**The Ins and Outs of a Professional Academic Website**

**Today’s post comes to us from Roger Whitson of the Digital Scholarship Commons (DiSC) at Emory University.  Roger kindly stepped forward when I asked for a guest post on the often asked questions: Should I have a professional academic website? And if so, what should it do?  I’m so pleased to have this post to both answer those questions, and demonstrate with lots of live links how to go about creating such a website.  Thanks for this, Roger!**

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

I have to admit, I’m a little biased. I have been interested in personal and professional websites since around 1996, when I created my first website in college. I enjoy having a web presence. I like the idea that my friends can contact me and keep up with what I am doing. And I admit that I’ve said things I definitely wouldn’t want a job committee looking at online. When my colleagues tell me that they don’t want to have a professional website, I can understand the fear they have of saying or doing something that will come back to haunt them.

So, why am I an advocate of creating a professional website? As a member of the [Digital Scholarship Commons (DiSC)](http://web.library.emory.edu/disc) at Emory University, I believe academics should use digital technology to their benefit. Part of using digital technology positively is understanding and taking control of our online identity. It is almost impossible to not have an online identity these days. If you have ever responded to a blog post, you already have an online identity. If you have participated in a message board, or created a [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/) account, or wrote an [amazon](http://amazon.com/) review, you already have an online identity. For me, it isn’t a matter of staying completely off the grid, it’s a matter of consciously crafting your online identity so that it most effectively presents who you are to potential employers.

Why should I have something other than my [academia.edu](http://academia.edu/) site? Certainly, [academia.edu](http://academia.edu/) might be enough for some academics simply wanting to have a single academic presence online. But, for those of us interested in business opportunities, non-academic and alternative academic jobs, other online services are important. Scholars are increasingly communicating on Twitter and writing blogs about their teaching and research. Different disciplines and fields might approach these technologies differently. Someone interested in the digital humanities and computer science, for example, may need to have a more robust digital presence than someone working in a more traditionally print-oriented field. Every year, DiSC [conducts a very useful workshop](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/creating-your-web-presence-a-primer-for-academics/30458) on using online services like academia.edu, [LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com/), Facebook and [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com/) to control what happens when someone searches for your name on Google. [Here is a video](http://ia700401.us.archive.org/30/items/CreatingWebPresenceI/CreatingWebPresenceI.mov)of that workshop. I like to have a professional website, because I can control almost every aspect of that site. I, then, use sites like [academia.edu](http://academia.edu/) and LinkedIn to point people to my professional site. Having more sites that you can control also gives you more control over what people see when they perform a Google search on your name. Take a look [at me.](https://www.google.com/#hl=en&output=search&sclient=psy-ab&q=roger+whitson&pbx=1&oq=roger+whitson&aq=f&aqi=e-pQ1g2g-v1&aql=&gs_sm=e&gs_upl=2208l3465l0l4097l13l6l0l0l0l0l216l855l3.0.3l6l0&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_cp.r_qf.,cf.osb&fp=6343a12a451e4006&biw=1432&bih=706) Professional websites, LinkedIn, academia.edu, Facebook, Twitter, and other sites tend to score very high on Google search results.

What should my website do? I see my website as [an online hub](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/) for my accomplishments and current projects. I include a copy of [my CV](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=5), using a paper-sharing application called [Scribd](http://www.scribd.com/); a brief account of [my research](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=186) and [digital scholarship](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=500); my [teaching portfolio](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=297), with a t[eaching philosophy](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=14), [student evaluations](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=19) of my work, [sample syllabi](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=463), and [links to student projects](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=79); embedded [Prezis](http://prezi.com/) of my most recent conference presentations; and [videos](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?page_id=425) presenting my teaching and research. I feel that my professional site allows my job applications to come alive. Not only do employers see that I presented on collaborative reading and annotation in the classroom at the 2012 Modern Language Association conference, they can [read that presentation](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?p=1319), and [see a video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_4g42PujkY&feature=player_embedded) of me giving an introduction to the presentation at the MLA. Finally, I like to keep a blog on my personal website. This allows me to quickly point people to changes in my CV, like [receiving an award](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?p=475), being [quoted in a magazine,](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?p=485) or [accepting a new job](http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?p=773).

