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Library Tech Notes

The UNLV Libraries Technology Committee

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CAMILLE'S COMMENTS

After a number of weeks away from the library on administrative leave to work on a research project and to attend two conferences, I am back as a "contributing writer" to TechNotes. Thanks to Jason for providing a column for the past two issues.

Professional Staff Position in Systems
Last month, I drafted a job announcement for the new professional staff position in Systems. After a review by Systems staff and Cabinet, the Provost's office made some adjustments to the announcement. Since this was going to be a local recruitment (at least to start), the ad appeared in the Las Vegas Review-Journal and the Reno Gazette in mid-April.

The position announcement is also posted at the UNLV Human Resources Web site at http://usce.edu/unlv/Human_Resources/Employment_Svcs/.

This position was funded by the Legislature to support end-user computing on campus. The Libraries were fortunate to get this new position as both our staff and our patrons are considered "end-users" of our computing systems! The bulk of this person's time will be spent managing and assisting in daily Systems operations; planning the upgrade, enhancement, and replacement of systems and software; directing Systems technicians in the development and design of new information systems; recruitment, training, and supervision of Systems technical staff; and serving as the principal technical resource person on information systems technologies for the Libraries.

The remaining 12% or so of the job responsibilities will include coordination with other campus and UCCSN entities regarding technical issues related to computing and networking; serving on library and campus committees as appropriate; and providing high-level consultation and arranging for the continuing education of Systems technical staff. A tall order for sure! But this position is sorely needed to help with the technical support that we provide to our users and to manage the special projects that we plan to undertake to prepare us for the new computing environment in the Lied Library.

As this is a professional staff recruitment, Human Resources will screen the initial applications and forward to us those that best meet the position requirements. We are optimistic that we can get someone on board soon. We plan to conduct interviews similar to the interview schedules we have in place for librarian positions so you will get a chance to meet the candidates and ask questions of them.

Summer Projects
Now that spring semester is over, summer is here, and it is time for summer projects in Systems. A number of interesting projects are awaiting our attention including the configuration of PCs from classroom 106 for the Reference CD-ROM area, a complete redesign of the Libraries Web site and NEON Web pages, an infusion of computers and networked equipment and resources in the CML, upgrade of staff and patron PCs, and beta testing of locally-loaded Web server software from SilverPlatter to name a few. I will provide highlights of some of the projects in future columns.

Camille Clark Wallin
Troubleshooting

As you've probably already discovered by now, there's a big difference between keying in predigested examples and actually creating pages of your own. Creating a page and then having it display incorrectly can be frustrating, to say the least. However, there are a few basic guidelines that can keep you out of most trouble, as well as making the tracking down of problems a bit less frustrating.

When you write HTML, you're really writing a simple computer program. Like other computer languages, mistakes in HTML generally fall into one of two categories: syntax and logic. In addition, computers don't generally make mistakes of their own, but they're only too happy to display yours. If something doesn't display correctly, keep in mind that it's very likely that the mistake is a) yours and b) pretty simple to find and correct.

Syntax is another fancy word for grammar, and computers are much less forgiving of bad grammar than even the most tyrannical English teachers. If you leave out a parenthesis in a paper, the chances are that your reader will still be able to understand what you've written. Leaving out a symbol in a computer program, on the other hand, will almost certainly cause an error of some kind. In HTML, the most common syntax errors are:

1. a missing tag,
2. a missing pointy bracket,
3. a missing quotation mark or two,
4. a misused tag, and
5. a misplaced tag.

The most common tag to leave out is the second tag of a pair, such as the </A> tag at the end of a link you've created. If you do this, your entire document from that point on turns into a link (normally blue underlined text). Similarly, leaving out a </B> tag at the end of bolded text will result in everything from there on appearing bolded.

A more difficult missing tag to identify is one of the required tags (<HTML>, <HEAD>, <TITLE>, or <BODY>). Omitting one of these (especially the end one, such as </HEAD>) can cause very strange things to happen to your document, such as graphics refusing to appear, etc. By the way, misspelling a tag is the same as leaving it out, since HTML will ignore any tag it doesn't understand (such as a "<HAED>" tag). Leaving out one of a tag's pointy brackets will really confuse your browser, since it won't know where the tag ends. Usually the browser will assume that everything from the first bracket (<) to the first end bracket it finds (>) is part of your tag.

