we are imparting to you

teaching is not (just) telling

a university education is about...

the stuff we are taught

yes, the stuff we are taught but also...

the learning community

other learners, sharing their knowledge, modelling ways of thinking

people we learn with and from

people who share their knowledge, show us how they think, model behaviours and ways of thinking, challenge us to examine our beliefs

a culture of learning

people visibly learning around us, drawing us into ways of thinking and behaving that encourage us to learn and support our learning journeys

exposure to ideas

discovering things we did not seek to discover - for serendipity, the discovery of our beliefs

challenging beliefs

FREE SPEECH NOW

allowing us to see the world differently, from different angles, different perspectives

building relationships and connections

building connections and relationships that will sometimes last a lifetime, with people who share experiences and ideas with us

being inspired

as true of teachers as it is of students

a university is a **learning community** where everyone learns together. As professors and lecturers work at a distance, it can be hard for them to learn from and with one another.

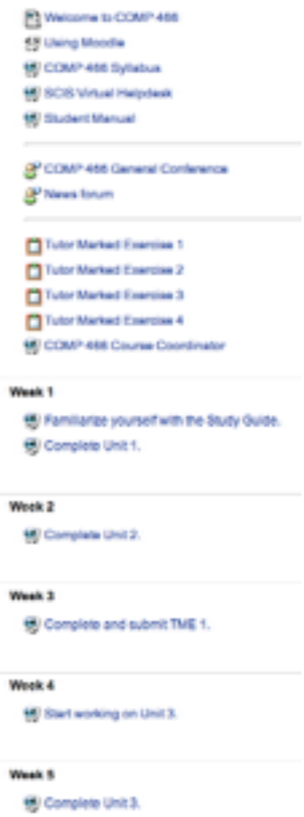
Athabasca Landing

a social site created in 2010, the home of tens of thousands of posts, comments, discussions, shared content and files.

a space to

share
communicate
connect &
create

a space between


Welcome to COMP 466
Using Moodle
COMP 466 Syllabus
SCIS Virtual Helpdesk
Student Manual

COMP 466 General Conference
News forum

Tutor Marked Exercise 1
Tutor Marked Exercise 2
Tutor Marked Exercise 3
Tutor Marked Exercise 4
COMP 466 Course Coordinator

Week 1

Familiarize yourself with the Study Guide.
Complete Unit 1.

Week 2

Complete Unit 2.

Week 3

Complete and submit TME 1.

Week 4

Start working on Unit 3.

Week 5

Complete Unit 3.

We were not trying to replicate a face to face college, but to build a **space between** purpose-driven sites like learning management systems and the informal dialogue and conversation of email and telephone, a **persistent and malleable** environment a little like the quads, hallways, libraries and common spaces in a university. It is a **learning commons**, a **soft space, a controllable space, a variegated space, filled with dialogue**, a space where you can **trust** that people are who they say they are, that they share an interest in learning, where everyone is **accountable** for what they do. It's a space where its users are all **equal**, everyone sharing equal **control**, from the president to a visiting student.

Participative design and management

Friends of the Landing

>50 people contributed

>100 continue to contribute

Some principles

every post belongs to someone

ownership

very flexible and powerful tools with which to create social spaces, with discretionary access control throughout

