



This is an overview of the way that we have configured WordPress at Emory Law for our Advanced Legal Writing - Blogging and Social Media Course. The course was taught in the spring 2015 and spring 2016 semesters. It was co-taught by Professor Jennifer Romig and myself. Each time, we had approximately 20 students in the class. Here's an outline of the steps that we followed.

Meta: Why teach this class?

Jennifer came to me about this course two and a half years ago. Her concept was that new associates and small firm lawyers have always done **public legal writing** and that this is fundamentally different from the type of focused fact-constrained writing that one does for a client. Traditional examples of public legal writing include:

- Bar Journal articles
- Firm newsletters
- Client alerts
- Law Day presentations
- CLE presentations
- etc.

Increasingly, modern public legal writing takes place in different venues and is shaped by different technologies and techniques:

- Blogging
- LinkedIn
- Medium
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat

Jennifer's idea was that this is a different type of writing, in terms of voice and audience, and is shaped by different tools. We conceived the course as a blending of an education on writing in a new style as well as learning WordPress as a tool. This has led to a unique and really fruitful collaboration, at least for me! We decided that we would do everything in one tool and that tool would be WordPress. Our worry was that the students would never get any deep exposure to



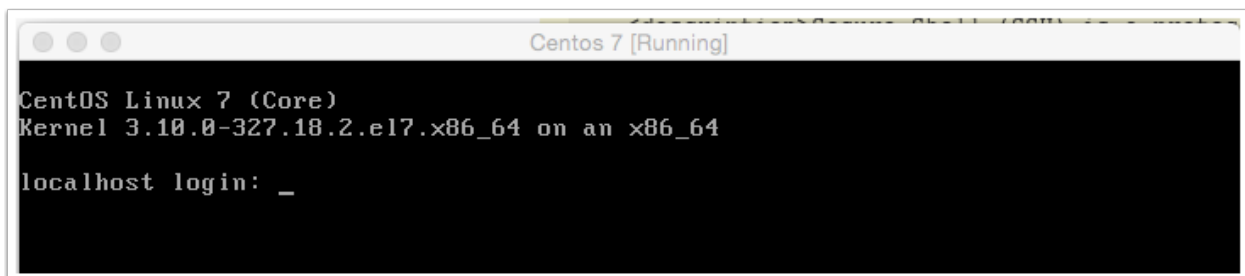
WordPress if we did part of the class in an LMS and part of the class in a local version of WordPress and part of the class in WordPress.org.

Meta: Big themes

1. In Dave Weiner's famous formulation, blogging is the "unfiltered voice of the individual."
2. We sought to marry that with the idea of the creation of a "professionally appropriate identity."
3. And, another goal is to join that to demonstrable competence with one of the dominant web-publishing tools currently available.

Preliminary: Obtain a VM for WordPress

At Emory, the central IT department charges \$320 per year to set up a VMWare hosted virtual machine ("VM"). The machine is configured with a current version of RedHat Linux or a current version of CentOS Linux. For purposes of demonstrating some of that setup and configuration, I've used a local VM running in VirtualBox. You can see a quick refresher on how to configure CentOS as a guest OS in VB [here](#).



Preliminary: Follow one of the many tutorials on how to set up a basic LAMP stack and WordPress

You'll need to install various bits before you can install WordPress. Digital Ocean has [a good, very short, tutorial](#) on how to get the web server, PHP programming language, and MariaDB/MySQL database server set up. This is the Linux-Apache-MySQL-PHP that gives "LAMP" its name. Sticking with Digital Ocean's tutorials for a minute, [you can follow this one](#) to get a basic WordPress installation configured on your host. Even though it is slightly dated, the suggested steps should



work. There are some other issues with setting up the virtual machine and WordPress hosting environment, such as properly configuring firewall rules, that are outside the scope of this article.

Preliminary: Extra security features that you may wish to consider

On our server, I installed and configured [SuPHP](#) and configured a special user for Wordpress. I also requested and installed an InCommon [SSL certificate](#) so that all web traffic to the WP instance is secured in transit. Those items are outside the scope of this session, but let me know if you have questions about them. For purposes of this tutorial, Wordpress is running as the Apache webserver user.



Preliminary: Complete the setup of WordPress and verify functionality of basic system

Visit the Wordpress site in your browser to complete the configuration of WordPress. WordPress is a very popular tool, which makes it a common target for external attacks. Please make sure that you do not use a "default" user name, like "admin" as the WordPress superuser. Go ahead, be creative! Also, because we are creating a private place in which students can experiment, ideally your site will not be publically accessible. Regardless, go ahead and tick the box to discourage indexing of the site by search engines like Google and Bing.

