

Fall 2009 Syllabus...

COMS 326 Web Production

Instructor: **Bob Stepno**

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Class section, time, days, room:

001, 3:30 p.m., Tues-Thurs, Porterfield 173

002, 5 p.m., Tues-Thurs, Porterfield 173

office hours: Monday & Wednesday 11 a.m-noon and 2-4 p.m.
-- earlier morning meetings any day, by appointment

For up-to-date information, check <http://www.radford.edu/rstepno> each week

Overview

"Digital natives" born after the creation of the Internet have had the World Wide Web to work and play with for almost 20 years, but few of the millions of people who use it every day understand how the Web came about, the standards that hold it together, how Web sites are created, what tools are available to build them, and the real secret that allowed this most powerful of communication media to blossom so rapidly.

Whether you plan to create Web sites for a living or for fun, or just want to understand how they fit into our media culture, the goal for this course is to build on what you already know, correct any misconceptions you've had about Web design being rocket science, introduce a variety of tools Web producers use – and prepare you to find new tools to meet your needs in a very exciting online future.

Today's sophisticated Web productions are still sometimes one-person operations. Others are team efforts – involving writers, researchers, editors (of text, audio and video), programmers, graphic designers, multimedia producers, photographers and marketing departments. With the rise of blogs, Facebook, Twitter and other social-networking sites, some Web organizations even hire specialists on "social software" and audience interaction. You won't learn to do all of that in one course! But it will help you evaluate what's out there, start to sketch a roadmap for further study, and begin (or continue) building your personal Web portfolio.

Students in this course usually have varied backgrounds and levels of design or computer experience. Share what you know and make this class more of a creative studio experience.

Formal course description:

Web Production (3)

Instruction and practice in designing interactive World Wide Web sites for the mass media. Course also introduces Web aesthetics, digital imaging and other applications for the web. Prerequisite: MSTD 130, COMM 230 and MSTD 226 or ITEC 225. (Both MSTD and COMM are now "COMS")

Texts, Equipment and News

Books:

- *HTML, XHTML & CSS* by Liz Castro
- *The Non-Designer's Web Guide* by Robin Williams and John Tollett

Hardware:

- A USB storage device – memory stick, SD card, portable hard drive etc. – to backup your work.

Lists of weekly required readings, additional supplementary texts, library reserves, downloadable software and useful Web sites will be linked to the course home page, <http://www.radford.edu/rstepno/09fall/326>

(During the first week, read the introductions and first chapters of both books, browse the professor's Web site, and read Web designer Jason Cranford Teague's essay "[Everyone is a Web Designer](http://bit.ly/1vA9wg)" at <http://bit.ly/1vA9wg>)

Library resources: McConnell Library has numerous HTML and Web design books available in e-book format; the print editions of several of them will be on reserve for this class at the library front desk.

Become a Web Information Addict:

It is terribly easy to make *terrible* Web pages, but not hard to make pretty good ones. As part of the work in this course, you should develop an eye for Web pages that work, that meet the needs of their audiences, or that surprise us with new ways of doing things. Few people 20 years ago expected a world of digital media quite like the one we have with You Tube, Facebook, Google and Amazon. At the same time, a number of online media ideas that looked good at first faded away quickly.

Not only will you learn to plan, design and code Web pages in this class, you should start keeping up on new developments in Web technology by becoming regular users of Web sites *about* the Web, industry publications, blogs, podcasts and Twitter feeds. Subscribe to the RSS feeds of blogs like PaidContent and TechCrunch. Learn the jargon, history and people of the Web, including names like Tim Berners-Lee, Marc Andreessen, Craig Newmark, Khoi Vinh and Adrian Holovaty.

For a start, try the Web version of some “old” media – see the tech sections of *The Wall Street Journal* (<http://wsj.com>) and *The New York Times* (<http://nytimes.com>), and online standards like Wired (<http://wired.com>) magazine, Slate (<http://slate.com>), and the O'Reilly publishing company's pages (<http://oreilly.com>). Locally, see what's doing at *New River Voice* (<http://newrivervoice.com>), *The Collegiate Times* at Virginia Tech (<http://collegiatetimes.com>), *RU Today* (<http://rutoday.radford.edu>), *Whim* (<http://ruwhim.com>) and *The Tartan* (<http://thetartan.com>).

Thanks to the Web, you don't have to do all your learning at Radford. As the semester progresses, we will visit MIT, Stanford, UC Berkeley and Harvard in search of Web expertise.