control

many reasons to visit, more reasons to stay

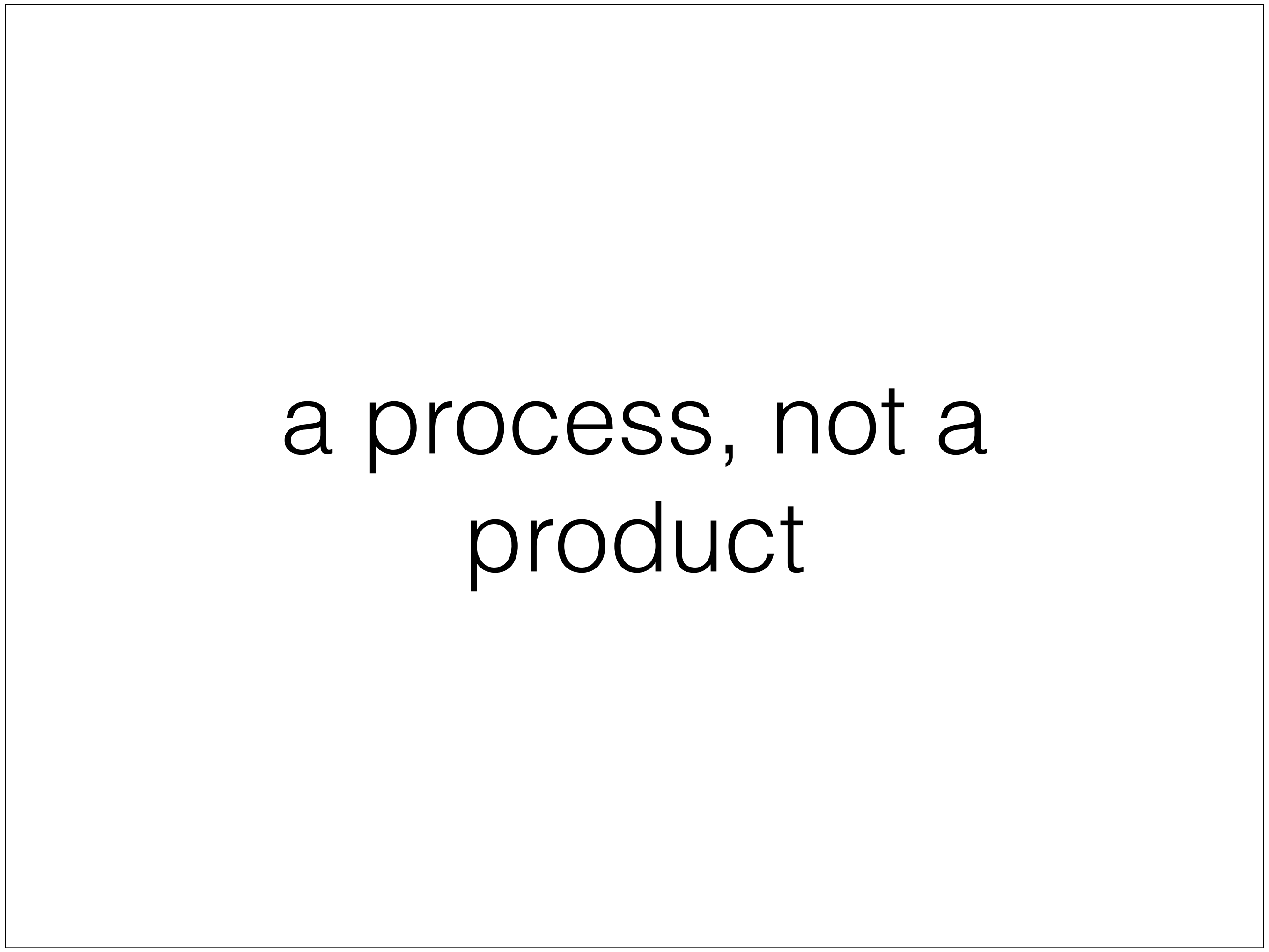
diversity

everyone has as much power as everyone else

equality

ubiquitous dialogue for every post

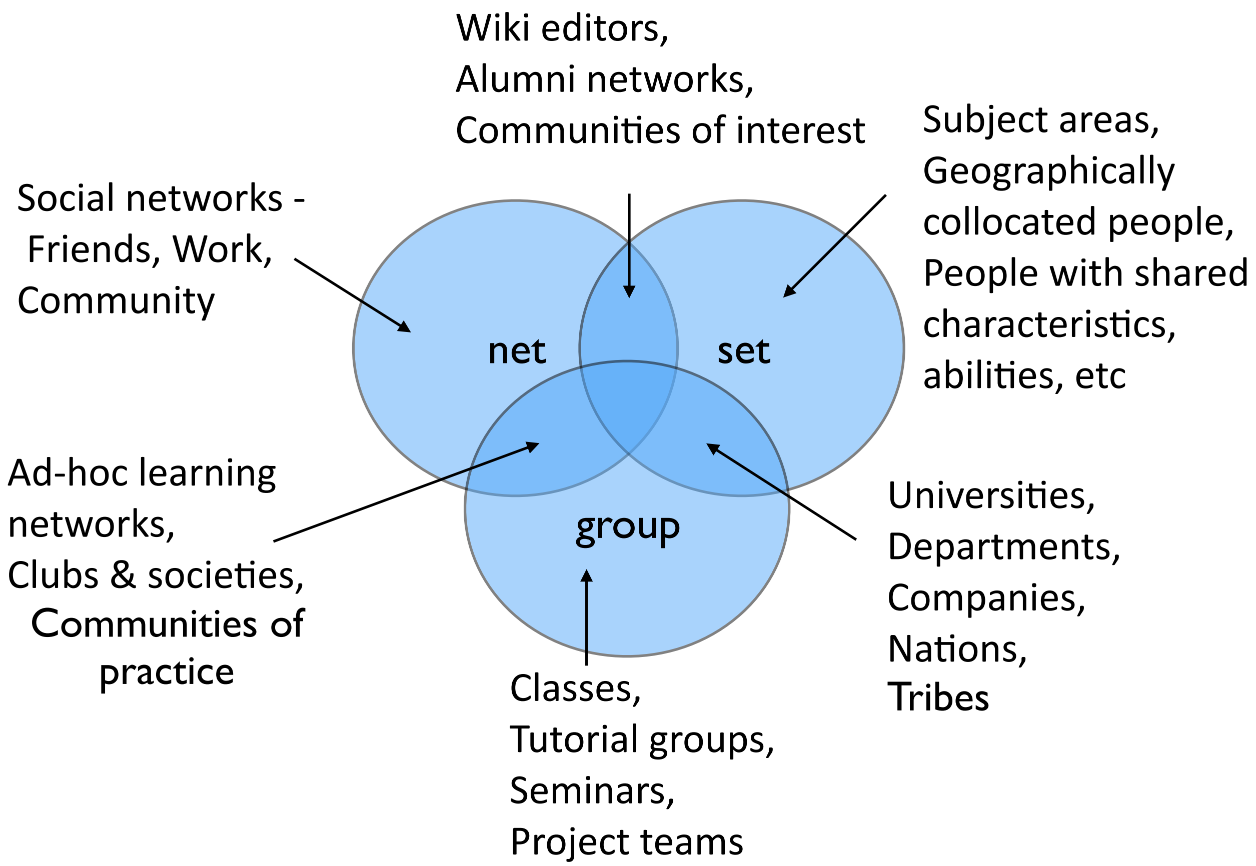
sociability



a process, not a product

not a finished project, constantly evolving

sets, nets and groups



Wiki editors,
Alumni networks,
Communities of interest

Social networks -
Friends, Work,
Community

Subject areas,
Geographically collocated people,
People with shared characteristics, abilities, etc

