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## Why a Narrowly Defined Legal Scholarship Blog Is Not What I Want: An Argument in Pseudo-Blog Form

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# WHY A NARROWLY DEFINED LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP BLOG IS NOT WHAT I WANT: AN ARGUMENT IN PSEUDO-BLOG FORM

ANN ALTHOUSE\*

**If this is a pseudo-blog . . . should I be starting at the end and reading my way up to this top post?**

No. You can start here and keep reading downward, following the convention of printed writing. But I must admit that it's become hard for me to put new material underneath old material. I have an instinctive urge now to put the new material on top, to press everything below one notch closer to oblivion.

I'm adopting something of a blog format here because it's become so natural to me to write this way. The blog unlocks my thinking and creates a state of flow.<sup>1</sup> I love to open up a little window on my computer screen, type in a few sentences—composed as crisply and pithily as I can—hit “publish,” and let it go. I move on to the next window, which I don't have to connect to the previous post the way one paragraph is connected to the next in an essay. I get my momentum in part from the freedom not to connect every paragraph to the next. In this freedom not to connect things in the conventional way of the written page, I find new connections. Without the need, according to the regimentation of law review writing, to follow a theme or to produce a big idea, I have a chance to see something new, to think something new.

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1. See MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *FLOW: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF OPTIMAL EXPERIENCE* (1991). (Footnotes will have to take the place of links in this pseudo-blog.) Csikszentmihalyi describes “flow” in terms of eight components:

First, the experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing. Second, we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing. Third and fourth, the concentration is usually possible because the task undertaken has clear goals and provides immediate feedback. Fifth, one acts with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life. Sixth, enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions. Seventh, concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over. Finally, the sense of the duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours. The combination of all these elements causes a sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it.

*Id.* at 49. Isn't that an astoundingly accurate description of blogging? It is for me.

I love the simple, time-stamped structure of the blog, with each new item posted at the top. How seductive! How like life itself. In life, you can't skip backwards and forwards in time. You can only live in the present. A blog is like living—living in writing. What fun!

So I will indulge this now-overwhelming preference of mine to live freely in writing. (My blog readers know that's my motto, my reason for blogging.) But I will make a concession to print and not require you to read from the bottom up. I intend to be somewhat annoying, but not that annoying.

**But this is an argument.**

Though I'm amusing myself by writing in bloggish style, I'm also hoping that the form of the writing will carry some of the weight of the argument I intend to make, demonstrating why you might want to write, if not quite like this, in a way that allows the structure of the blog to work its magic on you. Write to be free, write for the joy of it, and don't think too hard about how you might make the blog count as scholarship or advance you professionally. Don't work! Play! It might go just as well for you as a more doggedly serious approach, and if you blog so that it is intrinsically rewarding, you'll have no loss if it amounts to nothing.

I have to confess that I balk at other kinds of writing. I feel so much resistance! But with blogging, bang, it's done. I can leave it to readers to hash out the details on the comments page, and my fellow bloggers link and argue with me elsewhere. Maybe I'll dip back in with my own contributions to the comments or updates to the post.

Meanwhile, I can hit the "create" button and have a clean window for a new little piece. Life goes on.

**There is always a fresh start in a new window.**

With a new post, I easily satisfy the prosaic orderliness of the blog: chronological order. There is always a fresh start in a new window. The next thing I write will belong where it is because of its time-stamp. No one can say this doesn't follow. The top post on my blog right now is a joke about a lollipop in a photograph I just took on my walk to the café where I'm writing this.<sup>2</sup> The next post could be about anything, perhaps about a news story that is happening now and that I will read about in ten minutes when I take a break. The previous post riffed on a *Washington Post* article about angry left-wing bloggers, who seem to blog to express raw anger,

