

2007

## MERLOT Delivered to Your Desk

Margaret M. Hansen EdD, MSN, RN  
*University of San Francisco*, [mhansen@usfca.edu](mailto:mhansen@usfca.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.usfca.edu/nursing\\_fac](http://repository.usfca.edu/nursing_fac)



Part of the [Nursing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hansen, Margaret M. EdD, MSN, RN, "MERLOT Delivered to Your Desk" (2007). *Nursing and Health Professions Faculty Research and Publications*. Paper 13.  
[http://repository.usfca.edu/nursing\\_fac/13](http://repository.usfca.edu/nursing_fac/13)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Nursing and Health Professions at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nursing and Health Professions Faculty Research and Publications by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing

Issue: Volume 25(1), January/February 2007, pp 20-22

Copyright: © 2007 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc.

### **MERLOT Delivered to Your Desk**

Maag, Margaret EdD, RN

Section Editor(s): Thede, Linda Q. PhD, RN,-BC

Margaret Maag, EdD, RN, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of San Francisco.

Key Points:

- \* RSS defined
- \* Merlot and RSS Opportunities
- \* Advantages of using MERLOT RSS

Approximately 75 million people living in the United States and Great Britain use real simple syndication (RSS) "feeds," also known as "readers," via the Internet without actually knowing what RSS is all about. Researchers indicate 17% to 32% of RSS users know they are using RSS feeds every day to access their favorite Internet sites in a time-efficient manner.<sup>1</sup> Keeping abreast of Web log (blog) entries and daily news via RSS feeds is becoming a technology du jour. More and more people are accessing the principal names on the Internet, such as BBC News Headlines, ABC News, CNET, and Amazon.com, via RSS feeds. Perhaps you are one of the individuals who can spot the petit orange RSS or extensible mark-up language (XML) icons on almost all of today's Web sites but you do not have a clear understanding of the burgeoning technology.

So, what is RSS? It is a process that allows Internet publishers to instantaneously distribute up-to-the moment information to individuals subscribed to their information sources on the Internet. When your favorite Internet site updates content, as a subscriber, you will instantly receive a synopsis of the updated information and a link via an e-mail or a syndication service, such as Feedster (<http://www.feedster.com/>), NewsGator (<http://www.newsgator.com/home.aspx>) or Feedburner (<http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/home>). These RSS services are open-source and free to use. In addition, authors of blogs, podcasts, video blogs (vlogs), as well as educators, use RSS as a publishing choice to share with their audience filtered online resources (<http://m-learningupdate.blogspot.com/>). "RSS is the engine that drives Web 2.0 applications. It is the critical cog in enabling wide dissemination of information and the development of many dynamic displays of new content" (personal communication, Ray Schroeder, April 16,

2006). Microsoft Corporation announced the development of "extensions" that may be appended to RSS feeds that allow two or more people to exchange and update content in a two-way manner via RSS.<sup>2</sup> For example, if two people wish to write a paper and want to share content with one another they may publish their individual paper using RSS and its specific file extensions and then subscribe to one another's feed. This is an excellent example of the power that RSS has for publishing content and allowing two authors to share ideas while working simultaneously on a project.

## MERLOT AND RSS

The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) repository offers various peer-reviewed learning objects for educators and learners alike (<http://www.merlot.org/Home.po>). Each learning object, or "digital resource," is assigned to one of six main categories: simulations, animations, tutorials, collections, lecture/presentations, and reference materials.<sup>3</sup> According to McMartin,<sup>4</sup> MERLOT's online resources may support pedagogical research, designing curriculum, instruction, learning, learning assessment, and providing important feedback to students. Moreover, MERLOT offers registered users a Web page that clearly lists and provides 32 free-of-charge RSS feeds (personal communication, Martin Bastian, April 23, 2006) that disseminate the most recently peer-reviewed and submitted learning materials to the online repository (<http://rss.merlot.org/html/RSSSubmit.php>).