Ad-hoc learning networks,
Clubs & societies,
Communities of practice

Universities,
Departments,
Companies,
Nations,
Tribes

Classes,
Tutorial groups,
Seminars,
Project teams

Theoretical

- Social Presence
- Cooperative work in self-paced programming
- Interaction results in increased social, institutional and academic integration, leading to increased completion rates (Tinto, 1987)
- Need to develop a virtual campus supporting community beyond course interactions
- Social Capital Building
- Potential for community and alumni contribution

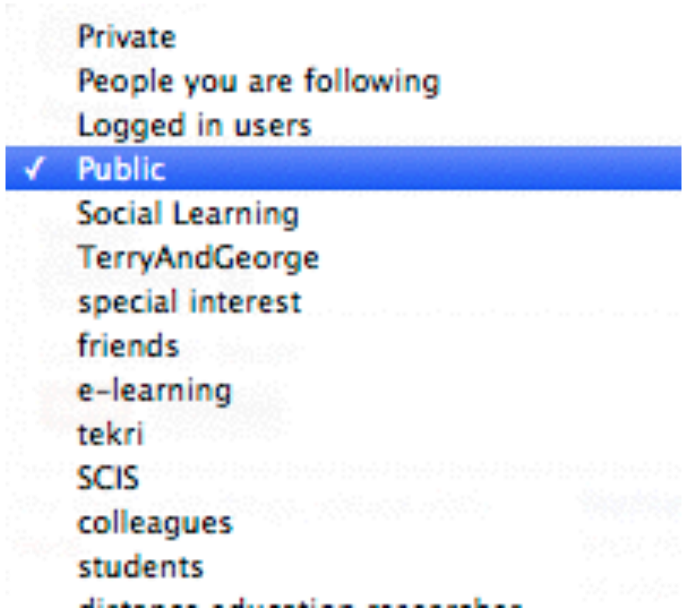
practical

- Communications is a continuing challenge in our workplaces.
- Too many of our faculty and staff are disengaged from our community
- We lack any sort of knowledge management system- all knowledge explicit, little connected
- It’s hard to get to know people at Athabasca.

many tools

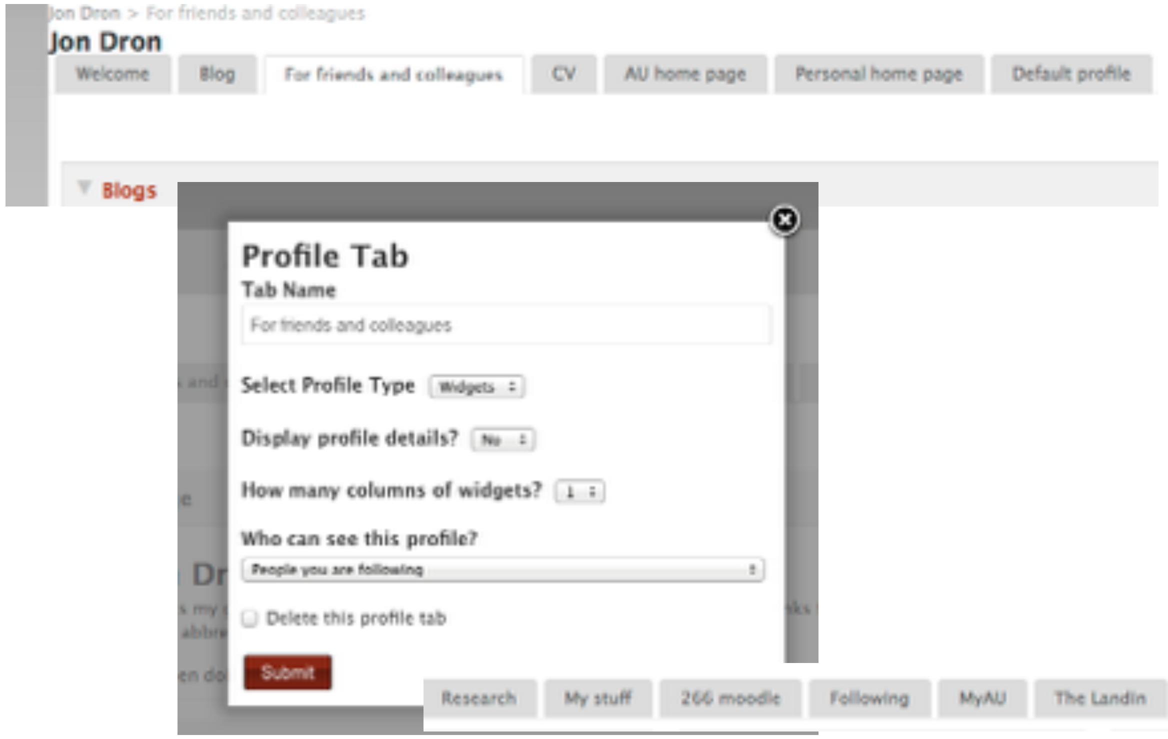
to support this, we built and configured many tools. We used the Elgg social framework, a kind of social software construction kit. We gave around 50 Elgg plugins back to the community – they can be downloaded from community.elgg.org