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2. Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2006/04/madison-lollipop-sees-its-shadow-on.html> (Apr. 15, 2006, 9:26 a.m.). There just happened to be a red Tootsie Roll Pop casting a black shadow on the sidewalk in Library Mall. In the blog-enabled mindset, a found lollipop, as much as a new Supreme Court case, poses the question: What does it mean? What can I say because of this?

without much of a plan to get from their emotions to their political goals. I wrote:

Actually, I have to admit that I blog for self-expression, not with any expectation of affecting anything. In fact, I strongly favor blogging for the sake of blogging and mistrust bloggers who are tapping the medium because they have a goal that they want to accomplish. I have to think that the monumental talkfest that is blogdom has got to be having some effect. But I quite love the fact that the effect is far beyond the control of the individuals who take up blogging because they want to make something specific happen.<sup>3</sup>

I was thinking about writing my piece for this Bloggership Conference when I wrote that, so the blog was functioning as a notebook at that point—something that my readers would not have noticed.

**Bloggng sounds rather dangerous for a scholar.**

Of course it is! But dangerous things are exciting, and if you do them, you'll feel daring. When I first started to blog, it felt like a clandestine activity. I had no idea what my colleagues would think of what I was doing. This sense that it might be wrong made blogging thrilling, made me want to sneak time to do it.

But maybe you ought to think of ways to protect yourself. You might tick off some colleagues if you write about politics. People who don't quite get blogging might decide you're a lightweight if you talk about television. And, most disturbing for the scholar, you could lose the feeling for how to compose things on the grand scale. (We do still need to write law review articles, don't we?)

One idea is to rethink blog writing and make it more like law review writing: stick to your subject of expertise, make your posts into substantial essays, adopt an academic tone, and join a network of other lawprofs dedicated to the professionalization of blogging.

Yes, why don't you do that? Put your nose to the grindstone. If you do, I'll have all the fun. But read on, and let me try to convince you to blog for the intrinsic rewards of blogging.

**Doesn't blogging for the joy of it lower the value of the writing to the reader?**

The reader. Who is this reader? If you're a law professor thinking of blogging, who are you trying to reach? Who should you want to reach?

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3. Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2006/04/angry-lefties-online.html> (Apr. 15, 2006, 7:14 a.m.).

Maybe you picture other law professors and lawyers in your field, and, if you do, maybe you're also assuming that you must continually demonstrate your profundity and expertise.

Law professors and lawyers tend to be smart, broad-minded individuals. They can handle a rich mix of topics and attitudes. A query about the cultural impact of a scientific discovery, the identification of the precise hypocrisy in a politician's use of religion, a concise exegesis of one paragraph from Justice Breyer's new dissenting opinion, a prediction about how "The Sopranos" will end, a photograph of the lollipop on the sidewalk—your desired readers are perfectly capable of making their way through material like this without thinking ill of you. They're likely to think it's kind of cool. My experience is that these people get into the habit of dropping by on a daily basis to see what's going on in the little domain of my blog. The mix hooks readers.

By contrast, if you stick to serious, stodgy paragraphs in your area of professional expertise, these smart, broad-minded individuals might find you too small, too predictable. Why read a blog on a daily basis if it just feels like a law review? If you write a specialized legal blog, it might occur to people to check in with you if they happen to notice that there is a significant development in a field they remember is yours, and you may be able to get law bloggers with substantial traffic to link to you and send over a few hundred readers on these occasions. But it's much better to have a regular group of a few thousand readers who have become interested in knowing what you have to say. And, of course, if you do that, when you write a post on a law subject, you'll still get those links on the law blogs like *How Appealing*<sup>4</sup> and *SCOTUSblog*.<sup>5</sup> In fact, you're more likely to get the links that bring you more traffic if you're already visible due to your own substantial traffic.

Blogging on diverse topics, including very light ones, is not seen as undercutting your expertise by law professionals who understand how blogging works. These people are valuable readers who will bond with you if you have a personality, write clearly, say some sharp things, and post every day. They will check in frequently in the hope of being charmed, surprised, or stimulated in some new way. When you have a law-related post up, they'll be seeing that too. They'll be interested in what you, and especially you, have to say. In this way, the non-law posts reinforce the law posts.

