**Research Communications in Social Media**AURA Research Course 4

Course Pack
March 2016



**About the African Universities’ Research Approaches (AURA) Capacity Development Programme**

The **African Universities’ Research Approaches Programme (AURA)** sought to strengthen research and teaching practices in East Africa through a blended learning approach – mixing online and face to face courses.  AURA, a two-year programme, funded by UK AID, was implemented from November 2014 to September 2016 by the project consortium, consisting of: the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa (ITOCA), and Loughborough University.

The overarching aim of the programme was to address continent-wide goals to support African universities to co-create a context-specific educational framework that would: address the need for locally generated research knowledge by skilled researchers (and graduates); and support faculty to nurture strong research and information capabilities by modelling how to create research-rich, and pedagogically innovative, teaching and learning environments.

AURA completed the following deliverables:

* The co-development of three research capacity courses that provided targeted support to academics (and students) to design, develop, and peer review, 5 responses to ‘live’ research calls, and strengthen current post-graduate research proposals
* Two teaching courses that strengthened capacity to design people-centred and technology-enhanced learning environments using evidence-informed teaching practices
* Application was a key aspect of the educational framework, and all participants were required to demonstrate comprehension of the course content through assessed course assignments, dialogic tasks and the development of curriculum enrichment plans.
* The programme took a cross-organisational approach by working with academics, technical and administrative staff in multi-disciplinary teams (called the ALIRT teams) to identify how to cost-effectively implement and support the achievement of institutional goals

The following educational framework is available to download through a creative commons license as individual course packs:

Three research courses:

* Orientation to different research approaches – known as R1
* Orientation to ‘researcher-led’, analytical research approaches - known as R2
* Research communications in social media – known as R4

Two teaching courses:

* Introduction to Teaching and Learning theory – known as T1
* Technology-enhanced learning approaches – known as T3

All of the course packs are aimed at educators in higher education institutions primarily in Africa but are also applicable to educators and other training/service providers in other parts of the world. Resources are can be re-used, adapted, or remixed (where indicated by the license) as long as the resulting materials are fully attributed.

AURA, a two-year programme, funded by UK AID, was implemented from November 2014 to September 2016.



To watch the video [R4-V01], please click here: <https://youtu.be/Yho7JFDwrpg>

Siobhan Duvigneau, AURA Programme Manager, provides an introduction to the AURA Programme, to the consortium partners and participating partners from East Africa, and gives an overview of the aims and rationale of the programme.

**The AURA Programme Consortium and Partners**

The AURA Programme, led by the Institute of Development Studies in partnership with the Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa and Loughborough University, worked with four universities - Jimma University, Kenyatta University, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) and Strathmore University, and was aimed at academics working in health, business and other academic disciplines.

**Acronyms**

| ALIRT | Academic department, Library, ICT Services, Research unit and Teaching unit |
| --- | --- |
| AURA | African Universities’ Research Approaches Programme  |
| R4\_D1-S1 | Research Communications in Social Media Course One-Day 1-Session 1 |
| IDS | Institute of Development Studies, UK |
| ITOCA | Training and Outreach Centre for Africa |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| LO | Learning Outcome |
| R1 | Research Course One |
| R4 | Research Course Four |
| R4-H01 | Teaching Course One-Handout 01 |
| R4-P01-S1 | Teaching Course Three -PowerPoint Presentation 01-Session 1 |
| R4-TV01 | Teaching Course One-Transcript of Video 01 |
| R4-V01 | Teaching Course Three-Video 01 |
| T1 | Teaching Course One |
| T3 | Teaching Course Three |

**List of resources**

**Course Overview**

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| **Resource Unique Identifier** | **Title & Description** |
| R4\_Course Overview | **Overview**: AURA Research Course 4 (R4). |
| R4-V01 | **Resource: Siobhan Duvigneau introduces the AURA Programme (course overview).** Siobhan Duvigneau. AURA Programme Manager, provides an introduction to the AURA Programme, to the consortium partners and participating partners from East Africa, and gives an overview of the aims and rationale of the programme. [Link: <https://youtu.be/Yho7JFDwrpg>] |