Discretionary access control


Private
People you are following
Logged in users
✓ Public
Social Learning
TerryAndGeorge
special interest
friends
e-learning
tekri
SCIS
colleagues
students

every post can be as public or as private as you wish. You can share with individuals, with your network, with user-defined circles of people like your friends, colleagues, fellow students, department members and so on, with the people in groups you belong to, with everyone on the site, or with the whole world.

context shifting


Jon Dron > For friends and colleagues
Welcome
Blog
For friends and colleagues
CV
AU home page
Personal home page
Default profile
Blogs
Submit
Research
My stuff
266 moodle
Following
MyAU
The Landin

Jon Dron

Profile Tab

Tab Name: For friends and colleagues

Select Profile Type: Widgets

Display profile details?: No

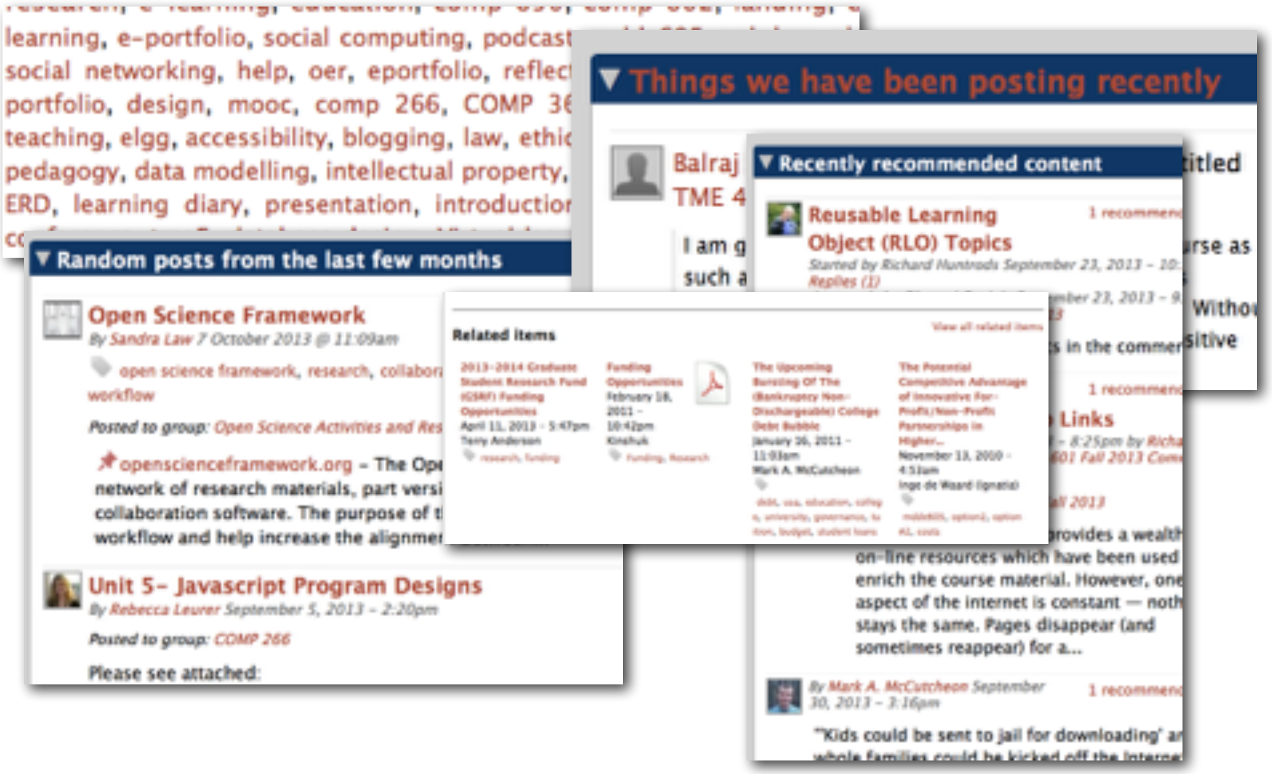
How many columns of widgets?: 1

Who can see this profile?: People you are following

☐ Delete this profile tab

university life involves much shifting between context - classes, societies, clubs, committees, social networks, etc. The landing allows controllable access for everything, and filtering according to network or group

Planned serendipity



learning, e-portfolio, social computing, podcast
social networking, help, oer, eportfolio, reflec
portfolio, design, mooc, comp 266, COMP 36
teaching, elgg, accessibility, blogging, law, ethic
pedagogy, data modelling, intellectual property,
ERD, learning diary, presentation, introductio

▼ Random posts from the last few months

Open Science Framework
By Sandra Law 7 October 2013 @ 11:09am
open science framework, research, collabora
workflow
Posted to group: Open Science Activities and Res
opensciencframework.org – The Op
network of research materials, part versi
collaboration software. The purpose of t
workflow and help increase the alignme

