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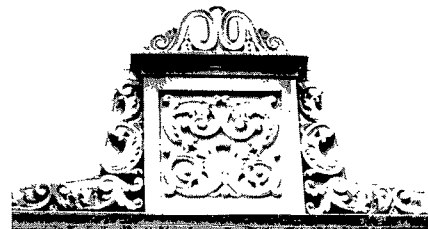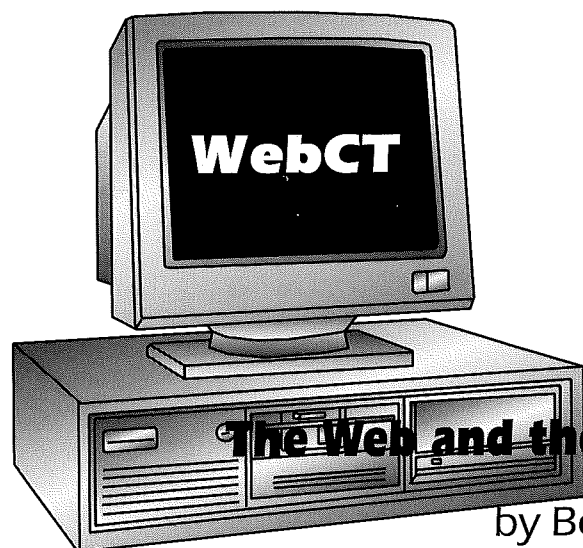
of the History Department at Boston University

The Web and the Classroom

by Betty Anderson

A s an acknowledged computer geek, I took it as a personal challenge, on arriving here at BU, to discover all I could about the available computer facilities. After about five months of research, I can safely say I have come to terms with the good, the bad, and the I'm-just-going-to-have-to-deal-with-it computing situation at BU. On the plus side, BU has programs set up that will enable you to post many types of Web pages and introduce a whole series of interactive techniques into your classrooms. On the negative side, I have to admit that these programs are confusing and require a previous knowledge of computers or a teacher who will cut through a lot of the "computerese" to give you only the most important instructions. Within these parameters, I have been able to post information successfully on BU's Web site and have clearly found a receptive audience among my students.

The Office of Information Technology at BU has recently purchased two courseware programs called WebCT and CourseInfo. Both provide all the elements any professor would require: bulletin boards, chat rooms, posting areas, calendars, templates for student submissions, and even multiple-choice tests. Since IT recommends WebCT, I chose that as my particular program. As such, this article is about WebCT and not CourseInfo (although reports I later received from reliable sources say that the latter is an easier program to use; too late for me but you might want to check it out). After a horrible start this summer, I have now mastered

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in brief

EVENTS OF NOTE!

Professor **Barbara Diefendorf** chaired and commented on a session on "The Book and its Audience in the Era of the French Religious Wars" at the annual meeting of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in St. Louis on October 29 and then flew on to California for a meeting of the Western Society for French History at the Asilomar Conference Center on the Monterey Coast. "There," she reports, "I gave the plenary luncheon address. My paper, entitled 'Contradictions of the Century of Saints,' was on aristocratic patronage of Counter-Reformation convents, but what I'm sure that everyone will remember is rather the deer who bounded over the sand dunes and stood looking through the window behind me for the longest time. I thought I'd experienced every possible interruption teaching on Commonwealth Avenue, but this is the first time I've been upstaged by a deer."

In November Professor **Jill Lepore** delivered the Martin Weiner Lecture at Brandeis University on "Coincidence and the Writing of History." That month she also held a workshop on the Writing of History at Yale University and delivered a lecture, "Mai diir Kuntrimen," at the Charles Warren Center at Harvard.

In November Professor **Mariano Plotkin** traveled to Buenos Aires to deliver a series of lectures at the Univer-

sity of Tres de Febrero. He has also signed a contract with the University of New Mexico Press for an edited volume in progress titled "Argentines on the Couch. Psychiatry, State and Society in Argentina, 1880-1970," not to be confused, he points out, with his "Freud in the Pampas."

Also in November, Professor **Reggie Blaszczyk** spent five days in The Netherlands, where she attended an international research workshop on "Technology and Modernity: The Empirical Turn." The seminar was held at the University of Twente, near the German border. Blaszczyk commented on a paper by communications scholar Anne Balsamo of Xerox PARC entitled "Designing Culture."

Professor **Marilyn Halter** was the commentator for the session "Immigrants and Image-nation" at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association in Montreal October 28-31.

Graduate student **Thomas Johnson** had an article, "Managing the Rain from Heaven: Dams and Downstream Residents in Southern Zambia," published in the fall 1999 issue of *Cultural Survival Quarterly*.

The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities have invited Professor **Joseph Boskin** to be part of a panel discussion of youth violence at the Commonwealth Forum on December 13.

Graduate student **Gerald Ward** presented a paper at the History of Science Society conference in Pittsburgh November 3-7. His talk, "From Merchant Adventurers to Merchants of Light: English Oceanic Commerce and the Making of Bacon's Great Instauration," part a four-person panel discussion on the role of travel and "long-distance corporations" in the making of early modern European science, suggested that Bacon's plan to reform natural philosophy—as outlined in his writings— required the participation of England's overseas merchants to achieve its goal.