The 32 feeds represent diverse disciplines or content categories, such as biology, business, health science, history, information technology, mathematics, music, and world languages, to name a few. "In many cases, people turn to MERLOT with a specific need in mind. So, the majority of the users are best served by the provided 'search tool,' or perhaps they may meet their needs by browsing by category from MERLOT's home page link. They don't need the RSS feed. The RSS feed serves a different need. It is for the person who is focused on a discipline or topical area. The feed keeps these people up-to-date on new learning objects as they are released in their field" (personal communication, Ray Schroeder, April 16, 2006). However, Martin Bastiann, MERLOT's Webmaster, explained that an upgrade was planned for summer 2006 and "we will be offering a feature in a new version of the Web site that will allow you to create an RSS feed out of any query" (personal communication, April 23, 2006). The addition of a dynamic XML file generator that will create a RSS feed upon a key search term will assist educators in keeping current in their field and when developing an up-to-date curriculum for their learners.

The MERLOT feeds are provided for anyone who wishes to display the syndicated

MERLOT content on a personal Internet site or news reader, such as the complimentary NewsGator. Individuals may choose a content area of interest, such as health science and teaching with technology, and display the most recently reviewed and accepted learning objects at a particular site (<http://onlinelearningupdate.com/merlot.htm>). An example of most recently peer-reviewed materials in MERLOT Health Science and most recent materials in MERLOT teaching with technology are illustrated in Figure 1. Specific directions are provided by MERLOT's Webmaster on how to showcase MERLOT's most recent learning resources at a personal site of choice (<http://rss.merlot.org/>), and another easy method of creating a Web page as a home for your current MERLOT learning materials is to fill in provided text areas of a Java Script RSS box viewer (<http://p3k.org/rss/?setup=true>). Furthermore, various institutions of higher education offer workshops on how to add MERLOT RSS feeds to e-learning platforms, such as "WebCT" and "BlackBoard 6" (<http://www.unclt.org/initiatives/compendium/resources/merlot-rss-blackboard6.doc>).

#### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF MERLOT DELIVERED TO YOUR DESK?

Creating your own personal MERLOT RSS sanctuary may add value to your educator's toolbox. Imagine sharing all types of learning objects with your colleagues and students, as well as keeping abreast of the latest simulations, animations, tutorials, and presentations without spending endless time searching for the perfect learning tools for your students. In addition, the MERLOT staff will peer review submissions to the online repository, thus eliminating you having to use your precious time filtering and reviewing endless information on the Internet. Furthermore, MERLOT RSS will promote social networking with other educators and clinicians in your field of interest (<http://www.rsscontact.com/RSS2/>) and perhaps encourage others to use learning objects as a part of the nursing research process. There is a factor of "fun" and "curiosity" involved in discovering new learning objects that may be shared via an open source repository and simply delivered to your desktop. It is an exciting time to be an educator because a plethora of technological tools enhance learners' healthcare knowledge. "Knowledge should be free!" (personal communication, Graham Wright, June 11, 2006) and therefore easily accessible to all learners in today's global society.

#### REFERENCES

1. Sherpa M. 50 million US & UK RSS users do not know they use RSS: how to reach them. Available at: <http://www.marketingsherpa.com/barrier.cfm?ident=24184>. Accessed June 18, 2006. [[Context Link](#)]

2. Niccolai J. Microsoft making RSS a two-way street. Info Worlds. Available at: [http://www.infoworld.com/article/05/11/23/HNmicrosoftrss\\_1.html](http://www.infoworld.com/article/05/11/23/HNmicrosoftrss_1.html). Accessed June 18, 2006.

3. Sewell J. Best practices in teaching design: using online learning resources in MERLOT. *Comput Inform Nurs*. 2006;24(3):129-131. [Request Permissions](#) [[Context Link](#)]

4. McMartin F. MERLOT: a model for user involvement in digital library design and implementation. *Journal of Digital Information*. September 9, 2004;5(3). [[Context Link](#)]