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4. *How Appealing*, <http://howappealing.law.com>.

5. *SCOTUSblog*, <http://www.scotusblog.com/movabletype>.

**“You, a law professor!”**

Not everyone gets blogging. And even some of the people who do get it still hate the idea that the fun of blogging has to be shared with older bloggers,<sup>6</sup> with professors. They won't hesitate to blog: Don't you have a life? Who do you think you are? If you have a comments section they'll say it there. And maybe, being a law professor, you'll think you need to tolerate and even facilitate their free expression, even on your own pages.

If you blog outside the lawprof box, bloggers will make it their business to tell you to get back in the box.

(Typo: blox. Defining the typo: noun, the box you think you need to stay in to blog; verb, to blog within a defined box. Althouse avoids bloxxing.)

Some of my political and cultural observations have ticked off a few bloggers who reel out rhetoric along the lines of: “I can't believe this woman is a law professor.” I did not always have nerves of steel about that sort of thing, but I've developed them. I've been scolded with the phrase “you, a law professor” enough times to make it a running joke on my blog. Maybe you don't want to put up with taunts like that. I've been called “psychotic,” a “whore,” and—perhaps most damaging to my professorial reputation—a “right winger.” I can laugh about it now, but it took some getting used to. If I had not loved blogging so much, I wouldn't have put up with that sort of abuse long enough to learn to tolerate it.

**A supportive environment.**

The fact is, I have enjoyed a supportive environment at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Some of my colleagues seemed puzzled about blogging for a while. There is always the question, “How much time do you spend blogging?” And I have one colleague who invariably asks, “Who reads these things?” But it has been clearly expressed to me in a number of ways that the people at the school appreciate my blogging and see the twenty percent of it that deals with law as part of my work as an intriguing hybrid of scholarship and service. No one has ever suggested that the many posts about television, politics, and my personal life diminish the part of it that is about law. I didn't even get slammed—to my

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6. See Comment of Chris to Wonkette, <http://www.wonkette.com/politics/stanley-fish/stanley-fish-has-a-blog-167381.php> (Apr. 14, 2006, 3:34 p.m.) (in response to a post noting the new blog written by Prof. Stanley Fish at the *New York Times* website, commenting, “[a]nother step in the geezerfication of the blogosphere”). For a discussion of whether that's the correct Bluebook form for a blog comment, see Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2006/04/bluebooking-blog-comments.html> (Apr. 16, 2006, 12:27 p.m.).

face, at least—for admitting to voting, in Madison, for George W. Bush in the last election. Yes, it's true!

My sense is that people at my school like it when a law professor is shown to have different interests. No one can convince me that I did not land this job in the first place—back in 1984—because I was an artist, married (at the time) to a novelist. This is a place where we make a point of demonstrating to students that we are not all-law-all-the-time. During the semester, we have weekly sessions—called “Coffee and Donuts”—where a faculty member talks to students about something other than the law that he or she does. I've been tapped twice in two years to present a session about blogging.<sup>7</sup>

I was not the first Wisconsin law professor to take up blogging. I had two blogging colleagues whose boldness in blogging encouraged me to start,<sup>8</sup> and there are two others who started blogging soon after that.<sup>9</sup> It helps to have a group of bloggers egging each other on. None of my colleagues has taken up the all-law approach to blogging. Wisconsin-style blogging has always been free-spirited.<sup>10</sup>

Are you going to tell me your school is more staid and narrow-minded?

