Computer Techniques for Communication Students
American University Class: COMM 323
Spring 2003

Course overview
Whether we like it or not, computers are an integral part of any communications field. And making the best use of technology is the key to success in print news, broadcasting, new media, advertising and other areas of communication. People working in communication fields must keep up with the ever changing ways of gathering information and disseminating it.

As technology has evolved, so too have audiences who have more sophisticated tastes for information delivery and content and more ways of avoiding messages they want to avoid.

Along with all of these changes come new challenges. Among the issues this raises: Can we maintain a free, democratic society in which there is so little common knowledge and such a large divide between those who have access to information and those who don't? How will laws once applied to traditional media be interpreted in the information age?

Course goals
Professional communicators of the future must have the skills that will allow them to gather and deliver information using different means than in the past. And they must understand the profound implications of these developments on their profession and the larger society. Those are the subjects this class will address.
This class has two primary goals:

- To give you, as a future communications professional, some of the computer skills you will need to be successful in your career; in particular, you will learn how to conduct research and analysis using computer tools, and you will become familiar with electronic publishing techniques. To help accomplish this, virtually all work in the course will be done on the computer. We will make extensive use of electronic mail to communicate with one another.

- To give you an appreciation of the legal, ethical and social issues that arise from the widespread adoption of electronic communications tools.

Textbook
Macromedia Dreamweaver for Windows and Macintosh, J. Tarin Towers, Peachpit Press, 2001

Grades
You will be graded on the following criteria. Explanations follow.
1. Research assignment 20% of grade
2. Web site evaluation 10% of grade
3. Web site creation 25% of grade
4. Quizzes 15% of grade
5. In-class work and participation 15% of grade
6. Final Examination 15% of grade

The following is an explanation of the each area of work:

1. **Research Assignment -- 20 percent of grade.** You will be required to use the Internet and spreadsheets or databases to examine a specific subject mutually agreed upon with the instructor. This project will be done in stages. The final piece will be a written paper, in which you will describe and evaluate the various research techniques you used and provide your findings.

2. **Web site evaluation -- 10 percent of grade.** You will be required to evaluate three Web sites pertinent to the research assignment you just completed. You will create a presentation, using PowerPoint, which you will present to the class. You will be expected to use both images and text in your presentation. You will be graded on your critique of the content, presentation, appropriateness of the content as well as other qualities of the sites. You also will be graded on your presentation to the class and your use of multimedia while delivering that presentation.

3. **Web site Creation - 25 percent of grade.** The class will be creating two or three different Web sites. You will be responsible for the creation of a portion of one of those Web sites. You also will be responsible for several other aspects of the site, which will be determined in part by the class, in part by you and in part by me. Your portion may involve the creation of a multimedia presentation, design of graphics and site architecture, or it may involve more "content driven" pages. Much of what you do on the site will be determined by your area of interest as well as your area of expertise. Your work will be judged on quality of content, creativity of material, relevance to rest of project.

4. **Quizzes - 15 percent of grade.** You will periodically be quizzed on information from lectures and from the readings.

5. **In-class work and participation - 15 percent of grade.** You are expected to attend all classes and will be responsible for all material discussed during class. Some classes may include an actual hands-on exercise that will be turned in at the end of class. In addition, I will be evaluating you based on your attitude, effort, initiative, participation and other measures of professional behavior. If you need to miss a class, please make arrangements with your instructor to do complete the class work at another time.

6. **Final Examination - 15 percent of grade.** Will combine information from lectures and class work, readings and class projects.

Deadlines and Attendance
The University expects you to appear regularly and on time to classes. If you miss class sections it will be unlikely that you will be able to complete your assignments on deadline or and your grade will most likely suffer considerably from having missed the material. Work missed due to an excused absence may be made up. An in-class assignment such as a quiz or writing assignment due to an unexcused absence, on the other hand, may not be made up and will result in a zero for that particular portion of your grade.

Academic Integrity

It goes without saying that all work must be your own, original effort. Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will be dealt with severely. At the least, it will cause you to fail this class. You work will be checked to verify that it does not contain material that is published elsewhere.

In this class, it is especially important to understand that material on the Internet is protected by the same ethical and legal standards as other published information. The general rule is: The creator of the information has the right to decide how it is used. Others who want to use another's work must seek permission and give credit.

The university administration has asked all faculty members to include this statement in course syllabi:

"Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course."

A note about communication
All assignments should use effective writing including correct grammar and spelling.

Contacting the instructor
The instructor will be available following the class on most days. All other office hours will be by appointment only. You are encouraged to e-mail or call to make an appointment. E-mail is the most effective way to reach me.

Email: jlafleur@american.edu
Phone: 314-550-3255
Alternate phone: 703-807-2100, ext. 114 (This is the phone number for The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, dedicated to helping working journalists. During working hours (9 a.m. to 6 p.m.), please use it only for urgent calls B after 6 p.m., feel free to call for any reason - when you get the message that we=re closed, hit 114.(I=m usually there until about 8 p.m.).

I periodically will send materials out via email – if your american.edu address is not your preferred email, please go to my.american.edu and follow the instructions for forwarding your american.edu address to another address.

<u>**Schedule**</u>
The following is the tentative schedule for class sessions. Keep in mind, the instructor may need to make some adjustment as the semester progresses. Reading assignments should be completed prior to the class session for which they are listed. Any handouts listed will be provided at least one week earlier. If you must miss a class, please make arrangements to get copies of reading material.

Jan. 14:   Course introduction and computer familiarization

Jan. 21:   Introduction to electronic research techniques
            Reading: *Nora Paul, Computer-assisted research*

Jan. 28:   More on electronic research
            Evaluating Web sites

            Reading: *The Wired Journalists* by Mike Wendland: Introduction and Wired News
            Gathering, www.rtnda.org/resources/wiredweb/index.html

            "Evaluating Web Resources," by Jan Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate
            muse.widener.edu/Wolfgram-Memorial-Library/webevaluation/webeval.htm

            Selection from *The Online Journalist* by Redick and King

Feb. 4:   Introduction to computer-assisted reporting
            In class: Review
                            Introduction to spreadsheets exercise

Feb. 11:   Spreadsheets as a reporting and researching tool
            Reading: Nursing Home story
                            CAR overview handout
            Guest speaker: Chris Schmitt, U.S. News and World Report
            Web site evaluation reports due

Feb. 18:   Using Powerpoint to make presentations
            Reading: Handout

Feb. 25:   Using databases
            Reading: Handout

March 4:   In-class presentations of Web site evaluations
            Web site/Research proposals due

March 11: no class (Spring Break)

March 18: Introduction to Web site development
            Reading: Handout

A beginners guide to html:
archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu/General/Internet/WWW/HTMLPrimerAll.html
Research projects due

March 25: Writing for online publications (guest speaker)
Reading: *The elements of digital story telling* by Nora Paul and Christine
Fiebich: www.inms.umn.edu/Elements/index.php

April 1: Legal issues relating to the Internet and other technologies
Reading: Lost In Cyberspace@ by Phillip Taylor, *News Media and the Law:*
www.rcfp.org/news/mag/v.cgi?26-2/cov-lostincy

Web sites can expose publishers to lawsuits in other states, countries, by Monica
Dias, *News Media and the Law:* www.rcfp.org/news/mag/v.cgi?26-2/cov-lostincy

April 8: Using online images and graphics
Accessibility of Web sites (guest speaker)

April 15: Other issues
What does the future hold?
In-class work session on Web sites

April 22: In-class Web site presentations