



Teaching Tips:

Designing a Course Web Site for effective Student Learning

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Designing a course web page which will facilitate the educational goals of a course requires strategic planning. The following ideas are assembled to help Brown faculty and TAs reflect upon how they can put instructional technology to use in enhancing the learning environments in their courses.

I. Consider these initial questions:

- 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?

Creating a course web page can be a lot of work, and unless you have justified for yourself the relationship of a web page to student learning in your course, you may be creating a lot of work for yourself with little benefit to either you or your students.

II. Decide how you will create the site: Your options include Course Publisher, commercial web-editing software (such as Microsoft's Front Page, Adobe's Page Mill or Macromedia's Dreamweaver) or hand coding

Course Publisher provides faculty with a simple way to create a course page. The software is straight-forward, allowing you to simply copy and paste elements from your word-processing document into forms which will automatically produce the course web site. Using Course Publisher will also automatically create a link for students via BOCA (Brown's On-line Course Announcement Bulletin). Commercial web editing software may give you greater flexibility in content, design and functionality. A web site created by using web-editing software will need to be uploaded to either the University server or your departmental server. To get your site onto the University server, you need to go to (<http://www.brown.edu/webmaster/infocont.html>) and fill in the forms and then submit them in hard copy. To add your web page to your departmental server, contact your departmental web master.

III. Design for effective Learning:

A. Functional Organization

A course web site can be divided into three main components: Organization, Content, and Communication. You might have visited some complex sites, but a first web site can start with a simple presentation that serves as a basic building block from which you can develop features in

III. Design for effective Learning, cont.

future years that take advantage of the Internet's unique features. Typical examples of the main components of a web site are listed below.

- *Organization*: syllabus, assignment due dates, course policies
- *Content*: class materials, reading schedule, assignments
- *Communication*: bulletin boards, listservs, announcements, FAQs

B. Design Considerations: Site Organization, Text and Graphics

1. *Site Organization*: an effective course web site has an obvious relationship among its pages so that navigation from one section to another is easy. This goal is facilitated when all of the pages have the same layout and menu choices so the student knows what to expect. When arranging the information on the page, consider whether the student will use the information on the monitor screen or will download the information and print it out.

2. *Text*: the issues related to text are the practical ones of legibility. Careful preview of the page during the design phase should address these issues. Make certain that:

- Font Size is large enough to be read on all monitors

- Contrast between background color and text, links, and visited links color is visible
- Italics have limited use since they can be hard to read
- Background Pattern is not distracting.

3. *Graphics* can contribute to an appealing and attractive web page, and they are often a reason for using a web site. However, the best pages limit the number of graphic images so the design is simple and uncluttered. Each image should serve a specific purpose on the page. Remember that large graphic files can take a very long time to download, causing frustration for the student. This latter issue should be a consideration in the actual design process and the associated problems can be mitigated with careful planning by limiting the size of graphics and providing alternative text.

IV. Make sure your audience can find you...

Don't forget to link your site to the University list of all course web pages! If your site is created using web editing software, it will not automatically be listed in BOCA. Go to: <http://webpub.brown.edu/cgi-ets/cpub/list> and a short form will allow your page to be linked to the main list of all University course web pages. Also make sure your departmental web master points the departmental page to your site.

V. Keep your site current and remember the web is a dynamic medium.

For students to use the site, the web site needs to be current and up to date. Once the students realize that the information is inaccurate or out of date, the site loses its usefulness.