

# Editor's LETTER

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## The Skinned-Knee Bloggers and Networkers

It's time for the ACS national meeting, and the blogs are buzzing with all things chemistry. If you can't join us in Chicago (and even if you are there in McCormick Place!), blogs are a great way to catch up on what you missed and see another person's perspective on meeting-related activities. These days, even eight-year-olds (the skinned-knee demographic) are blogging and using social networking tools to stay in touch with their pals. In this editorial, we discuss how blogs and social networking have infiltrated the ACS and chemistry and highlight a new web trend that will make future generations of chemists more web-savvy than we can imagine.

For those familiar with blogs and who wish to stay up-to-date on meeting activities, tune into the ACS News Service Weblog, where veteran science writer and colleague Michael Woods finds the hot stories. *Chemical & Engineering News* will also host its own fun blog. Our news writers can't be everywhere at once, so review other web sites as well. There are now more than 30 chemistry blogs—too many to list here, but nothing a Google search can't provide.

If you want to learn more about how blogs, WIKIs (online collaborative sites), and social networking are used in chemistry, visit the ACS booth in the exposition hall and attend a few sessions sponsored by the Division of Chemical Information and the Division of Chemical Education. On Sunday, a session titled "Using Social Networking Tools to Teach Chemistry" (<http://oasys.acs.org/acs/233nm/techprogram/S23527.HTM>) highlights the many ways blogs, WIKIs, and other tools are enhancing chemistry education. To get an overview of how the ACS is using social software, listen to Michael Tennesand's talk in the second session. Sunday afternoon ends with Harry Pence discussing the future of social networking software in the chemistry classroom. On Tuesday, colleague David Martinsen has organized a session titled "The Evolving Network of Scientific Communication" (<http://oasys.acs.org/acs/233nm/techprogram/S22895.HTM>), where many of us involved in publishing will discuss our experiences and new tools that we expect will enhance your reading experience on the ACS Publications web pages.

It's clear that social networking is affecting how we teach and present chemical concepts today. But what does it hold for the future? One need only look at the under-14 crowd, who now have their own mechanism to blog and network on the web. Take my son, who's seven and a half, as an example. He recently received a Webkinz (Webkinz.com) stuffed frog. Unlike the simply plush toys of our generation, this one came with a URL and a password to a social networking site. So, now my son can bring his pet to life on the web, decorate its



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habitat, build it additional play rooms, and invite friends from school (and their Webkinz pets) to visit the frog's pad. Webkinz also allows the owner to keep track of the pet's happiness, hunger pangs, and overall health, much like the Tamaguchis of the late 1990s. You're probably wondering what this has to do with blogging and chemical biology. Nothing and everything—it has to do with social networking and how for a whole generation of kids (future scientists) blogs and social networking are now second nature. Imagine what these kids will expect from the ACS and our journals 20 years from now as they start their scientific careers.

Many such social networking sites target the skinned-knee demographic, and most resemble those for adults. Sites like ClubPenguin.com, Whyville.net, and Habbo.com are fantasy virtual worlds that resemble Second Life ([www.seconddlife.com](http://www.seconddlife.com)), the 3D online planet built, owned, and inhabited by more than 4 million members. Others, like Imbee.com, resemble MySpace and provide a place for kids to create blogs, post photos, and share music. Both Disney ([www.disney.com](http://www.disney.com)) and Nick ([www.nicktropolis.com](http://www.nicktropolis.com)) also offer social networking sites for the younger set, which means that most 7- to 14-year-olds (who cannot participate in MySpace) now have their own space. Warren Buckleitner, editor of *Children's Technology Review*, notes that these sites provide educational value. "These prepare [kids] for services like MySpace, WIKIs, and blogs," Buckleitner says, "the same tools that are becoming part of the workforce and culture in general" ([www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2007-02-26-nickelodeon-disney-social-sites\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2007-02-26-nickelodeon-disney-social-sites_x.htm)).

The take-home message is that we should continue to expand our understanding and usage of blogs, WIKIs, and social networking tools so that we can improve our communication with the younger generations of chemists and future ACS members. Start today by catching up on the ACS national meeting at your favorite chemistry blog. Attend a few sessions to see how these technologies can help you as an educator. Try your hand at editing our ChemBio WIKI, and write about interesting papers in our WIKISpot pages. Your kids and grandkids will appreciate that you understand their web tools and might even invite you to join their network.

See you in Chicago!



Evelyn Jabri  
Executive Editor