**How will you blog well if you don't find it intrinsically rewarding?**

A blog requires frequent updates. You are going to want to write several posts every day. Why, then, would you constrain your sources of inspiration? If writing your blog isn't going to be intrinsically rewarding, you won't be able to keep up the flow of posts that makes a blog a blog. Worse, you won't be exposing yourself to the power of the blog to stimulate your thinking, to open creative doors, to spur innovative writing, and to make new intellectual connections. A blog is a sketchbook, a place to jot down ideas, to see what you will say. I've said your readers will appreciate a rich mix of material, but so will you, and you will become more interesting to yourself if you give yourself the license to pop off on all sorts of topics. The blog format perfectly accommodates moving from one thing to another, in and out of professional expertise, and shifting

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7. See Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2004/09/such-proper-ideas-of-doughnuts.html> (Sept. 21, 2004, 5:55 a.m.) (discussing first session on blogging and determining that “doughnuts,” not “donuts,” is better spelling).

8. See Posting of Gordon Smith to Conglomerate, <http://www.theconglomerate.org/gordon.html>; The Other Side of the Ocean, <http://ninacamic.blogspot.com>.

9. See The Tonya Show, <http://thetonyashow.blogspot.com>; The Columnist Manifesto, <http://thecolumnistmanifesto.blogspot.com>.

10. An additional Wisconsin blogger with an influential, free-spirited style is sociology professor Jeremy Freese. See Jeremy Freese's Weblog, <http://jeremyfreese.blogspot.com>.

from humorous to serious. It is opening yourself up to this experience that makes blogging inherently pleasurable. You prefer drudgery?

**The blog is a machine for self-discovery.**

There is something that is true about me but quite likely not true about you. I can't frame a master agenda for blogging, because I have nothing that I want to say. I really do blog for the joy of blogging. I enjoy writing. I enjoy being in touch. I enjoy having readers. But I really have nothing that I am trying to say. I'm not pushing a cause.

Before I had a blog, I used to begin the day reading the *New York Times*. Back then, I would read an article and wonder if I had an opinion about it. How did other people manage to have so many opinions about these things? Now that I have a blog, I still begin the day by spreading the *New York Times* out on my dining table. I wake up in the morning knowing I'm about to blog, but I am agenda-less, with no plan of what to blog about. I need to see something that whispers "bloggable" to me, and, even then, I usually don't know what I'm going to say about it. There is that moment of emptiness, agitated by the uneasy knowledge that if I want to blog about this I will have to think up something of my own. This is bloggable, but I can't serve it up plain. Then, an idea. Thrilling!

Since I'm not opinionated, and I'm not politically partisan, a big part of blogging for me is pushing myself to generate an opinion on the topics I find myself drawn to. By blogging, I find out what interests me and what I have to say. The blog is a machine for self-discovery.

**"Views belong to people who are not artists."**

I didn't come to blogging with a store of opinions and a desire to influence people. My prelaw background is in art, and I've long identified with the Oscar Wilde saying, "Views belong to people who are not artists."<sup>11</sup> For me, blogging feels like an art project.

Last summer, there was a discussion in the lawprof blogs started by Douglas Berman, who asked, "How might we improve blogs as an academic medium?"<sup>12</sup> That provoked Stephen Bainbridge to say "Yuck," and assert that blogging is just for fun.<sup>13</sup> My response to Berman's question was:

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11. This quotation can be found at <http://anglik.net/oscarwilde.htm> ("No work of art ever puts forth views. Views belong to people who are not artists.").

12. See Posting of Douglas Berman to Prawfsblawg, <http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/2005/week31index.html> (Aug. 1, 2005, 1:47 p.m.).

13. ProfessorBainbridge.com, [http://www.professorbainbridge.com/2005/08/bloggers\\_just\\_w.html](http://www.professorbainbridge.com/2005/08/bloggers_just_w.html) (Aug. 1, 2005).



Well, jeez, Doug, if you're going to phrase it like that, you're going to propel me all the way over to hedonistic side, where I don't even want to be.