Unit 5- Javascript Program Designs
By Rebecca Leurer September 5, 2013 - 2:20pm
Posted to group: COMP 266
Please see attached:

▼ Things we have been posting recently

Balraj
TME 4
I am g
such a

▼ Recently recommended content

Reusable Learning Object (RLO) Topics
Started by Richard Huntrods September 23, 2013 - 10:
Replies (1)

Links
- 8:25pm by Richa
401 Fall 2013 Com

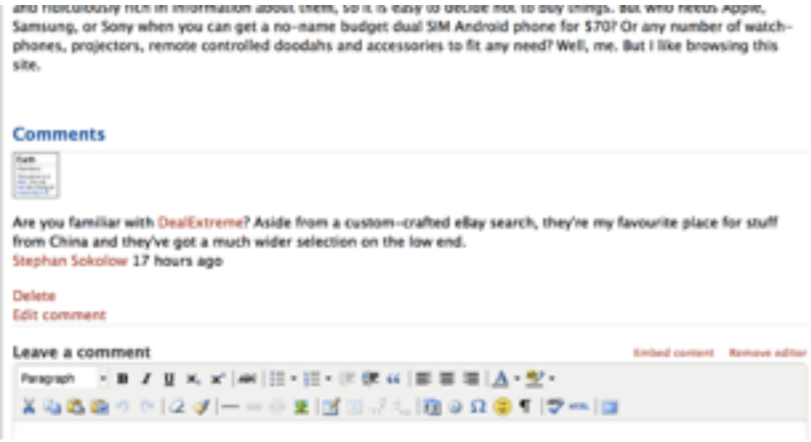
provides a wealth
on-line resources which have been used
enrich the course material. However, one
aspect of the internet is constant — noth
stays the same. Pages disappear (and
sometimes reappear) for a...

By Mark A. McCutcheon September 30, 2013 - 3:16pm
"Kids could be sent to jail for downloading" a

Related items

the space we created provides many opportunities to discover topics, people and posts of interest - uses the concept of collectives as well as some random picking

every post an opportunity for dialogue



and ridiculously rich in information about them, so it is easy to decide not to buy things. But who needs Apple, Samsung, or Sony when you can get a no-name budget dual SIM Android phone for $70? Or any number of watch-phones, projectors, remote controlled doodahs and accessories to fit any need? Well, me. But I like browsing this site.

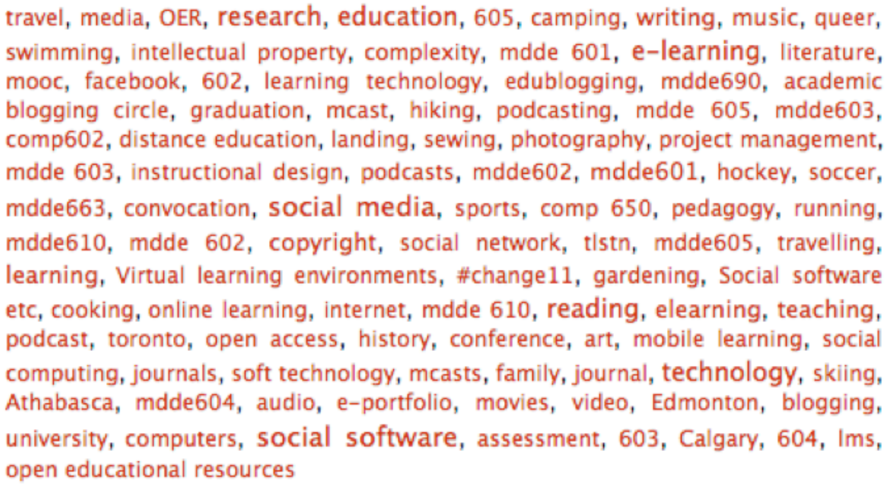
Comments

Are you familiar with DealExtreme? Aside from a custom-crafted eBay search, they're my favourite place for stuff from China and they've got a much wider selection on the low end.
Stephan Sokolow 17 hours ago