**Face to Face Activities**

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| **Resource Unique Identifier** | **Title & Description** |
| R4\_D1-S1 | **Session 1 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P01-S1 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 1: Introduction to R4 Course & Outcomes.** The presentation outlines the learning outcomes of the course. |
| R4\_D1-S2 | **Session 2 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P02-S2 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 2: What is a blog?** The presentation outlines the learning outcomes for the session. Learners are asked to consider (and respond to) the questions ‘what is a blog?’ and ‘why blog in an academic context?’ Useful definitions and a case study are provided. Learners are asked to discuss a different blog post (four in total) in groups and to establish the characteristics and main perspectives (or approaches) presented. |
| R4-H01 | **Handout Session 2: What is a blog? People are sticky, The Ed Techie, Martin Weller**. This handout provides an example of a successful blog that is personalized in approach. Martin Weller builds on his practice so that his work is constantly evolving. He has a first person, informal voice and often uses his blog to capture reflective learning. Professor of Educational Technology at the Open University in the UK. |
| R4-H02 | **Handout Session 2: Why we should stop talking about ‘desertification’, Zimbabweland, Ian Scoones.** This is an example of a professional blogger and shows how useful a blog can be for disseminating the learning arising from research (or research communications) in an academic setting as well as for participating in scholarly debate. Ian Scoones is a research fellow based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK. |
| R4-H03 | **Handout Session 2: How to fix Nigeria? 7 key issues by Oluseun Onigbinde, Africa Research Institute.** This is an example of a guest blogger whose post has been republished on an institutional blog. The Africa Research Institute (ARI) publish their own researchers’ blogs and also those of external experts or guest bloggers - the blogs are disseminated through ARI’s networks. In this blog post, Oluseun Onigbinde expresses strong opinions and provides an argued position. This is an example of a professional blog that is informal and conversational in tone. |
| R4-H04 | **Handout Session 2: Our problem isn’t corruption, It’s lawlessness, Nerima Wako, Siasa Place.** This is an example of a personalized approach to blogging as this blog post takes the writers’ personal perspective as a starting point for political commentary. This post is by Nerima Wako and was published by Siasa Place. Using a personalized perspective as a way of writing about political experience is an approach that Siasa Place champions. This post reflects the bloggers’ direct, personal, opinions. |
| R4\_D1-S3 | **Session 3 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P03-S3 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 3: Reflective practice.** The presentation outlines the learning outcomes for the session. Learners are asked to consider (and respond to) the questions ‘reflective learning?’, ‘reflective writing’ and ‘how would you use reflective learning to support your research communications?’ Learning theories and definitions are provided. In an activity, learners are asked to consider, in pairs, how a reflective learning statement could be deepened.  |
| R4\_D1-S4 | **Session 4 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P04-S4 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 4: Developing voice in reflective writing.** The presentation outlines the learning outcomes for the session. Learners are asked to consider (and respond to) the question ‘what do we mean by writer’s voice?’ and to consider that a first person professional voice and an informal conversational tone is required for blogging. Two creative writing techniques (free writing and writing against the clock) are introduced as ways to practice reflective writing in the first person. Learners apply these techniques to generate reflective writing on a significant aspect of their research. Learners are then invited to identify two or three aspects or topics from their writing that they would like to expand into a blog post later in the course. |
| R4\_D1-S5 | **Session 5 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P05-S5 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 5: What makes a blog post more effective?** The purpose of this session is to enable learners to explore what makes a blog post more effective; to practice writing a blog post on an aspect of research (drawing on the topics learners identified earlier in the course); and to give (and receive) critical feedback on their writing in a peer support session using a rubric. |
| R4-H05 | **Handout Session 5: “Traffic Lights” markers for learners to indicate answers to quiz in Session 5: Writing an effective blog post.** These can be printed out and colour photocopied onto card (if that is an option). A cheaper option, however, would be to prepare white A4 sheets marked with A, B, C, D which can be also photocopied onto white card. Learners in Session 5 will need one set each.  |
| R4-H06 | **Handout Session 5: Ten tips for writing an effective blog post.** This handout provides ten practical ways to make a blog post more effective so that when a reader is ‘scanning’, they will take away a clearer impression of the message.  |
| R4-H07 | **Handout Session 5: Blog Structure Template.** This handout provides a basic structure or template for writing a blog post for the first time along with prompting questions/statements to support learners in the writing process. |
| R4-H08 | **Handout Session 5: Assessing a Blog Post (rubric).** Thishandout provides an assessment form with criteria and scoring for learners to assess one another’s blog posts. The criteria includes: written English, content, structure and format, length, and referencing indicated.  |
| R4\_D1-S6 | **Session 6 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P06-S6 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 6: Getting your blog post published.** The purpose of this session is to enable learners to publish the blog posts they have written a blogging tool/social media platform; to foster confidence in interacting in an online environment by have the opportunity to comment on other blog posts online; and to comprehend how social media (in particular Twitter) can be utilized to grow an audience |
| R4\_D1-S7 | **Session 7 Face to Face Course (Day 1): Session Plan.** Guidance notes for facilitators/educators. |
| R4-P07-S7 | **PowerPoint Presentation Session 7: Closing session.** The purpose of this session is to bring learners together and conduct a summative assessment using the ‘mood monitor.’ |

