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Library Tech Notes

The UNLV Libraries Technology Committee

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Camille’s Comments

Classroom 106 Gets Major Surgery. The PCs in JD1-106 (classroom 106) have served us well but the time has come for them to be replaced with newer PCs running Windows 95. Our library instructors have found that many of their students haven’t seen Windows 3.1 (the operating system on the 486/66s in the classroom) as the first PC they have purchased came with Windows 95!

Last fall when we put together an order for computer equipment using biennium equipment funds, we ordered 15 new Pentium 233s for classroom 106 (14 student workstations and one instructor’s workstation). It was expected that these machines would be installed during spring break or when classes weren’t in session. Over the past two weeks, however, we have seen marked degradation of several of the student workstations in classroom 106 — so much so, that it has been difficult (almost impossible) to show students how to use search engines and Web-based resources. The PCs were ready to be completely rebuilt. But why invest this effort if we have new PCs on hand ordered specifically for classroom 106? After an assessment by John and Sandra, it appeared that we could expect further degradation of the current 486/66s in classroom 106. The machines would be ready for the “intensive care unit” before spring break in April!

Working with Instruction staff, an accelerated timetable was established to configure, test, and install the new Pentium 233s so the room would be fully functional as soon as possible. The classroom has been reserved for Systems staff to do an installation “blitz” Wednesday February 25 through Friday February 27. Sandra will be in charge of configuring the alpha (first) PC using the configurations for classroom 107 and the Architecture Studies Library classroom 203 as models. She will also set up accounts and system policies for the classroom workstations on Whitney, our newest server. Jason will review the configuration for consistency, ease of use, and to ensure that the machine has all necessary applications, viewers, etc. that library instructors expect and need for their classes. Martin will "clone" or replicate the drive image so all the machines have the same configuration.

Meanwhile, John will be setting up classroom 107 to access LANSchool, the classroom management software that runs on Whitney. John had installed the newest version of LANSchool a day before he and Sandra recommended setting up classroom 106 with new PCs and was still in the process of testing and debugging it. But, since a large number of classes originally scheduled for room 106 had to be moved temporarily to classroom 107, the ability to broadcast the instructor’s workstation station to each student workstation was especially important.

Setting up LANSchool for classrooms 106 and 107 requires John to set up accounts for each workstation and to install specific files on every workstation in the two rooms. Jason will review the new features of LANSchool and will give the library instructors an “orientation” so they will be comfortable using the features of the Windows 95 version of LANSchool.
Martin will also be responsible for removing the old workstations from room 106, wiping the hard disks clean, and storing them until the hardware has arrived for them to be upgraded to Pentium-level PCs. (These machines will replace the 15 aging workstations in the CD-ROM Reference area.)

John, Sandra, and Martin will work together on setting up classroom 106 during the three-day blitz except for any emergency pages they may receive. Setting up these new PCs for classroom 106 will definitely be a group effort.

Although we have to tackle this project in the middle of semester when classes are in full-swing, we will be able to do it so that the room will not be available for classes for only three days. The next time you take part in staff training or a vendor demonstration scheduled in classroom 106, I think you will be impressed with the results of the "operation"!

Camille Clark Wallin

Tuma's Wondrous Web Sites

AlphaSearch The jewel of the Calvin Theological Seminary's Hekman Digital Library is AlphaSearch, a huge, searchable meta-site offering links to other academic meta-sites, or gateways, as they call them. The search engine is simple; no Boolean here, but it works. Try AlphaSearch the next time you need to find reviewed academic subject-specific sites: http://www.calvin.edu/library/as/

The Tibetan Book of the Dead. A good example of what some libraries are doing to share their exhibits, this offering from the Special Collections Department at The University of Virginia Library has just been placed on the Web. Although I found the site a bit wordy, it offers excellent examples of text and images from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, and does much to de-mystify the work. http://www.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/dead/index2.html

American Memory. It's been several years since I mentioned the Library of Congress' American Memory project. If you haven't visited lately, do so! Over 8,000 of George Washington's papers have been digitized, and the African American Odyssey exhibit is complete. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/

World Wide Words. This online language site features articles about English language, with emphasis on words too new to be in published dictionaries, or those just added to the Oxford Archives. A teddibly enjoyable British site craftily authored by Michael Quinion. http://www.clever.net/quinion/words/index.htm