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Since the contents of a tag don't display as text on your page, this can cause big chunks of text to unexpectedly disappear from your page. Similarly, leaving out quote marks when required (such as the graphics filename in an IMG tag) can result in the browser trying to guess just where the filename ends and other HTML information begins. Again, the result can be disappearing text or graphics.

Placing something inside a tag that isn't allowed (such as putting an SRC="filename" in a heading tag) will usually just result in the inappropriate information being ignored; sometimes the results can be unpredictable, though, depending on your browser. One common mistake is putting the ALIGN attribute into an image tag (such as

<IMG SRC="mygraphic.gif" ALIGN="CENTER">

in order to center it. Since ALIGN="TOP" and ALIGN="BOTTOM" are perfectly legal, it's easy to assume that ALIGN="CENTER" should be too. Unfortunately, it's not, and trying to center your graphic this way can be very frustrating as you keep rechecking your code looking for some other mistake.

Although the order of tags isn't usually very important, you do need to realize that when you're working with paired tags (such as <B> and </B>) you should always nest them, not overlap them. What this means is that if you want to put a pair of tags inside some other pair, this is OK:

<A HREF=http://www.a.place><B>Jump here</B></A>

but this isn't:

<A HREF=http://www.a.place><B>Jump here</A></B>

This can cause really bizarre problems if you do this with any of the required tags, like this:

<HEAD>
<TITLE>
My title
</TITLE>
</HEAD>

Some of the hardest problems to track down are a result of this.

Finally, let your browser do some of the work for you. If you open your page in your browser, and then choose view -> Page Source (in Navigator) or View -> Source (in Internet Explorer) your browser will show you your HTML code with any mistakes highlighted (although the deal problem may be earlier in your code).
This can often allow you to identify problems that are otherwise hard to spot. Next month: Backgrounds and colors.

Lamont Downs

TUMA'S WONDEROUS WEB SITES

Around the World in (Less than) Eighty Cams

In honor of the fact that we will soon have a video camera recording construction of the new Lied Library, let's take a tour of some other web cam sites. WARNING: some of these sites require sophisticated plugging, if you have an older computer, you might want to use a newer one for the advanced sites.

The University of Kentucky had a cam in place to record their library construction. Read how they did it, and see views of the new building.

news.uky.edu/~libcam/

There are several live feeds set up to watch birds nesting. One really awesome site features a close-up of the nest of a pair of bald eagles in western Massachusetts. This is a solar powered cam out in the wild, so the image is refreshed only every 15 minutes, and you have to press the reload key on your browser, but the view is wonderful.

www.nu.com/eagles/eagles.htm

Another site that offers several live cams focuses on Peregrine falcons. The view isn't as intense, but the frames reload every minute, and you can opt to launch a mini viewing window and use your browser for other activities while keeping an eye on the nest. My favorite is the Etobicoke nest; the eggs haven't hatched as of this writing, but things should start jumping as soon as incubation is complete.

www.peregrine-foundation.ca/

Watch the fronts move into Vegas. Visit KLAS-TV8's site and click on the Live Las Vegas Cam icon to get a stratospheric view of the city. (You can also replay the Aladdin implosion to your heart's content.)

www.klas-tv.com/

Visit the Thames. Beautiful scenes.

www.livesights.com/
cgi-bin/VideoPages.plx?title=live

Or visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

www.thewall.org/

Or visit Mt. Fuji, and you can control the camera!

www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/mtfuji/tonbo/index-e.html

Or check out the view of the San Francisco Bay from a cam situated on the Exploratorium roof in live motion video.

www.exploratorium.edu/learning_studio/CAM2/index.htm

Here's another site for those of you who'd like to see live, streaming video (RealPlayer required). Select Live Cameras, then click on the biggest pipeline, and then choose the scenes you want to view (I prefer the fish tank choice).

www.hydroactive.com/Frames.htm

John Fox would fuss if I didn't include NASA's live cam site.

www.ambitweb.com/nasocams/nasacams.html

Thanks for being on board; this concludes our WebCam tour. You may have noticed that almost every site used different software and offered various features. Which did you prefer?

People who would rather cut and paste instead of typing those gnarly long URLs can receive a copy of this article via email by requesting such. Email tuma.

Kay Tuma
TECHNOLOGY BOOK LIST

(Z 682.35.P75A44 1997)

(PN 4784.E5E44 1998)

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(TK 5102.M85 1998)

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