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Blogging with Video

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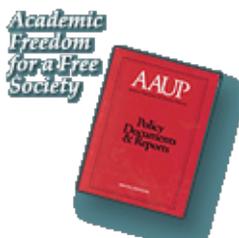
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Marc Bousquet's series of interviews includes a number of the figures appearing in this special issue of *Academe* devoted to faculty serving contingently, including Andy Smith (featured above), Monica Jacobs, Elizabeth Hoffman, and Cary Nelson. Future installments in the series include interviews with Joe Berry, Julie Schmid, Jane Buck, Stanley Aronowitz, and many others.

After promising my editor to launch a Weblog accompanying the release of [How the University Works](#) early this year, a fateful impulse occurred to me: "What the heck, why not make it a video blog?"

This was with no previous experience as either a blogger or videographer. About ten years ago, I shot exactly 19 minutes of video—one long take during a holiday event—and never again.

But my academic research in participatory culture made me curious about the relationship between social media and social movements, especially the prospects for activism and political documentary represented by video sharing.

There are many options for video sharing, but I eventually settled on YouTube, the single most meteoric tech start-up ever: first video uploaded in April 2005; company sold to Google exactly 18 months later for \$1.65 billion. While Google hasn't quite figured out how to profit on that investment, it made the purchase for the same reason I ended up selecting them as a platform: eyeballs, currently 80 million pairs viewing 3 billion videos every month.

Only a tiny fraction of the millions ever visit [my channel](#), which features short clips of interviews with faculty serving contingently (the [Faculty on Food Stamps](#) series), graduate student employees, and folks like Nelson and Berube with something to say about academic labor. The video clips have circulated in other media, including on Facebook—a story for another time—but on YouTube the couple of dozen video clips currently published have so far been screened about 55,000 times. That's respectable by academic standards, but a single music video by an obscure band will effortlessly record twice that figure.

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Only a fraction of YouTube's eighty million users publish content; of those that do, a much smaller fraction is original. A yet smaller subset is activist or political in nature, even during the recent election. A very high percentage of YouTube visitors are young people watching pirated Mariah Carey and Hannah Montana clips, and there are other places to publish activist video, of course, with audiences more targeted to one's concerns.

However, YouTube succeeded in part by enabling a "both/and" model of publishing: by choosing YouTube, you could also easily publish anywhere else that you wanted, because they provided script to embed the Youtube player in any other Web page—your MySpace page, Weblog, or organizational Web site, for instance. An exchange was set up: you send eyeballs to YouTube; YouTube sends eyeballs to you.

In the case of the channel for *How The University Works*, almost half the views come from my home Weblog and the larger group Weblogs where I cross-post (The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* [Brainstorm](#) and [The Valve](#)). The other half come from YouTube, though a much smaller fraction of those find their way from an individual video to the channel main page and from there to the Weblogs. This appears to be typical, even of much higher-traffic channels.

At first, I interpreted this as meaning that the eyeballs provided by YouTube were "low-quality" viewers, accidental screeners of clips in which they were only marginally interested. Certainly some of the comments from business-frat trolls support that theory.

Subsequently, however, I've begun to observe that video viewerships and text readerships don't overlap anywhere near as much as I anticipated. The overwhelming majority of visitors to Weblog pages with embedded video read and sometimes comment on the the text without stopping to play the video.

Contrary to my expectations, video viewers appear somewhat more likely to incorporate text readership into their viewing session than the other way around. Nonetheless, video viewers similarly don't necessarily have an interest in shifting gears to read text relevant to the topic of the video, in many cases appearing to prefer to jump to another video. These may be a matter of different kinds of Web users—different generations, different proclivities and literacies—or they may be the same users at different times, in different moods or modes of "content consumption." This is an area for much further research.

I've responded to this phenomenon a couple of ways. Initially I embedded video clips in a very short blog post—feeling that the video itself was the main "content," and not wanting to distract from it. (I was also typically exhausted from a marathon session of video editing, too impatient to publish the clip and too numb to say anything intelligent anyway.)

Later I tried embedding the clip in a related essay that didn't duplicate the clip's content. What seems to work best, however, is embedding the clip in a short blog post that provides an excerpted transcript of the interview. This functions as a teaser: if interested in the scrap of dialogue, visitors are likelier to want more, and exchange their "readership" mode for a "viewership" mode to satisfy that desire. This technique also raised the level of conversation from those contributors who don't play the video or mishear, misunderstand, or misrepresent—which is especially helpful on unmoderated discussion forums, like [Brainstorm](#).

The single most-viewed clip on the channel, ("[Play Ph.D. Casino!](#)"), however, reached 18,000 views mostly independent of choices I made about the text in which it was embedded. Instead, I entered it into a YouTube-sponsored forum on education during the primary season, where for a week or so it was one of the top links, largely because of the eloquence of the interview subject, Monica Jacobe, and possibly because the editors of the forum liked the trip-hop-themed trailer I'd created for the interview series. In any event, viewers in this forum were serially viewing clips, but incorporating modest amounts of text in their viewing—very brief introductions to the videos on YouTube's pages, but also reading and sometimes writing comments.

In future posts on [my blog](#), I'll talk about my adventures in sound recording, choosing a videocamera, editing styles, and weblog software, the limits of composing for YouTube, alternative publishing outlets, creating a trailer, and more.

Marc Bousquet is an associate professor of cultural studies and writing for new media at Santa Clara University. As a graduate student in 1997, he founded the online journal Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor, and earlier this year NYU Press released his book, How The University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation. [Chapter One](#) and [Chapter Four](#) are available for free download.



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