TurboTax. Last year, the IRS provided us with the ability to file our tax returns online, but only if we wanted to purchase software or "see our local tax professional." Things have improved marginally this year. You can save the cost of that stamp to mail your return, and pay only $9.95 to complete and send your return using Intuit's TurboTax website. Although it isn't designed for extremely complicated returns, it does appear to be simple to use. You answer the questionnaire and the software performs all of the calculations and fills out the forms. http://www.intuit.com/turbotax

Kay Tuma
HTML From the Ground Up

Working with Text

Last month you'll remember that we created a minimal first Web page. Once you put the basic HTML codes into place, you found that just typing in the text content for your page didn't quite work the way you expected. To be a little more specific, you ended up with the world's worst run-on sentence. (By the way, remember that the examples for these articles are available on the UNLV Libraries Web site at http://www.nscee.edu/unlv/Libraries/admin/html/examples/. If you're going to work your way through these articles as they appear, you might want to add that bookmark to your browser.) This happened because HTML ignores something called "white space," which means spaces, tabs, and carriage returns. Any combination of one or more of the above characters is treated as exactly one space by your browser when it's figuring out how to display a page on your screen. This means you can add any of these characters to lay out your page of HTML code in virtually any way you want (such as adding lots of carriage returns to insert blank lines) in order to make the page of code easier to read, but without having any effect on the end result.

The downside of this is that you have to explicitly tell the browser (by using HTML codes) every time you want a new line to start, or insert a blank line, because just making it look right when you type in your text won't work. HTML uses the <BR> (or "break") tag causes the text immediately afterwards to start on a new line. The <P> (or "paragraph") tag inserts a blank line before the next line begins. You can put in as many <BR> tags in a row as you want, but a browser will ignore all but the first <P> tag if you put several in a row. <BR> and <P> are "single" tags; that is, they can stand alone. The <HTML> and </HTML> tags you used on your first page, on the other hand, are "paired" tags, which means you always have to use two (the second will start with a slash just after the < bracket). Think of these as "on/off" tags. For example, if you want to make some of your text bold, put a <B> (or "bold") tag just before the text to be affected, and a </B> tag at the point where you want the bolding to stop. Another popular tag of this kind is the <I> (for "italic") tag, which will be eventually followed by an </I> tag.

At this point, you should retrieve the file you started last month (the one with the run-on text) and try inserting some <P>, <BR>, <B> and <I> tags. Remember, one of the great pluses of HTML is that you can make your changes and immediately call up the changed file on your browser to see the results. (But don't forget to save your changes first; the browser loads your HTML file from your hard disk, not your screen, and if you make changes and don't save them the browser will still be displaying your older--unchanged--file.)

A very important tag is the heading tag, which comes in various sizes: <H1>, <H2>, <H3>, up to <H6> (<H1> is the largest and <H6> the smallest). You must always use a closing version of the tag (<H1>, </H2>, etc.) at the end of the heading. Be sure the numbers match. (Try making the first sentence of your text page into a heading and view...
the results.) Some tags allow you to add additional information on how you want the tag to work. For example, you can include in a heading tag the command ALIGN="CENTER" to cause the heading to be centered on the page: <H1 ALIGN="CENTER">My centered heading</H1>

This information is called an "attribute." You must always include a space before each attribute you add (there can be more than one in a tag). Note that you didn't have to include the attribute in the end version of the tag. Next month: adding graphics to your page.

Lamont Downs

Book Review

*Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontent*/ Ellen Ullman. Call#: QA76.2.U43 A3 1997. If you're interested in what it's like having a cyberpunk as a lover or want to gain insight into a software engineer's lifestyle, this is the book for you. This is a light and easy read; at least it seems that way at first. Quoted from the dust jacket: "This book is a little masterpiece, an exquisitely melancholy cry from a body disappearing into the machine ... a wrenching swan-song for human beings." What caught my attention in this little "swan-song" is the author's efforts as a consultant to communicate with employers who have unrealistic expectations of technology and software programs. This is a very personal experience from one of those ladies who has seen her career toggle between success and nonexistence as the years have progressed. I can't say this was a great choice for a technology book review...but for some reason I keep being drawn back to reading and rereading it. The author has her own unique kind of poetry, and this, combined with accounts of struggling relationships with various technological groups makes it a worthwhile read.

Paulette Nelson

Technology Book List


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