What You Will Learn

Some specific things you will be practicing and learning include how to...

- make basic HTML pages
- install them using SSH, SFTP and your network share
- make a reusable template for similar pages
- plan and organize multi-part sites
- use effective headings
- use lists
- use tables and iframes
- use internal (relative) and external (explicit) links
- take snapshots of your screen
- crop, resize and optimize images for Web use
- embed inline images
- link from images as well as text
- write effective headings and summaries
- write clear, concise and accurate documentation
- create menu systems for multi-page sites
- use navigational image-maps as well as text menus
- test and evaluate the usability of pages
- think critically about new Web techniques and tools
- use embedded and external Cascading Style Sheets
- employ CSS to create multi-platform pages
- embed audio, video or multimedia players in your pages
- use metadata and Search Engine Optimization techniques
- find and use low-cost or free site hosting services
- find and share even more tools and tricks on your own

Depending on the time available and the experience and interests of the class, we will at least touch on: the Unix and OS-X operating systems; “semantic Web,” usability and accessibility issues; open-source and free software, especially code editors and page creation programs; and advanced tools for creating dynamic and interactive pages, including Flash, Javascript, forms, CMS systems and a variety of “Web 2.0” services.

Schedule changes & e-mail

Like the news itself, expect the class to change as we go along. The assignment calendar may be altered to take advantage of special campus events, speakers, breaking news and other opportunities. **Changes in the schedule will be announced in class, by e-mail, and on the Web. Check your Radford.edu e-mail and my website often.** If you use another e-mail account, forward your Radford mail to it.

If you have questions of any kind, stop in during office hours or send me a note at rstepno@radford.edu. I have other e-mail accounts, but that is the one I use for all course-related mail. I check it several times a day, but rarely after 9 p.m. or before 9 a.m.

I may not be able to respond to all mail individually. If you have an especially good question, I may write back to the entire class or discuss it at our next class meeting.

E-mail as user-interface

Your first “information design” lesson: When you send e-mail, think of the “Subject” line as part of your story. Make it an informative headline, not just a label. Make it specific. Mail that is unnamed, vague or generic is easy to miss, or mistake for spam.

When you write to the professor, please put your **name, course number (326-1 or 326-2) and topic** in the “Subject” line.

- **Not:** “Hey prof!” or “Weekly assignment”
- **Preferred:** “JBrown, 326-2, Zen garden assignment” or “JSmith, 326-01, dog ate my computer”

Being here: Attendance, Assignments and Deadlines

My attendance policy is inspired by professional media organizations: You are expected to come to every class, arrive **on time**, and deliver your work **on deadline**. When you’re here, be here: No e-mail, Facebook, texting, online gambling or off-topic Web browsing, please.

I know there are good reasons to miss class, so don’t bother with doctor’s notes or written apologies. BUT after the second week of class, when add-drop changes are over, **if you have more than three absences** for any reason come see me. Your grade for the course may be reduced by one letter for each absence after the third, unless you show that you have kept up with both the in-class and homework assignments. After four or five such absences, we should talk about your withdrawing from the class. In the event of a flu outbreak or other emergency that keeps classes from meeting, we will “meet in cyberspace” using online systems and e-mail.

You will have online or on-paper exercises in almost every class. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what they were and do them on your own.

If you know in advance that you will miss a class, see me to arrange a catch-up assignment. If you miss a class, check my website and contact a classmate for assignments. I may not have a chance to answer “tell me what I missed” e-mails on Tuesday or Thursday, but I will attempt to update an “exercises we did in class” list on my Web page. If an assignment was done in class or due as homework the day you were out, submit it electronically and bring a printed copy to the next class you attend for full credit.

Class Cancellations

If class is cancelled because of a winter storm, flu outbreak or other emergency, it is your responsibility to check my course Web page for any assignment and schedule changes – and **do the work**.

Want to know if a class is cancelled?

In addition to local television and radio stations, information about classes being canceled and administrative offices closing due to inclement weather will be available from the university switchboard by calling 831-5000 or on the university’s Web page.

If you are confused by conflicting announcements, you may call the switchboard for clarification. The switchboard will update information on the day of the closing by 6 a.m.

More info: <http://www.radford.edu/weatherpolicy.html>

Important Note About Disability Services

If you are seeking classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you are required to register with the Disability Resource Office (DRO). The DRO is located in Room 32, Tyler Hall, telephone 831-6350. To receive academic accommodations for this class, please obtain the proper DRO forms and meet with me at the beginning of the semester.