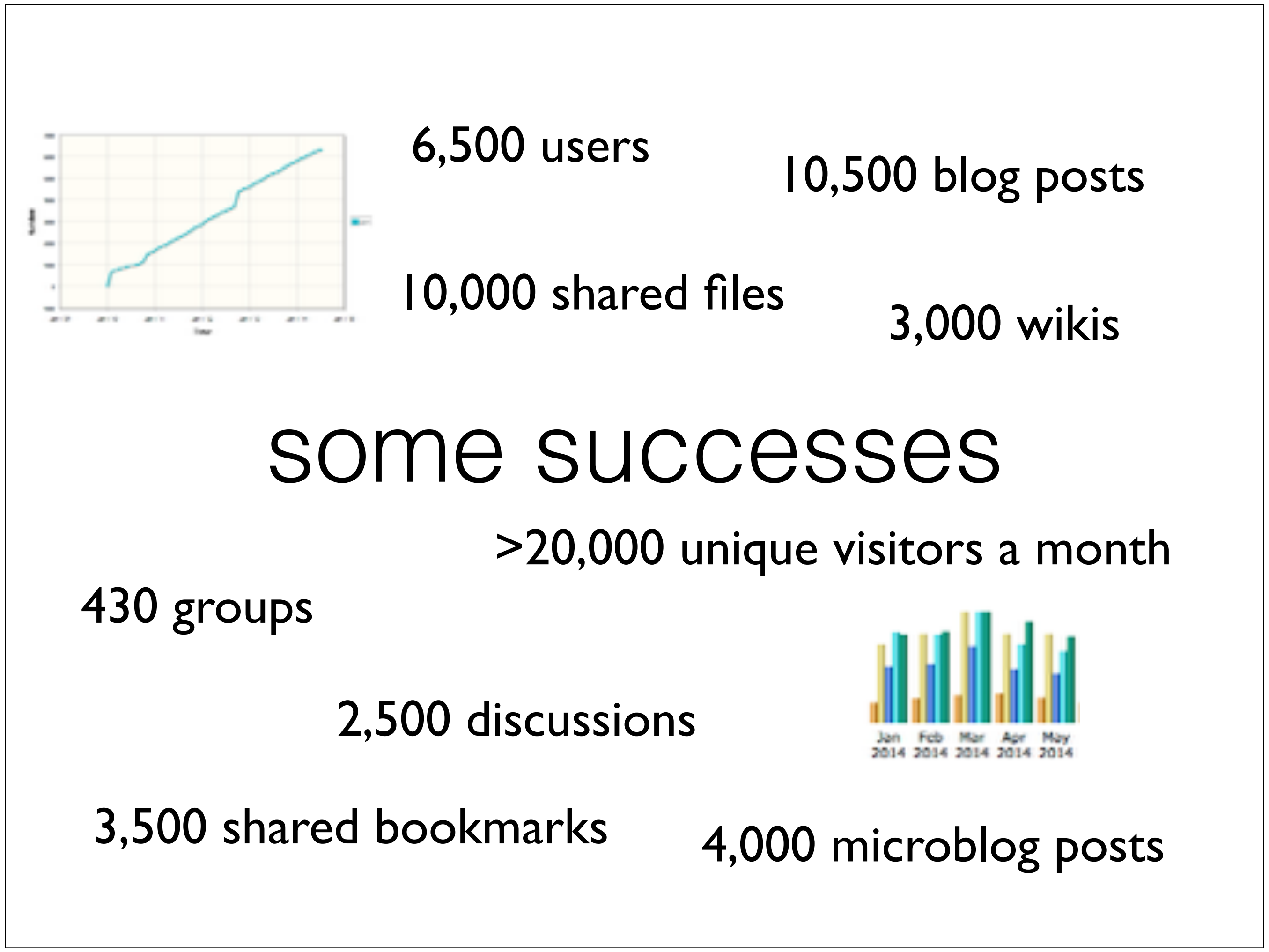
Delete
Edit comment
Leave a comment
Embed content
Remove editor
Paragraph

and every post carries with it an opportunity to communicate, to engage, to discuss and collaborate

Diverse interests



travel, media, OER, research, education, 605, camping, writing, music, queer, swimming, intellectual property, complexity, mdde 601, e-learning, literature, mooc, facebook, 602, learning technology, edublogging, mdde690, academic blogging circle, graduation, mcast, hiking, podcasting, mdde 605, mdde603, comp602, distance education, landing, sewing, photography, project management, mdde 603, instructional design, podcasts, mdde602, mdde601, hockey, soccer, mdde663, convocation, social media, sports, comp 650, pedagogy, running, mdde610, mdde 602, copyright, social network, tlstn, mdde605, travelling, learning, Virtual learning environments, #change11, gardening, Social software etc, cooking, online learning, internet, mdde 610, reading, elearning, teaching, podcast, toronto, open access, history, conference, art, mobile learning, social computing, journals, soft technology, mcasts, family, journal, technology, skiing, Athabasca, mdde604, audio, e-portfolio, movies, video, Edmonton, blogging, university, computers, social software, assessment, 603, Calgary, 604, lms, open educational resources



6,500 users

10,500 blog posts

10,000 shared files

3,000 wikis

some successes

>20,000 unique visitors a month

430 groups

2,500 discussions

3,500 shared bookmarks

4,000 microblog posts

Jan 2014
Feb 2014
Mar 2014
Apr 2014
May 2014

We've been running since 2010 and there has been a steady increase in use of the site over that time. A lot of people use the site but it's not about making everyone engage and create. It's as much about visibility and awareness of activity. We have tried to valorize critical passion, not critical mass.