Welcome

Welcome to the famous five-minute WordPress installation process! Just fill in the information below and you'll be on your way to using the most extendable and powerful personal publishing platform in the world.

Information needed

Please provide the following information. Don't worry, you can always change these settings later.

Site Title

Username Usernames can have only alphanumeric characters, spaces, underscores, hyphens, periods, and the @-symbol

Password Strong
Important: You will need this password to log in. Please store it in a secure location.

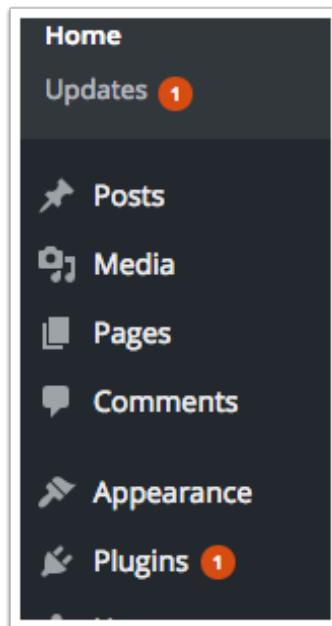
Your Email Double-check your email address before continuing.

Search Engine Visibility Discourage search engines from indexing this site. It is up to search engines to honor this request.



Preparation: Updating WordPress

First, check for updates to both core WP and to any plugins. Once you've gotten those done, we're going to spend most of our time in the plugins screen adding additional plugins.



Preparation: Adding appropriate plug-ins

Our goal is to run a secure, password-protected WordPress instance with some additional features that make it easier to communicate with students about course-related information. We are teaching the class using WP as our core tool, in addition to allowing students to use the system to post their work, comment on others' work, respond to comments, and work with the system as administrators so that they can practice with themes, plugins, widgets and the like.

Preparation: Security tools like Acunetix WP Security

From their plugin page: "[a]cunetix WP Security checks your WordPress website/blog for security vulnerabilities and suggests corrective actions." The screenshot below shows the current status of the WordPress installation. It also provides a database backup and allows you to rename the



database tables, which is very helpful in hardening the system against automated attacks against the WordPress database. it's a *great* plugin. There is a commercial version available as well.

Server Report	WordPress Scan Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Operating System : Linux▶ Server : Apache/2.2.15 (Red Hat)▶ Memory usage : 38.02 MByte▶ PHP Version : 5.3.3▶ MYSQL Version : 5.1.73 <ul style="list-style-type: none">! SQL Mode : Not set! PHP Safe Mode : Off! PHP Allow URL fopen : On! PHP Memory Limit : 256M! PHP Max Upload Size : 2M! PHP Max Post Size : 8M! PHP Max Script Execute Time : 30s! PHP Exif support : Yes (V1.4)! PHP IPTC support : Yes! PHP XML support : Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ You have the latest version of WordPress. ✓▶ Your database prefix is not wp_. ✓▶ The WordPress version is hidden for all users but administrators. ✓▶ Startup errors are not displayed. ✓▶ User admin was not found. ✓▶ The .htaccess file was found in the wp-admin directory. ✓▶ The user currently configured to access the WordPress Database holds the appropriate rights to interact with the database. ✓▶ The index.php file was found in the wp-content directory. ✓▶ The index.php file was found in the plugins directory. ✓▶ The index.php file was found in the themes directory. ✓▶ The index.php file was found in the uploads directory. ✓



Preparation: Administrative tools

We want our blog to be members-only; we only want our students, ourselves, and a staff member to be able to access the blog. Also, we have approximately 20 students in the class. So we'd prefer to have a way to bulk upload the student information into the blog.

[Simple Members Only](#) handles the members-only aspect. It's easy to set-up and works like a charm. After installing it, every user will need to log in to access the blog. We configured it to just send everyone to a login page. If you were using it to encourage sign-ups or subscriptions, you could send non-registered members to another page.

[Import users from CSV with meta](#) is a terrific plugin that allows you to bulk load students via a CSV file.