The Radford University Honor Code

By accepting admission to Radford University, each student makes a commitment to understand, support, and abide by the University Honor Code without compromise or exception. This class will be conducted in strict observance of the Honor Code, which reads as follows:

I do hereby resolve to uphold the Honor Code of Radford University by refraining from lying, from the stealing or unauthorized possession of property and from violating the Standards of Student Academic Integrity.

Those Standards of Student Academic Integrity are spelled out in the Student Handbook. **McConnell Library** has related material online: <http://lib.radford.edu/tutorial/X/learn.asp>

Assignments and Grading for COMS 326

- Multimedia site-review assignment (cumulative midterm project), 25%
- Class participation, homework assignments and exercises, 20%
- Quizzes on assigned reading and visiting speakers, 20%
- Final project, including proposal, presentation and self-evaluation, 35%

The first project will be a six-part report on the use of multimedia (video, animation, slideshows, sound, etc.) as a storytelling device on the Web, demonstrating the coding techniques and design concepts covered during the first half of the course.

Quizzes will test your knowledge of Web design issues and terminology gained from the course books, tutorials, class discussions and visiting speakers.

The final project will be to design a working website using all of the competencies covered in the course. The site can be for an organization, individual or business. A preliminary proposal, site map, class presentation and self-evaluation of the project will be part of the grade. A detailed assignment sheet will be distributed before the mid-term.

The calendar on the following pages will be available in expanded form online, with weekly textbook readings, links to online demonstrations and tutorials, and site-building tasks to be accomplished.

Web Production COMS 326 -- Fall 09 Schedule

	<i>Date</i>		<i>topics</i>
<i>Week 1</i>	9/1	T	Introductions to the course, the lab and each other... Macs vs. PC, network drives &c.; defining the Web...
	9/3	Th	Basic tools: Working with HTML using simple text editors. The power of hypertext and semantic markup: "Web 2.0 is Us/ing Us"
<i>Week 2</i>	9/8	T	A little Unix, ssh and chmod... See pages at http://www.radford.edu/rstepno/09fall/326
	9/10	Th	Discuss evolution of Web standards, tools, and alphabet soup... from Unix, FTP, SSH, HTML, XHTML, XML, CSS and RSS to Apache, LAMP and Ajax. Coding: Links, lists, tables....
<i>Week 3</i>	9/15	T	More table and link coding... Discuss testing, browser wars and cross-platform issues. Review of imaging concepts, file types, file compression, and some hexadecimals...
	9/17	Th	Structure, form, content, usability & accessibility... More CSS... Site types, audiences, and some history, from Arpanet to Googlezon.
<i>Week 4</i>	9/22	T	Documentation, comments and debugging
	9/24	Th	Dreamweaver I - The user interface and site definition.
<i>Week 5</i>	9/29	T	Dreamweaver II - CSS with a purpose
	10/1	Th	Dreamweaver III
<i>Week 6</i>	10/6	T	Dreamweaver IV
	10/8	Th	Midterm project wrapup lab: Project deadline 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 9
<i>Week 7</i>	10/13	T	Read and review each other's projects; discuss multimedia styles and techniques.
	10/15	Th	Sharing and Web 2.0 tools: Wikis, Ning, Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, RSS feeds, podcasts & more.
<i>Week 8</i>	10/20	T	Final project proposal brainstorming: Types of sites, audience needs, working with clients.
	10/22	Th	Using audio and video files on your pages; MP3, Quicktime, Adobe Flash
<i>Week 9</i>	10/27	T	Build a media page

	10/29	Th	Post project proposal draft by Friday, in HTML, with relevant links.
<i>Week 10</i>	11/3	T	More multimedia – proprietary tools and free software
	11/5	Th	Review skills you have – or need – for project
<i>Week 11</i>	11/10	T	Complete site map for final project. CSS and multi-platform pages; Zen garden examples.
	11/12	Th	Design for project
<i>Week 12</i>	11/17	T	Work on project page layouts, templates
	11/19	Th	Post first draft of final project before leaving town.
	11/21-11/29		Thanksgiving break
<i>Week 13</i>	12/1	T	Site review and coding lab
	12/3	Th	Site review and coding lab
<i>Week 14</i>	12/8	T	Present sites to class
	12/10	Th	Final pages: Self-evaluation and portfolio.
Exam week	12/14-17		Final project revision due at exam time below

FINAL EXAM: Usual room, different day and time

326-01 ~~normally meets TTh 3:30 p.m.~~; EXAM 8 a.m. Dec. 14 (Monday)

326-02 ~~normally meets TTh 5 p.m.~~; EXAM 5:30 Dec. 15 (Tuesday)

Final exam periods are two hours long. There will be another class scheduled in our room at 12:30, so both exams **must** end on deadline – which is appropriate for a news writing class.