**Process Definition**

AURA R4 – Research Communications in Social Media – is envisaged as a one day, face-to-face course, which has been organised into 7 sessions. Please note that the timings are **indicative only** and should be adapted by facilitators to the context and audience – the course includes material for **more than one day** so that facilitators can adapt the focus of this course to suit their contexts. R4 was envisaged for academics new to social media and blogging so will need to be adapted for an audience with different levels of experience in this field.

Each session file contains the following:

1. Overall Description and indicative time of delivery
2. Learning outcomes
3. Recommended modality (i.e. face-to-face or online)
4. Overview of the main learning activities
5. Formative assessment strategies
6. Course material recommended to deliver the session
7. Presentation’s slides with facilitation instruction (text in bold), a script for the facilitator as a support for the delivery of the session (text in italics), and a section on the formative assessment techniques recommended (text underlined)

The course content was organised into independent sessions, discrete units that users could pick and choose from, without necessarily having to deliver the entire course. This cost-effective approach to e-learning aimed to design objects that future users could easily re-use, edit, and tailor to different contexts, levels of expertise, and target audiences. However, a significant level of dependency among the sessions of the course is preserved and made explicit in the facilitation instructions.

**Technical Aspects**

Research Course 4 is recommended as a one day course. However, we encourage the users of this course pack to reflect on their own learning environment and contextualise the materials to fit their own learning context. The duration of sessions is also indicative and can be expanded if the sessions are delivered in a context that allows for more time.

Research Course 4 is designed as a face-to-face course which utilizes a blogging, or social media, platform – in this session learners are encouraged to post a blog post that they have written in an earlier session online and then to comment on one another’s posts in the online environment. There are a number of online platforms and social media spaces which could be utilized for this session. However, as social media platforms and usage are constantly evolving, it is not practical to offer a prescriptive approach for the technical aspects of Research Course 4. In order for learners to share their blog posts online as part of this course, it is therefore recommended that the facilitator chooses an online blogging platform which will need to be set up in advance of the course. The facilitator should then adapt the appropriate as indicated in the specific session to their choice of platform.

The following platforms may be considered for the blogging platform in the course, however, this is not an exhaustive list:

* Blogger help (2016) Available at: <https://support.google.com/blogger/?hl=en#topic=3339243> (Accessed: 12 September 2016).
* Google+ help (2016) Available at: <https://support.google.com/plus/?hl=en-GB#topic=6320376> (Accessed: 12 September 2016).
* Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/> (Accessed: 13 September 2016).
* WordPress. Com: Create your stunning website (2015) Available at: <https://wordpress.com/create/> (Accessed: 12 September 2016). It is important to take into consideration that setting up, and piloting, the platform will need to be completed in advance of the course to ensure the smooth-running of the technical session in the course.

It is also important to take into consideration that learners should be able to publish their blog posts (and to comment on each other’s posts) during the session and the facilitator will therefore need to familiarize him/herself with any permission requirements, and other technicalities, of the platform in advance of the course. The facilitator will need to ensure that permissions are appropriately set up for each learner either in advance of the course itself, or, if this is not possible, during the morning and lunchtime break.

This final session works best if there is a **co-facilitator** on hand and who is also familiar with the blogging platform. It is recommended that each has a clear role as follows:

* **Co-facilitator** manages any technical issues that may arise during the session and ensures that each learner has approval to access to the platform
* **Facilitator** circulates within the group to provide support to learners (for example, individuals may need support in getting onto the platform, or in finding their way around the platform for the first time in order to complete a variety of tasks usual in using social media spaces - such as: setting up a profile, posting their blog post, commenting on other learners’ contributions) and foster learner confidence in an online environment. Technical issues may also arise that need referring to the co-facilitator to manage, or resolve.

Finally, the blogging platform should provide learners with a secure environment; therefore, it is advised to reflect on whether the platform is open (public) or closed (private to members) and the related positive and negative aspects of both options (security). Either way, participants should be made aware of the status of the blogging platform that they are working in, and whether their contributions are shared with their peers only or with a wider audience.

It is recommended that Research Course 4 is a one day, face-to-face course. The online element (R4\_D1-S6) is envisaged as being supported in the face-to-face environment in order to the build the capacity and confidence of learners within a group setting, so that they can be applied by individuals in their regular research communications.