We think that it's an exciting environment that fills an important need, restoring some of the flexibility and social engagement that is the hallmark of a traditional university education.

institutional support and integration

confused purposes, soft systems

uneven contributions

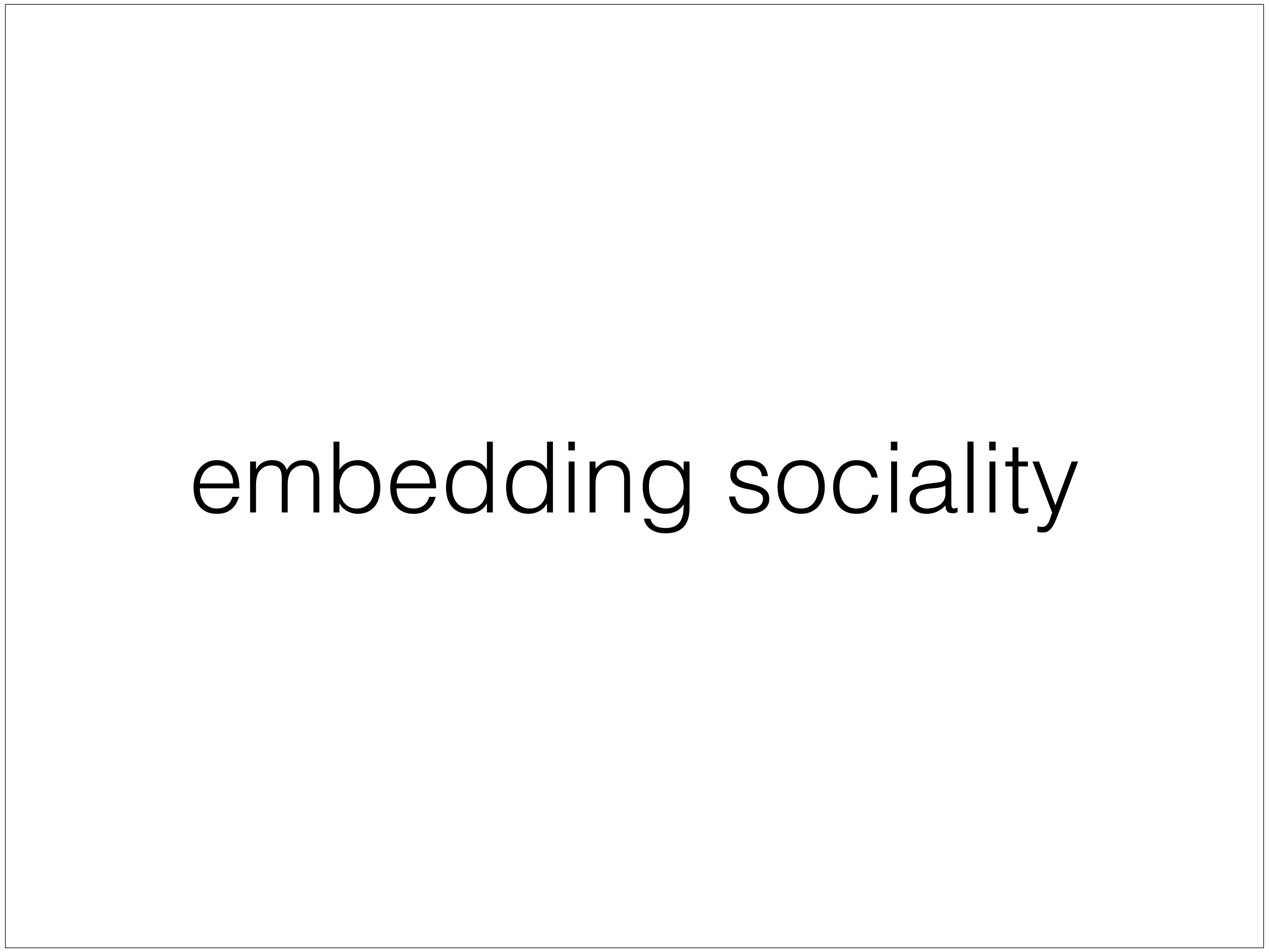
some issues

conflicting worlds

the monolith

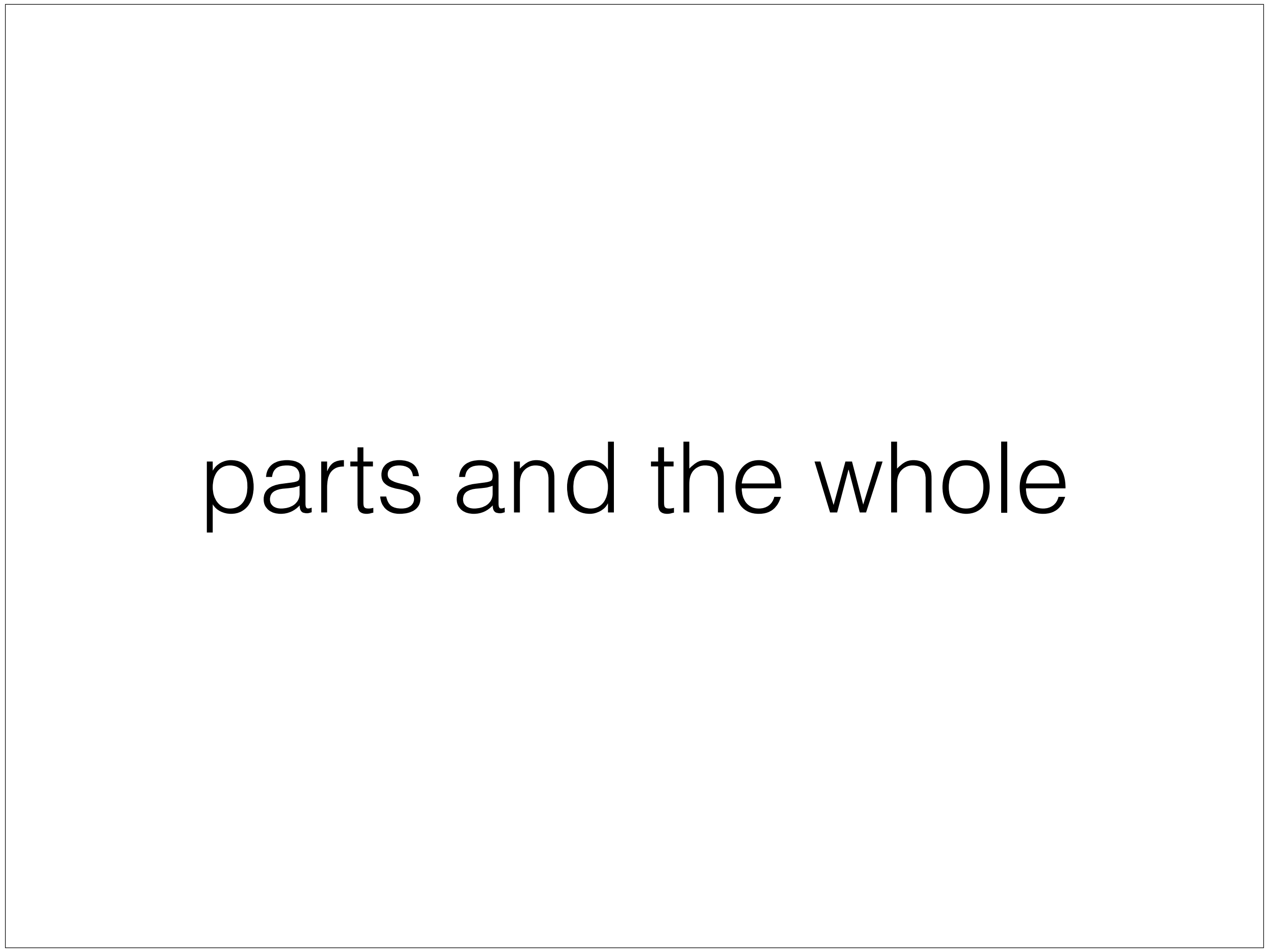
small pieces, loosely joined

If we could start again…



embedding sociality

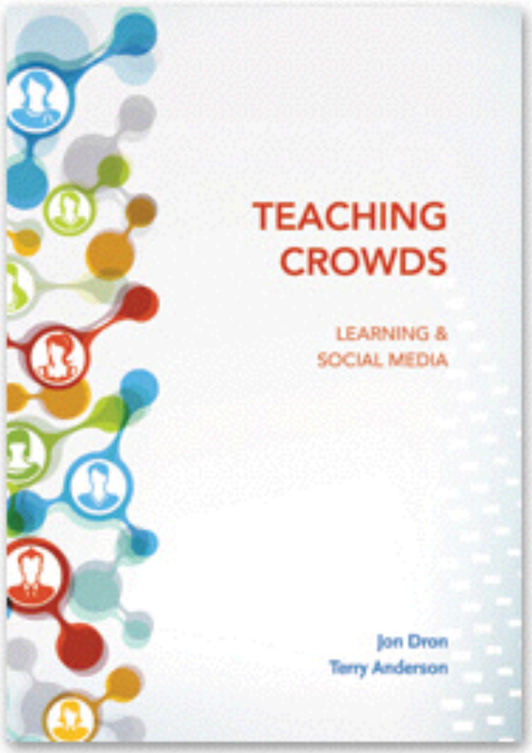
a monolith is not the answer in a distributed system - need to embed social tools in all the other systems, not create a whole new space to have to think about



parts and the whole

We made a shopping list - blogs, microblogs, wikis, etc - without thinking of commonalities. Difficult to choose a medium for sharing/communication due to major overlaps.

