

Better Late Than Never

Web Teaching Guide: A Practical Approach to Creating Course Web Sites

by Sarah Horton, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2000

Reviewed by Larry Spears

The *Web Teaching Guide* covers the traditional difficulties of Web page design, HTML language, and project development pretty thoroughly.

The author identifies and discusses the issues that deeply troubled most people five to ten years ago. These questions include which type of font to use, what type of background to install, and what does PDF mean? Much of the information contained here will be useful to anyone who needs a general introduction to teaching on the Web.

This would certainly be an excellent book for someone contemplating a late entry into the field of distance learning. If someone plans on creating a Web page without the help of any of "e-learning" company, then this is an excellent place to start.

Yet the book is a little late out of the gate. One software provider or another has already made many of the questions the book addresses moot. For example: one should never think about HTML language again. Many commercial products easily translate for you. Why on earth would you bother learning it?

The great practical detail that the author covers may even appear

frightening even to those who have taught on the Web for several years. Many of these decisions in terms of video and Web page construction are really peripheral to the more serious pedagogical issues of teaching on the Internet and better left to the technology departments

Naturally, content delivery is the first place one must always start when teaching. It is the medium that has always determined what we teach and how we teach it.

Distance learning currently faces many fundamental questions. Is asynchronous better than synchronous? What is the role of student-to-student interactivity when there is next to none in the on-campus class? Which is better: recorded video, or interactive video? And what are the learning objectives of the course, remembering that "learning on the Web" cannot be one of them?

How do we compare in a concrete manner the accomplishments of on-campus and on-the-Internet learning? These questions are not really the focus of this type of work. Instead, the book does introduce the reader to the type of question best answered by technical support at the institution.

To the extent that this work produces a commonality among instructional providers on the Web, it will be an excellent addition to our currently rather meager library.

As an exercise in history, in the issues that are of general interest particularly to technophiles, the work certainly has some merit. Any reader who has generally followed the recent trends of Internet education will profit from the very detailed analysis of Web site creation provided by Horton. ■

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