Berman's regular blog is "Sentencing Law and Policy,"<sup>14</sup> so you can see where he's coming from. He's in that part of the law blogosphere where each blog is dedicated to a particular area of legal scholarship. He asks how we can transform blogging into "a more respected and trusted academic medium."<sup>15</sup> He doesn't say, but I suspect his answer is that lawprofs need to dedicate their blogs to their specific areas of professional expertise—like Sentencing Law and Policy. No more politics and photographs and idle thoughts about music and TV.

No wonder Bainbridge responds with "Yuck." He calls blogging a "hobby," a nice *break* from professional obligations.<sup>16</sup>

If I had to pick, I'd go with Bainbridge, but in fact, I reject both the work and play models. Blogging means much more to me than either concept expresses. Blogging is *life*—in writing, in public. It's not a job or a break from a job. It's everything you might think about. Blogging is *art*.<sup>17</sup>

Maybe that sounds a little squishy to you. A little goeey. But I really mean it.

### **The conversation.**

Bloggng feels like a conversation with the world, and with a comments page, it's not just the blogger talking.

The comments thread that follows the post quoted just above begins:

Sippican Cottage said . . .

Improving blogs as an academic media. Hmmm. Is this the sort of fellow that calls comic books "graphic novels?"

Blogs are interesting because they are a window into other people's lives and thinking. They are a tavern, not a library.<sup>18</sup>

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14. Sentencing Law and Policy, <http://sentencing.typepad.com>.

15. Berman, *supra* note 12.

16. Bainbridge, *supra* note 13.

17. Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2005/08/blogging-is-it-serious-or-fun.html> (Aug. 2, 2005, 7:02 a.m.).

18. Posting of Sippican Cottage to Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2005/08/blogging-is-it-serious-or-fun.html> (Aug. 2, 2005, 7:54 a.m.).

LDM said . . .

Lo! If I could'st but work my will  
like a veritable nymph on the pill  
would'st the uncouth have their fill  
of verse and meter and prose n'er shrill  
verily to forgo the Blogosphere's usual swill  
Fie! Like a strumpet's fingers at the till  
most bloggers be'th naught but a politician's shill<sup>19</sup>

Sissy Willis said . . .

With a flash of ankle to RLS:  
The world is so full of such bloggable things,<sup>20</sup>  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.<sup>21</sup>

Ah! I love my commenters. Blogging with commenters feels like a variation on the law school Socratic classroom, not the Kingsfield Socratic method, but the original model of Socrates, where you offer up your dialogue free as a teacher for everyone. You set out the topic, and the smart, interesting people who have gathered around you converse—with you and with each other. It would not be the same set of people if you only talked about law and only in a scholarly style aimed at legal experts. By blogging on a multitude of topics in writing that ordinary, intelligent readers can understand and find appealing, you are creating a place where you will be able to talk about your ideas in a way that you can't among your colleagues.

Interacting with regular readers is a good reality check. The legal academy can be a hothouse nurturing bad ideas, convoluted theories, and fawning mutual citation. We flatter ourselves and each other and become self-involved and smug. The discipline of exposing your ideas to the general reader is salutary. But you cannot have this benefit unless you find a way to blog that attracts and holds the general reader.

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19. Posting of LDM to Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2005/08/blogging-is-it-serious-or-fun.html> (Aug. 2, 2005, 8:25 a.m.).

20. Here, Sissy Willis links to her own post carrying on the conversation. Sisu, [http://sisu.typepad.com/sisu/2005/08/blogging\\_is\\_lif.html](http://sisu.typepad.com/sisu/2005/08/blogging_is_lif.html) (Aug. 2, 2005). At the link we see that “RLS” is Robert Louis Stevenson, and following another link we see the original quote: “The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.”

21. Posting of Sissy Willis to Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2005/08/blogging-is-it-serious-or-fun.html> (Aug. 2, 2005, 3:58 p.m.).

