



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range (434) 982-2815 trc-uva@virginia.edu <http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/>

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COMPUTERS & TEACHING

TEACHING VIA COMPUTER

We have been continuing our study of electronic mailing lists (maillists) and newsgroups as great ways to stimulate discussions in and out of class (see Ramazani, J. "Student Writing by E-Mail" *Teaching Concerns*, September '94). Here's a summary of what we've learned so far.

Benefits:

- ◆ Students (and teachers) can interact in a less formal environment, at their own pace.
- ◆ Students who don't talk during class discussions often find a strong "voice" via the computer.
- ◆ You can reduce paper handouts for study questions, examples, exercises.

Potential problems:

- Not all students yet have easy access to a computer or to the network.
- Students can resist your efforts to get them to complete assignments *before* the next class.
- Some students feel overwhelmed by lots of class-related e-mail messages.

Possible solutions:

- _ Give students plenty of time to write and read e-mail between class meetings.
- _ Explain clearly the benefits of thinking about new information before coming to class.
- _ Limit the number of students who write each time.

Mailing lists are groups to which you subscribe your students; messages go directly into their e-mail accounts. Subscribers may post messages to the whole group or to individual

contributors.

Benefits:

- ◆ Students get messages automatically through their e-mail accounts and do not have to go through Unix.
- ◆ Participation is limited to those in the class.

To form a mailing list, send e-mail to postmaster@virginia.edu, and request setting up a mailing list. You will automatically receive detailed instructions about how to decide on an appropriate list name and establish the list.

Newsgroups, accessed through Unix, are open to a larger community, in that anyone with access to the UVa gopher can subscribe and contribute. Subscribers post messages to the group and follow up postings with their reactions and contributions. Messages are grouped by subject (or "thread"), and subscribers choose which ones they would like to read. Some instructors use this medium to post class notes and handouts (also a great way to save paper). In these instances, the threads are either class dates or subject headings.

Benefits:

- ◆ "Dialogues" are easy to carry out and see on screen.
- ◆ Participation is not limited to class members, so other points of view may come in (although generally class newsgroups are not perused by the general public; your students would probably have to advertise to get others to subscribe).
- ◆ Mailboxes are not clogged by lots of messages.

Finally, if you teach a very small class, you can have each student make a class alias for e-

mail. For larger classes, however, this takes up a lot of time, effort and space.

TEACHING RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

On the Internet, newsgroups are forums for discussions that are classified by subject area. We'd like to help familiarize neophyte computer users with some of the teaching resources available on the Internet. In other words, we'd like to help you "surf the Net".

The best way to find a group to suit your needs is to browse the subscription list in the newsgroup section of **gwis**. There are around 4,000 groups, so this can be time consuming. Here are some suggestions to help you find groups that meet your needs or interests. This is somewhat like perusing the library stacks, knowing one call number and finding a gold mine of information in the books around it.

To browse, type in one of the slashes below, then one of the following "call numbers." This will take you to newsgroups that start with the "call numbers." Please note that many are only the first part of the address.

Slashes: / search forward
 \ search backward

<u>"Call Number"</u>	<u>Description</u>
uva.teaching	The TRC's newsgroup deals with questions and issues in everyday teaching.
uva.educ.	Curry School newsgroups, some course specific, some general.
uva.med.	Medical school groups.
k12.chat.	
k12.ed.	Focus on kindergarten through grade 12.
k12.lang.	
k12.sys.	
soc.college.teaching-asst	Focuses on issues specific to TAs.
clari.news.education.	
clari.news.education.higher	Offer news stories related

clari.nb.education. to education.

Before posting to a group, be sure to read the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) file, if there is one. This gives the ground rules of the group.

Various colleges and universities offer either newsgroups that deal with teaching or databases of teaching information. One such database at the University of Minnesota, for instance, offers resources for less commonly taught languages. To access this information, part a project of the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, connect to the University of Minnesota server through Worldwide Internet Services on **gwis**. From there, follow this path:

- * University of Minnesota Campus Information
- * All the University of Minnesota Gopher Servers
- * Center for Advanced Research on Languages

If you're feeling adventurous, search other university servers for teaching information. And try our own TRC listing on the **gwis**. Watch for our Mosaic Home Page, too.

Happy surfing!