In October Professor **Diana Wylie** addressed the BU Alumni Association of Worcester County on the subject of "Perspectives on Southern Africa," and in November she traveled to Kenya

with a group of alumni to spend two weeks as an "enrichment lecturer" giving talks on topics such as Kenya's colonial history and the making of Kenya's independence. In December she will participate once again, as a member of a three-person committee meeting in New York City, in the selection of Fulbright scholars to conduct research in South Africa.

Sin-Jan Chu (PhD from Boston University in 1993) is now on the history faculty of the Chinese Culture University in Taiwan, Republic of China.

Professor Emeritus **Norman Bennett** recently returned from Porto, where he attended a conference gathering all contributors for discussions concerning the forthcoming four-volume *História do Douro e do Vinho do Porto*. The study will be published in 2000-2001 by the Grupo de Estudos de História do Viticultura Duriense e do Vinho do Porto and Edições Afrontamento of Porto. Bennett's chapter is "Os mecanismos de comercialização e as estratégias empresarias, 1830s-1908."

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WebCT (cont. from page 1)

WebCT and can say that it is a program that professors can use for both simple and complex Web pages. However, I must add a cautionary note and say that the learning curve is very high, although once mastered, the program is relatively easy to use.

The first step in creating a WebCT page is to go to *webct.bu.edu* and click on the link "Request a Course." You will then be asked to provide your name, the course information, and your choice of courseware programs (i.e., WebCT). In a few days, the site will be constructed, IT will e-mail you the password, and you can access it at the address listed above.

Now the fun begins... When you first look at the program, it will make absolutely no sense to you at all. It took me hours to work through all its little idiosyncrasies (as the IT-touted on-line manual is worthless). The majority of people who signed up for WebCT in

the fall seem to have abandoned all hope at this point, judging from the fact that only a few Web sites have been altered from their original templates. This problem falls under the "I'm-just-going-to-have-to-deal-with-it" category because BU does not give professors a lot of different options. To overcome the obstacle, I would recommend that you either sign up for one of IT's tutorial sessions in January 2000 (information is available at *www.bu.edu/computing/tutorials/*) or come and talk to me. I can walk you through the basic elements of WebCT so you can at least post your syllabus, set up a bulletin board, etc. Once you understand these first steps, you can easily work your way up to more complex tasks.

The other option you might consider is posting a syllabus and class information to a BU server called PeopleWeb. Any student, faculty, or staff member at BU can construct a Web site in this area. To sign up for a page, go to *people.bu.edu*. To sign up, click on "about/apply" and fill out the form. IT will then set up the page and send your password to you. This area is good if you want only to post small pieces of information, like a syllabus, because IT limits your space. The program also requires that you create the Web page on your own and simply send it to the site, using an FTP program (File Transfer Protocol). This program is generally available with any Internet connection service like the one supplied by BU, AOL, or EarthLink, for example. I created a PeopleWeb page to serve as a gateway to all my courses. You can view the page at the address *people.bu.edu/banderso*.

In addition to this gateway, I constructed WebCT sites for both of my classes this semester. The first thing I did was to post the syllabus on both pages. I have also scanned into the computer a large number of images and maps; in class, I show them on transparencies, while at the end of the week I

Assistant Professor Betty Anderson teaches Middle Eastern and North African history. She is now in the process of designing a Web site listing Islamic civilization courses at Boston University.

post them to the Web pages. I also upload any papers I hand out to the students, including the weekly outlines, paper topics, and quiz guides. When I arrived at BU, I did not know the level of computer literacy among BU students, so I specifically made these sites informational only. Students can look at the images and see the outlines, but I eliminated all the opportunities for allowing students to submit information. For example, this semester I am not using the bulletin board or requiring students to post papers to the Web. Nevertheless, my 32 students in the introductory Middle East class have accessed the site close to 500 times in the first ten weeks of this semester.

All my WebCT sites are password protected because I do not have the copyright to all the images. Schools have generally followed the policy that copyrighted materials can be posted to the Web if only the students in the class can access them. I also always cite the source for each image to protect myself still further. WebCT deals with this problem by allowing professors to download the course list from "Web Link" and posting the student names to the page. In this way, each student has his/her own ID and password. If you would like to view the sites, let me know and I can provide you with a temporary ID and password.

In planning to construct a Web page, I would recommend a few programs to buy and hints to take into account. In theory, WebCT provides text

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editors that allow you to create pages without understanding HTML, the programming language used on the Web. I would suggest that you take a basic tutorial on HTML (again, provided by IT) or talk to me (as I have taught HTML to many people) to better facilitate the process of creating Web pages. I also like Macromedia's Dreamweaver HTML editor, and BU has just bought a site license for the program, which costs $66 at University Computers. To upload large numbers of files and images at the same time, WebCT requires that you use a Zip program like WinZip. This program places all your images and pages into one compressed file. You then upload the file into WebCT and unzip the files to use them. WinZip is a shareware program that is available at sites like *www.shareware.com*. You can generally use these programs for a designated period of time and then choose to pay for them or delete them.