[Email Users](#) is very useful. It allows you to send an email to registered blog users. We used this to push an email any time that we posted something relevant to the course. Students preferred getting the emails to having to remember to check the blog for updates. We had more success with this approach than with the [Subscribe to Category](#) plugin that we used the first year. Incidentally, if you are using a plugin that relies on email, like "Email Users", you might also want to install the "Check Email" plugin. It allows you to test to make sure that email is working properly on your site.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Username	Email	Password	Address	City	State
2	john	john@myma	mypassword	Rd. Victoria	Atlanta	Georgia
3	javier	javier@mico	pass	Av. Cervante	Córdoba	Córdoba
4	elissa	eliss@myma	elis2013	Verona	Ferrara	Ferrara
5	piere	mon@mon.f	passwordfra	Nation	Paris	Île de la C
6	peter	pet@me.com	passpass	National	Washington	Columbia
7	luis	luisperez@cc	contrasenna	Sol	Madrid	Madrid
8	eleonora	eleonora@m	barele	Spagna	Roma	Roma

Import users from CSV with meta



Preparation: Writing tools

There are various writing tools that are useful.

[Table of Contents Plus](#) does what it says. It allows an author to generate nice-looking tables of contents for longer posts. We used this for longer documents, such as the syllabus, but it's also appropriate for longer law-related posts. TOC entries are built based on heading levels, which also allows us to reinforce the value of structural markup in conversations with students. It's a terrifically useful tool.

[Simple Footnotes](#) allows for easy creation of footnotes, using a [ref]note text[/ref] syntax.

The [lorem shortcode](#) plugin is useful to generate posts containing dummy text: "[u]se shortcode [lorem] to generate 5 paragraphs with 3 lines in each ,or [lorem p="4" l="5"]", p = number of paragraphs and l = number of lines per paragraph".

FD Word Statistics is a plugin that shows Fog, Kincaid, and Flesch scores for posts. Unfortunately, it's not being maintained any more (which is why I haven't included a link to it) and so we'll need to find a substitute. There are several others.

Writing analysis			
Sentences	Fog	Kincaid	Flesch
5	13.9	10.5	59

Course organization

We used the WordPress installation as our "hub" for the course. Students practiced creating posts, commenting, editing, and revising all in WordPress. All class announcements, the syllabus, etc. were posted on the WordPress site. In addition, teams of students "took over" the site for a week at a time during the semester - they installed new themes and presented to the class on the reasons for the particular theme choice, as well as reasons to choose a particular theme as opposed to another



one. This also allowed the team to explore information architecture and re-organization of pages and posts on the site.

The downside was that it forced us to deal with significant changes on a fairly frequent basis - and some themes and information architectures worked much better than others in terms of navigation. Also, it meant that anything that we (the instructors) were doing was available to the students. We spent a bit of time at the beginning of class setting expectations with regard to civility - and every time that we created a new set of administrators, we sent them a note warning them to be careful **and I pulled a complete backup of the WordPress files and database.** Fortunately, in the two times that we've offered the course we've never needed to restore from a backup.

Overall Course Map

- The course met twice per week.
- Course modules
 - Ethical Issues
 - Tools and Techniques (interspersed throughout)
 - Legal Analysis
 - Voice and Audience
 - Themes and Visuals
 - Capstone
- Assessment and Feedback
 - Capstone Project
 - WordPress.com blog
 - Freely available theme
 - About page, contact page
 - Seven posts
 - Four legal analysis posts of 800-1000 words
 - Three other law-related posts (such as a single-case update, reflection, or summary of law-review article)
 - Students also prepared and presented as part of a group
 - Blogging technique topic (Headings, Images, Conclusions, etc.)



- Theme choice and presentation (group acting as admins for one week)
 - Students provided feedback (and feedback on feedback) to other group members regarding their blogs
 - Students presented their blogs to the class

Capstone: Transition to Wordpress.com and a gotcha

Ninety percent of each student's grade in the class was based upon a capstone blogging project created at Wordpress.com. This gave us the opportunity to contrast the experience of using self-hosted WordPress with the fully-hosted Wordpress.com experience. One of our other class themes was that students should not spend any additional money to participate in the course. We wanted them to use the free WordPress.com and to use free WordPress themes.

There was an interesting side-note to this. Both Jennifer and I have Wordpress.com blogs, so we *knew* how the Wordpress.com blogs were supposed to work. Unfortunately, WordPress.com changed the appearance of the dashboard for new users, but **helpfully maintained the old layout for long-time users such as ourselves. This led to great puzzlement as we attempted to help our students sort through this.**



Other Tools: Not by Wordpress alone ...

We should mention that we did not wholly succeed in drinking our own champagne. We collected feedback as well as feedback on feedback using Wufoo forms. We scheduled office appointments using the excellent [Calendly.com](#) software. We used some Microsoft Office products. But, all in all, we did just about everything in the course via the excellent WordPress software. OH, and we used the fantastic [Clarify](#) to create this document and also to create various tutorials for the class and we used [Scrivener](#) and [Evernote](#) to organize class materials when we were first designing the course.

