

GOOD WEB, BAD WEB

PANEL DISCUSSION

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PANELIST STATEMENTS:

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We describe a one year one credit seminar for freshmen in computer science that is designed to give the students an overview of the scope of the discipline and at the same time introduce them to the WWW – both for browsing and for authoring. Students were required to learn about the basic issues studied in selected area of computer science and create an HTML document that introduced this topic to their (novice) peers.

While they enjoyed ‘surfing the web’ for interesting information, they were also required to read at least two expository technical papers or chapters in a textbook. They felt comfortable writing their reports, because they understood well the target audience.

We present both the positive and the negative aspects of this project and discuss the possible future directions.

Richard Close
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How much of the web is hype? While many people easily see the potential, there seems to be a tendency to ignore or, at least, downplay several significant problems. Among these are security, authenticity, reliability and privacy issues. Many institutions also have been slow in establishing policies for the web. Finally, many faculty members voice a concern about the efficient use of time; both their time and that of students. But the web isn’t going to vanish. If anything it will become more of a presence. But what are the costs? Can we even measure them? Can we start a dialog about how we should proceed or should we just let it happen?

After using the web for several years in classes, we have established local policies and guidelines that may serve us well in the future. There are also some externally imposed policies to consider.

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It is clear to many that the impact of the World Wide Web (WWW) is so pervasive that it must be deemed the defining technology of the 1990's. At this time the www is a virtually unlimited and uncontrollable resource for industry, education, business, and society in general. Boundaries and protocols for its development, use, and implications are still only being established. As with any defining technology (such as the personal computer for the 1980's) it impacts nearly everything we do. The WWW not only impacts education, but challenges its very definition and meaning.

Some issues which need further consideration are:

- 1) The distinction between the refereed material (which may only appear months or even years after it is prepared) for academic journals and the unrestricted, unreviewed, material which may appear very quickly on the WWW by ad hoc means. At the very heart of this issue are the matters of timeliness versus matters of careful deliberation, correctness, and accuracy.
- 2) The difference between "just surfing" and doing research. More and more we find that this distinction amongst students and even among faculty, is somewhat eroding. Let's face it: the internet is fun, and research can be fun, but the distinction still needs to be made.
- 3) The difference between promoting one's ideas and academic research interests, and promoting one's vested business interests. There was a time (in the 1970's and 1980's) when it was pretty clear amongst those who used the internet (mainly academics, industry researchers, and the government/military) that internet access was a job privilege which should not be abused for personal gain. In the 1990's the purpose, function, and abundance of the WWW has rather changed how we view what is ethical.
- 4) Copyright -- what is mine may now be yours and what is yours may now be mine. What defines ownership and copyright in terms of web material? Not long ago the courts had to grapple with issues of "look and feel" with regard to software. With the abundance of web material available, who will be able to judge and settle such matters?
- 5) Development Time. It is generally accepted that the more a software system simulates real-life, hands-on environments, the more valuable it is educationally. Just a few years ago it was accepted that development one hour of good instructional software required, at least, several hundred person hours. Perhaps the greatest underlying implication of the WWW for education is that multimedia instructional material can be developed more quickly and efficiently. Although the path has been genuinely paved for the instructor (in any field) who wants to develop educational material on the WWW, It is absolutely necessary that the instructor, academic institution and students demonstrate a commitment and understanding for the considerable development and maintenance time required for instructional software.

What happens to the traditional classroom instructor who steps aside for his own web development? Considerable experience will be required to learn, develop, and implement the methods which effectively combine traditional classroom instruction with web-based instructional material.

PANELIST INFORMATION:

Viera Proulx is an Associate Professor of Computer Science at Northeastern University. She has been involved with computer science curriculum development for a number of years, both with her colleagues at Northeastern University and with the fellow – members of ACM Task Force on High School Computer Science Curriculum. She is a member of the International Federation on Information Processing

(IFIP) Working Group 3.1 on Secondary Education. She has organized numerous workshops on teaching computer science for both college and high school teachers.

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Danny Kopec is an Associate Professor of Information and Computer Sciences at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. His research interests include computer science education, artificial intelligence and machine learning. Danny is also well – known for his activity in chess. He is a world – class player, a much sought after speaker, commentator and author. Danny also runs a very successful chess camp in the summer.

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