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## *Designing a Course Web Site to facilitate Student Learning: Sheridan Center Faculty Seminar*

Hannelore Rodriguez-Farrar

Throughout this past summer, about forty members of the Brown faculty from a wide variety of departments have participated in a four-part Sheridan Center seminar on the development of course web pages. Developed by Assistant Directors Vicki McKenna and Hannelore Rodriguez-Farrar, this interdisciplinary seminar has also been discussing in the impact of the Internet on the teaching and student learning in biweekly luncheons which began after the first session. CIS and Library staff have provided crucial technical support for the seminar and its participants. A second, concurrent, seminar will begin in the fall semester 1999, so watch for announcements.

Session One of the faculty seminar addressed the initial issues to consider in creating a course web page. A web page can be a valuable addition to the management of a course. It has the potential to provide course documentation, current information, and supplemental information. Information on a web page is accessible off-site and across platforms. A web page can be an avenue to address learning style differences among the students and also style differences between the teacher and the students.

However, effective web pages are based on careful thought and strategic planning designed to promote student learning. Questions initially considered by the seminar participants include:

- Why do you want a course web site?
- How do you expect the site to forward your course content?
- How will the site be integrated into the course?

- How should students use the site?
- What other method(s) might work as well/better?

Initial strategic planning for effective student learning must include thinking through the functional organization, design considerations (such as site organization, text, and graphics), copyright and fair use issues, student research policies and practices (including plagiarism), University support for instructional technology (classroom equipment, technical assistance, etc.) and equity issues. Faculty considered how to choose the most appropriate software to use in developing their course web site. Options include Course Publisher or other *html* editors such as Microsoft's FrontPage, Adobe's Page Mill, or Macromedia's Dreamweaver, etc. Choice of software affects the visual layout of the course, and thus has an impact on conduct, content and student use.

Student access to the course web page is another consideration, whether for initial "shopping" or for use throughout the semester. Course Publisher is directly linked to BOCA and the Registrar's Office. However, some departments have their own server (such as Sociology, Geology, Engineering, Computer Science, etc.) and faculty reviewed the most effective means of making their course web sites available.

The diverse group of faculty from across the University addressed a number of related issues of instructional technology at Brown, such as copyright and fair use policies, including the issue that a course web page constitutes intellectual content. Research policies and practices stirred concern and debate. Students are increasingly using only the Internet for research and other course materials. There is evidence that print source materials in the Library are being excluded to the detriment of the development of competent research skills. Students want course web pages which will make research easy, and many faculty members feel pressured to deliver them, regardless of whether or not they specifically serve the educational goals of the course. While students may be surfing the net for information, faculty are concerned over the quality of the materials on the web and the search capabilities of most generic search engines. Michael Jackson's article in this issue of *The Teaching Exchange* on how the research librarians can help faculty train and teach students to use the Internet with greater discretion and critical evaluation can provide faculty with solutions to this problem.

As part of the design process faculty also considered what their needs would be for institutional support for instructional technology as well as equity issues. Equity issues raise the problem of uneven resources for faculty and students across departments, which affects the functionality and effectiveness of the web site for all Brown students.

Part Two of the Seminar has stretched over the summer months. It has involved individual and group meetings of the participants with the Assistant Directors to discuss

the process of developing their course web site. The opportunity for exchange across disciplines has indicated the commonalities as well as differences across the University.

Part Three will be held in October and will focus on assessing the impact of the course web site at mid-semester. Finally in January, the entire seminar will reconvene for Part Four to review the process and to make recommendations for improving strategic planning for effective use of instructional technology at Brown.

For more specific information on the issues discussed in the seminar, see the "Teaching Tips" page in this issue of *The Teaching Exchange*. The Sheridan Center home web page (<http://Sheridan-Center.stg.brown.edu>) has a **new** link under "Programs" to the web resources used by the seminar participants. There you can find links to useful sites regarding copyright issues, course web site resources, models of course web site functions at Brown, and evaluation of web site content. If you wish to sign up for the fall seminar, please contact the Sheridan Center at [Sheridan\\_Center@Brown.edu](mailto:Sheridan_Center@Brown.edu).