What should my website look like? The design of your website is important. It helps to characterize you as a professional and an academic. Since I am interested in technology, scholarship, and teaching, I wanted a site that looked contemporary and gave evidence for my digital skills. The rounded edges, the overall clean and non-cluttered design of the site, and the multiple links to other social networking sites show that I am heavily invested in social media and design. I also wanted my site to establish my name (“Roger T. Whitson”) and my visual identity. If you look, I have the same picture on my header, on my Twitter profile on the right, and on the [favicon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Favicon) displayed in the URL bar. This photograph is also repeated in [many of](https://twitter.com/#!/rogerwhitson) [the social](http://www.linkedin.com/in/rogerwhitson) [network sites](https://plus.google.com/108347811625375187399/about) [I frequent](http://www.facebook.com/rogerwhitson). Further, I try to use the same username (“rogerwhitson”) on those same sites. The point is to create and maintain a consistent message about my identity. Fellow DiSC member [Brian Croxall](https://twitter.com/#!/briancroxall) [does](https://plus.google.com/104459088972113785980/posts) [the same](http://emory.academia.edu/briancroxall) [thing](http://guides.main.library.emory.edu/profile.php?uid=26477). The design of a professional site gives you a good sense of an academic’s professional identity. Doris Bremm has a [minimal online website](http://www.lcc.gatech.edu/~dbremm3/wordpress/) (including only her CV, a brief page about her Spring 2011 class, and a discussion of a film series she curated), whose design visually reflects her dissertation’s focus on visual art. The [pixelated background](http://www.zachwhalen.net/) to Zach Whalen’s site references his scholarly interest in video games. Anne Pollack’s site features [diagrams of hearts and pictures of researchers](http://lcc.gatech.edu/~apollock6/research/) in order to foreground her work in biomedicine and pharmaceuticals.

Where do I go from here? There are several different platforms you could potentially use when designing a professional site. [Some scholars](http://kathryncrowther.wordpress.com/) use a [simple WordPress.com site](http://stewartvarner.wordpress.com/). In fact, DiSC also has a [very useful workshop](http://www.archive.org/details/Creating_a_Web_Presence_II) on creating a WordPress.com site. I like WordPress because it is an easy platform to use and is open-source. Further, WordPress.com sites usually take very little time to set up, you can choose from many different themes, and update them when you want. I downloaded my own WordPress package from [WordPress.org](http://www.wordpress.org/) and use a site called [Hostmonster](http://www.hostmonster.com/) to be able to have my own domain name. While WordPress.com hosts websites, WordPress.org gives you the WordPress program to set up your own website whereever you want. Some people are fine with having  http://yourname.wordpress.com, but I like the idea that people can easily remember my URL [(“http://www.rogerwhitson.net](about:blank)”). You can pay for WordPress to host your domain name, but there are further advantages to using WordPress.org. These include the ability to extend the functionality of your website using plugins. I use several plugins on my site including [Blackbird Pie](http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/twitter-blackbird-pie/), which allows me to embed Tweets into my site; [WordPress GoodReads Bookshelf](http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wordpress-goodreads-bookshelf/), which displays images of the books I’m currently reading; and [Vimeo Quicktags](http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/vimeo-quicktags/), which allows me to embed videos uploaded to the Vimeo site easily. Some scholars also use [Drupal](http://www.drupal.com/), [code websites themselves](http://www.miriamposner.com/), or hire a professional developer but these are solutions that are often too complex and/or expensive to really help individual scholars. I am also able, should I decide to do so, to change the design of my theme by using [CSS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cascading_Style_Sheets) in the [Editor](http://codex.wordpress.org/Editing_Files) on the WordPress [dashboard](http://codex.wordpress.org/Dashboard_Screen).

Ultimately, the choice to create a professional website depends on a number of factors: who is your potential audience? Are the schools you are applying to invested in digital technology? Does your professional identity include technology in any significant way? While many academics may not want to create a professional website for precisely these reasons, controlling your online presence is becoming increasingly important as employers gain skill in using digital technology. Creating a professional website is one of many tools you can use to make sure the message potential employers get from the web is the message you intend.

## About Karen

I am a former tenured professor at two institutions--University of Oregon and University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. I have trained numerous Ph.D. students, now gainfully employed in academia, and handled a number of successful tenure cases as Department Head. I've created this business, The Professor Is In, to guide graduate students and junior faculty through grad school, the job search, and tenure. I am the advisor they should already have, but probably don't.