

Navigating the Internet and the World Wide Web: Workshop Report

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The half-day workshop on "Navigating the Internet and the World Wide Web" was a valuable preamble to the Airlie House Retreat theme, "The Fate of the Scientific Paper in a Paperless Age". It meant coming early, but with a worthwhile program and beautiful Airlie for another day, who could complain? The 11 attendees gathered in the Learning Center, which is one of the best-designed facilities I have ever seen. Individual computer stations arranged in a circular pattern made it possible to follow the course material in a very interactive fashion.

The 3-hour workshop was conducted by Kerry Brandt, assistant professor of Biomedical Information Sciences and Program Director for Curriculum Support at the William H. Welch Medical Library, Johns Hopkins University. Fortunately for us, Brandt is not at all as portentous as his title. He was sensitive to the diversity of professional backgrounds and to the levels of Web expertise, ranging from novice to the sophisticated user, represented in our small class. He was careful to bring us along in such a way

that none of us felt either overwhelmed or bored.

His outline for the afternoon was divided into 4 sections: 1) Internet and World Wide Web overview, 2) browsing and searching the Web, 3) electronic journals and scholarly communication, and 4) biological databases. The handout materials augmented well each of these subject areas.

The 1st section covered the basics of what the Internet is, how it functions, and how it can be accessed. The discussion of the coming shift away from modems to coaxial cable and trunk lines was particularly interesting.

The 2nd section was the most valuable to me. He explained how search engines work, why some are better than others, and how to use the existing engines for different search functions. Of particular help was the material on metasearch engines (which until this course I did not know existed).

The 3rd section was devoted to looking at some online journals, such as the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. There was too little time to delve into the philosophical pros and cons of Net publishing, but he gave us a good introduction to issues later dealt with during the retreat.

In the 4th and final part of the day Brandt discussed biological databases, using as examples the genome database and the protein database. This is one of Brandt's specific areas of expertise and great interest, and he explained it lucidly, but this is heady stuff and a little beyond this pupil's grasp for the time allotment.

So, in sum, it was a very worthwhile and well-conducted workshop on subjects of great interest and timeliness. Criticisms? Too short! To be done properly, I think the subject needs a full day. I know this sounds intrusive on an already tight CBE schedule, but the additional time would permit further exploration of the topics and expand the much needed question-and-answer period. Particularly, it would give the student time to free-range the Net and the Web with an expert looking over her or his shoulder. At the retreat, we agreed that the Internet and electronic publishing were here to stay, for better or for worse. That being the case, it behooves us to make certain that we are all familiar with the tools of the trade. After all, when the Underwood arrived on the scene, the smart ones took typing lessons, didn't they?