If you want to move into using images and maps on your page, Jim Dutton will scan your images on the department scanner, but if you want to do the work yourself, you need to invest in the proper technology. A scanner can be purchased pretty cheaply. My scanner cost only $140 and provides sufficient quality for the Web. I would not go below $100, however, as those scanners sacrifice too much quality for the price. The second step is to decide on a graphics software program. The most expensive (and most complicated to use) is Adobe Photoshop 5.5. At University Computers, the program costs about $270. I mention this one because it not only contains all the programming needed to alter images but also includes a program called Adobe ImageReady 2.0. This program is vital if you plan to use a lot of images on your site. Images are very large and take a long time to come through the telephone line. Students will not access your site very often if the pictures take too long to download. ImageReady optimizes the pictures so that they come through the lines quickly, with very little of the quality lost. If Photoshop is too expensive, you might consider easier and less expensive pro-

grams like Paintshop Pro (about $60), which do many, but not all, of the same things.

I know that all of this sounds incredibly complicated, but I am more than happy to explain WebCT and the Web process to any who would like more information. I can also add that I think the Web, in conjunction with the other tools I employ in the classroom, can be used to enhance student learning. I like the permanent nature of the Web, whereby students can view information for the class 24-7. Professors can also start working together on joint projects that help classes at different universities. These projects include ever-expanding archives of photographs and interaction between classes in distant places (I know of a professor in Texas, for example, who holds simulated crises with students at the American University of Cairo). I also like the potential for the students to work together to produce Web projects. Because of the nonlinear nature of the Web, students must think in terms of how their paper connects with someone else's, via a series of hyperlinks. ♦

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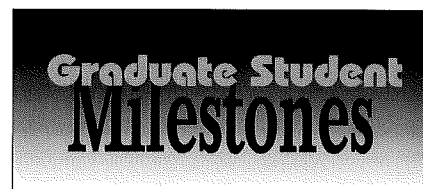

Graduate Student Milestones

The following students had the dissertation prospectus approved:

Melissa Lurio: "Marbode of Rennes and the School of Angers." The first reader will be Professor Clifford Backman, and the second, Professor Bernard Bachrach of the University of Minnesota.

Sarah Phillips: "Acres Fit and Unfit: Environmental Liberalism in the Age of Federal Expansion and Consensus, 1925-1955." The first reader will be Professor Bruce Schulman, and the second, Professor James McCann.

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The "Impact of Darwin" returns

Two different aspects of Darwin's heritage have been in the news in the past several months. The first has been a series of articles in *The New York Times* recording amazing discoveries that complete the fossil record of "missing links"—for example, three bird-like reptiles closely related to the reptile-like bird, Archaeopteryx, the possible discovery of the earliest vertebrate, as well as findings from molecular biology that illuminate the origins of flowering plants and the evolutionary history of mammalian sexual dimorphism at the chromosomal level. The other issue, of course, was the decision of the Kansas state school board to prohibit the teaching of evolution, followed soon after by the New Mexico board's decision to require it.

I first taught a course on the impact of Darwin at the University of Texas in the spring of 1971. It was a memorable course because it included a "field trip" to the Bible Department at Baylor, the Baptist university in Waco. Our colleagues there could not have been more gracious and open-minded, taking the history of Fundamentalist anti-Darwinism with a healthy grain of salt (Baylor's president during the controversies of the 1920s

was an evolutionist).

In the 1970s, when I brought the course to Boston University, the slant was heavily sociological. For example, we conducted two surveys of high school biology teachers, in Boston and in Puerto Rico, and found that Catholic schools tended to be more rigorous in the teaching of evolution than secular public schools were. In the 1980s the course turned more historical, with increasing attention to Darwin himself and the development of his ideas on evolution. I last offered the course in 1989, having since concentrated my teaching interests in the history of science in a Harvard summer course, "Darwin, Freud, and Einstein," which (its title to the contrary) is primarily about the reception of Darwinism.

The colloquium as it will be offered in the spring semester 2000 (HI 479) reflects my own changing interests over the past decade as well as developments in Darwin studies. Fully half the course will be devoted to Darwin himself, in part because the publication of his enormous correspondence through 1862 makes possible a very accessible route to the development of his thought, and in part, because my own interests have shifted from reception to Darwin's social and cultural ambiance.

Thomas F. Glick

An addition to the schedule

HI 593: The Mediterranean. A survey of the Mediterranean from its origins to the present with particular emphasis on the region's religious, political, and cultural particularities, the development of its institutions, its conflicts, and its differences from Europe. The course is open to both graduate students and advanced undergraduates. *Professor Keith Botsford.* Tuesdays 1-4 p.m.

More details on a course

HI 570: American Social Thought. A methods-oriented research seminar. Students will read and analyze four books that take significantly different approaches to the study of social thought, which is provisionally defined as answers to the question, "What makes a good society?" They will then research and present (both in writing and orally) topics of interest to them. Much class time will be devoted to discussion of research techniques and presentation of students' work. The time frame of the course will be determined by student interest. The course is open to both graduate students and advanced undergraduates. *Professor Lori Kenschaft.* Mondays 1-4 p.m.