Building from small pieces is great, but sometimes obscures the big picture. Need time to stop and reflect on what the whole system is doing


TEACHING CROWDS
LEARNING & SOCIAL MEDIA
Jon Dron
Terry Anderson

Thank you!

https://landing.athabascau.ca

Jon Dron - jond@athabascau.ca

Terry Anderson - terrya@athabascau.ca

we think the Landing is a very exciting development.

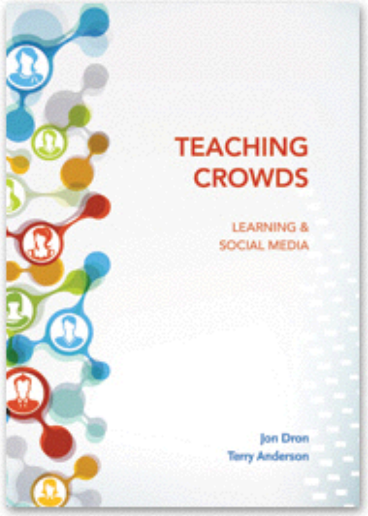
Coming September 2014…

Teaching Crowds: Learning and Social Media

Jon Dron &
Terry Anderson

AU Press

(free PDF download,
paper or e-book versions very
reasonably priced)


TEACHING
CROWDS
LEARNING &
SOCIAL MEDIA
Jon Dron
Terry Anderson

http://www.aupress.ca/index.php/books/120235

http://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Crowds-Learning-Distance-Education/dp/1927356806/