### The blog as calling card.

My blog is an unpredictable mélange of subject matter, but it allows me to maintain a public profile that leads to other writing projects. Twice in the last year, in response to a quick post on a Supreme Court nomination, I received an e-mailed invitation to write a *New York Times* op-ed.<sup>22</sup> Not only did the blog win me the invitations, it gave me the nerve to accept them with very short deadlines. Twice last year, on a day when I launched right into blogging about a new Supreme Court case, I was invited to participate in a temporary group blog dedicated to the case.<sup>23</sup> One of those group blogs, which dealt with *Gonzales v. Raich*,<sup>24</sup> the medical marijuana case, prompted a law review to devise a quick symposium on the issue.<sup>25</sup> Accepting very tight deadlines, we wrote short articles for student editors who committed to working quickly, and the issue came out about five months after the case was decided.

### So, great, blogs are turning scholarship into a rat race! Why is this good?

I like to think blogging has something very positive to offer scholarship. Law review articles have become terribly bloated over the years. They've turned into books—tedious, unpublishable books.

Back in 1994, I wrote an essay complaining about grimly generic law review articles.<sup>26</sup> That piece ended on this note: “Perhaps you will allow yourself, if not to embark on some radical change in style and content, at least to write in a conversational tone, to write shorter, more provocative essays, to read widely and to use an occasional reference to literature or popular culture or to another discipline.”<sup>27</sup>

I really thought there would be a trend toward pithy, creative essays in law reviews. But instead, law review articles got longer and longer, to the point where the law review editors rebelled and imposed page limits.<sup>28</sup> It's laughable how off I was in predicting where law reviews would go, but I

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22. See Ann Althouse, *Separated at the Bench*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 1, 2005, at A27 (based on Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2005/10/scalito.html> (Oct. 31, 2005, 6:09 a.m.)); Ann Althouse, *Innocence Abroad*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 17, 2005, at A29 (based on Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2005/09/looking-at-foreign-law-for-support-is.html> (Sept. 14, 2005, 9:17 a.m.)).

23. See SCOTUSblog, [http://www.scotusblog.com/movabletype/archives/2005/06/mega\\_group\\_blog.html](http://www.scotusblog.com/movabletype/archives/2005/06/mega_group_blog.html) (June 6, 2005) (Mega Group Blog on *Gonzales v. Raich*); SCOTUSblog, [http://www.scotusblog.com/discussion/archives/ten\\_commandments/index.html](http://www.scotusblog.com/discussion/archives/ten_commandments/index.html) (July 1, 2005) (Ten Commandments).

24. 545 U.S. 1 (2005).

25. See Symposium, *Federalism After Gonzales v. Raich*, 9 LEWIS & CLARK L. REV. 743 (2005).

26. Ann Althouse, *Who's to Blame for Law Reviews?*, 70 CHI.-KENT L. REV. 81 (1994).

27. *Id.* at 85.

28. See Peter Page, *Law Reviews' New Gospel: Keep It Short; Some of the Nation's Top Law Reviews Issue a Joint Statement on Brevity*, NAT'L L.J., Feb. 28, 2005, at 4.

like seeing that deep longing I expressed for something that turned out to be blogging. I still wish that journal writing would improve, and I think blogging offers some helpful inspiration for scholarship.

Of course, there are dangers. It must be horrifying to those who want to chew over a new case for a year and a half to see all the bloggers pounce on it the minute it is released and frantically try to play through all the permutations on day one. And how galling it must be that we bloggers have our instant, ready-made audience that far exceeds the sum total of readers who will ever peruse your carefully composed and edited traditional article.

But there is still a place for law review articles. Those who write them will need to find more profound insights and will need to write in the crisper, clearer style that readers used to blogs will come to expect. If blogs create pressure to clean up flabby prose and abandon the self-indulgences of law review articles, that will be a very positive effect. Blogs won't replace more sustained, detailed scholarly projects, and by presenting a competing model of scholarly expression, they can raise the standards for law reviews.