If you have an examination conflict or if you are scheduled to have THREE exams on one day, see the instructors to make alternative arrangements.

To double-check the exam time for this course or other classes:
http://www.radford.edu/~registra/web_2009/exams_info_fall09.htm

Grading scale for projects

- A: 90-100 percent. Work approaches professional-quality work – interesting site, attractive design, fully functional links and media including all assigned features.
- B: 80-89 percent. Above average grasp of basics; may need some repair, but all assigned features are present; product is attractive, usable and on-time.
- C: 70-79 percent. Shows a grasp of basic principles and has met most deadlines, but may have some broken links, clashing colors, slow-loading poorly-optimized images, or other bad design decisions.
- D: 60-69 percent. Significant errors in coding or posting; incomplete, late or missing assigned features.
- F: Fails to meet minimum standards. For example, major components broken or missing.

Time Requirement

Although this is a "lab" class, expect to work on projects outside of the classroom. In-class assignments and exercises, if not completed in class, must be posted in final form by 5 p.m. that Friday.

Digital Media Essentials

- Save documents early and often. They are your responsibility. Always have a backup of your work. Use your Radford network server space ("drive H"), e-mail or a USB memory stick.
- Be careful with Radford lab equipment and be considerate of other users. Report computer problems as soon as they occur and put a note on the computer to alert the next user.
- Use the computer to accomplish class assignments and exercises, **do not** drift into Facebook, IM, e-mail, texting, online gambling and unassigned Web browsing.
- Turn off your phone and put it out of sight while class is in session. Be *here*.

Your Teacher (this seems to require the third person):

Bob Stepno joined the Radford faculty in fall 2007 after more than 20 years as a writer and editor, then seven years as a teacher. He has worked for the nation's oldest (print) newspaper and one of its first online "newspapers." He received his doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill so recently (December 2003) that calling him "doctor" still makes him look around for someone wearing a stethoscope.

A note for you

Thank you for choosing this class. If you have questions that aren't addressed in this document—or in any class—come talk about it, or at least send me e-mail (which I usually check several times a day, seven days a week). After all, you're the reason I'm here!

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Fight viruses. Wash your hands *before and after* using any public computer.

From the RU administration

Radford University Students:

Novel H1N1 Flu: Virus Information

Novel influenza A (H1N1) is a new flu virus of swine origin that first caused illness in Mexico and the United States in March and April, 2009. It's thought that novel influenza A (H1N1) flu spreads in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the virus, but it may also be spread by touching infected objects and then touching your nose or mouth. Novel H1N1 infection has been reported to cause a wide range of flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. In addition, many people also have reported nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.

As you may know, flu can be spread easily from person to person. Therefore, steps are being taken to prevent the spread of flu at Radford University for as long as possible, **but we need your help to accomplish this.**

We are working closely with the regional and Commonwealth of Virginia health departments to monitor flu conditions and make decisions about the best steps to take concerning our institution. We will keep you updated with new information as it becomes available to us through links through your course faculty member using various virtual communication portals.

For now, we are doing everything we can to keep our institution operating as usual. The following information is provided by the Center for Disease control including general preventative care that you can take to lessen the impact of the flu season on the campus:

Over the next few weeks you will see additional hand sanitization stations in many Radford University academic buildings, residence halls, food service locations, computer labs, and student centers. We encourage you to use the hand sanitizers frequently and especially when you are working at computer stations or using restroom facilities. Remember, hand sanitizers do not replace hand washing with soap and water.

If you become ill please access the Student Health Web Site through the RU Portal for detailed information and guidance from the Student Health Center.

There's more!

All the flu prep news that's fit to print: <http://oep.asp.radford.edu/PrepGuideflu.htm>

Here's wishing you a safe, healthy and happy semester...

Bob Stepno

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<http://www.radford.edu/rstepno>

**-30- (used to mean "the end" in the newspaper business)
something like "/html" on a Web page**