**Research Course 4 Summary - Research communications in social media**

AURA Research Course 4 focuses on research communications in social media, and aims to help learners to develop their informal, professional writing skills (blogging) in an academic context, to explore how reflective practices can enrich understanding arising from research practices, and how social media can support the dissemination of research communications to a wider audience.

This is a practical, inter-active course which runs over one day and explores a number of areas:

* Supporting learners to explore how reflective learning can enrich research communications and informal/professional writing
* Supporting learners to develop an informal, professional tone and voice suitable for blogging
* Exploring what makes an effective blog post and how to structure a blog post
* Providing practical opportunities for participants to hone their critical reflection and writing skills through writing exercises and a peer group session
* Using social media tools and platforms to publish and promote research communications (e.g. Google+ and Twitter) and to respond to each other’s blog posts online.

The course runs over one day and is designed around five main areas. One area explores what a blog is, the different approaches to blogging and encourages learners to take a critical look at a selection of existing blogs through a group exercise.

Learners will then explore how reflective practices (thinking, learning and writing) can support the development and articulation of deeper insights into research practices for research communications.

Learners will then explore the concept of ‘writers voice’ and how two simple (creative) writing techniques (free writing and writing against the clock) can help support reflective learning as well as in developing a potentially new (first person) informal, professional tone and voice appropriate for research communications (blogging). There is a short individual writing exercise designed for learners to practice these techniques in connection with their own research practices. Learners will be encouraged to discuss, in pairs, the ideas (and experiences) this exercise generates and to each decide on a topic related to their research that they will write a blog post about in the later writing session in (this will take place in Session 5).

Learners will then look more critically at what makes a blog post more (or less) effective and how they can structure a blog post. This is a practical session in which learners will be given the opportunity to write their own blog posts in a writing session (using the topic they chose earlier in Session 4), and they will then work in pairs to provide peer support to one another and to critically review each other’s blog posts using a rubric.

Finally, learners will explore how research communications can be published, and disseminated, through social media channels. This will be a practical session in which learners will have the opportunity to post the blog posts they have produced in the earlier sessions onto a blogging or social media platform (e.g. blogger, Google + etc.) and to comment on one another’s blog posts in an online environment. The final part will focus on how social media (Twitter) can be utilized to disseminate blog posts to a wider audience.

**Face-to-face Course: Overview**

AURA Research Course 4 focuses on research communications in social media, and is planned for delivery over one day.

The course is structured as follows:

Session 1 introduces the course and course outcomes.

Session 2 focuses on what blogging is, the typical characteristics of a blog and some of the different approaches that can be taken by bloggers. This session also explores how blogging can be utilized to share learning arising from research practice to a wider audience. Learners will be given the opportunity to assess a selection of blogs and to draw conclusions from their findings about the different characteristics and some of the different approaches bloggers in an academic (or African) context have taken.

Session 3 explores the value of reflective practices (learning, thinking and writing) for research communications as practices which encourage deeper insights about research findings to arise and utilized for research communications (blogging).

Session 4 introduces the concept of ‘writers voice’ and proposes two (creative) writing practices (free writing and writing against the clock) and how these can support the development of a (first person) informal, professional voice for blogging.

Session 5 examines what makes a blog post more (or less) effective and how a blog post can be structured. This session provides learners with a writing exercise in which they will each write a blog post, as well as a peer learning exercise in which learners will work in pairs to provide critical feedback on each other’s blog posts.

Session 6 provides the learners with the opportunity to publish their blog posts on a blogging platform, and to comment on each other’s blog posts. This session also explores how social media (i.e. Twitter) can be utilized to disseminate research communications (blog posts) to a wider audience.

Session 7 is concludes the course with a short formative assessment (mood monitor) in which learners will have the opportunity to reflect on what they have experienced.

**Overall learning outcomes:**

By the end of the course, learners will be able to:

1. Describe typical characteristics and approaches of different blogs in an academic context
2. Recognise the benefits of blogging for articulating learning arising from research
3. Recognise the benefits of reflective practices (thinking, learning, writing) to enrich research learning and blogging
4. Apply writing techniques to develop an informal (first person) professional writing voice/tone for research blogging
5. Write one blog post (500 to 700 words) about an aspect of their research
6. Assess the effectiveness of each other’s blog writing using a rubric and referring to ten tips for effective blog posts
7. Upload / share their blog posts on a blogging (or social media) platform and respond to other blog posts online.