**If blogging is a competing model of scholarly expression, shouldn't the bloggers try to win the scholarship game?**

No, no, absolutely not! There's some overlap between scholarship and blogging, but blogging works in a different way. Blogging is a competitive mode of writing because it is distinctly different. If you freight your blogging with the conventions and obligations of scholarship, if you make it consistently serious and dutiful, it won't be . . . bloggy.

You know what scholarly is, but do you know what bloggy is? Do I? All I know is that it's bloggy to blog to discover what is bloggy. Open yourself to the power of the blog, and give yourself a chance to see what happens. Don't shut down and be afraid and make what could be daring into a safe, dreary imitation of scholarship.

**Are you sorry that you dared to write this printed essay in the form of a blog?**

To tell you the truth, I'm a rather timid soul, and I had to agonize a lot about doing this. One benefit of blogging, to me, is that it's built up my courage to express myself. Controlling my space on the web, I've found a way of speaking that I surprise myself by feeling so confident about. Writing without editing, publishing after thinking for a few seconds . . . it takes some nerve. I didn't start out that way. Here's the second post I wrote:

I was in the midst of cleaning out my office, having just covered the floor with books and papers. I paused the direct streaming “Fresh Air” I was listening to and checked my e-mail, which included a colleague’s description of her reasons for starting a blog. I had just e-mailed her about my admiration for her and my own timidity: “I’ll have to think about getting up the nerve to do this sort of thing. It seems if you’re going to do it, you need to become somewhat chatty and revealing, which is a strange thing to do to the entire world.” Then it seemed altogether too lame not to go ahead and start the blog.<sup>29</sup>

Am I going to dare to send out this article, in this form? Is it too ridiculous? Too cute? All the inhibitions that I’ve overcome through blogging flood back. Let’s check with the aforementioned colleague:<sup>30</sup>

Okay, I read it and I liked it a lot. I don’t think it’s too cute at all. The airiness of it is like a fairy from a Shakespeare scene, menacing with the staid world around her. Very appropriate.

Interesting, too, are the points you make. Of course, I know your blogging style and credo well, yet you make points I’ve not thought much about until reading this piece. Points I don’t necessarily agree with— your rejection of the legal blog and the hobby blog, for instance. Your particular blend of 20% legal and 80% everything else works because you pick legal topics that are fascinating to the general public. The Supreme Court, Con Law issues—they lend themselves to the mix. Family law may too, but in a different, more sappy human drama sort of way.

Me, I prefer to think that, as a lawprof type, I have an intelligent take on the minor details of life that absorb us inside and outside the classroom. In that way, my being a lawprof is not irrelevant—my work indirectly influences my way of looking at my surroundings, in and out of the office. I need not go to the substance of a legal issue to be intelligent in my posts. I like being non-anonymous for that reason. Hey, a lawprof is having these experiences! Let’s follow along—as students, as people in and out of the academe. But of course, then it becomes more of a hobby blog.

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29. Althouse, <http://althouse.blogspot.com/2004/01/i-was-in-midst-of-cleaning-out-my.html> (Jan. 14, 2004, 11:06 a.m.).

30. The Other Side of the Ocean, <http://ninacamic.blogspot.com>.

Again, you blend topics well at Althouse. Others are not so smooth  
.....<sup>31</sup>

Well, enough of that e-mail.

I liked getting that encouragement, and I'm not really saying every lawprof blogger should want the twenty/eighty mix that I've fallen into as I've gone along my way living freely in writing, responding to whatever whispers "bloggable" to me. I'm only selling the beautiful power of the blog and saying—give yourself a chance to write whatever it is you would write if you didn't make a plan and didn't stultify yourself with aims and limitations.

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31. E-mail from Nina Camic, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin Law School, to Ann Althouse, Robert W. & Irma M. Arthur-Bascom Professor of Law, University of Wisconsin-Madison (Apr. 20, 2006, 2:18 p.m.) (on file with author).