Course Website Management Best Practices for CS
As approved by the Operations Committee
February 5, 2014

There is great flexibility built into how each of us approach the construction of our classes and this flexibility is important in general and should extend to course websites. That said, course websites are a shared resource, and these best practices are proposed to foster better sharing and archiving. To be clear, we are discussing the sites reached through links such as http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~cs160.

**Class Account:** all classes have associated accounts with public_html directories. Course materials for the website should be stored in those folders using class accounts. Symbolic links to other accounts create problems for future instructors who wish to see a clear picture of what has been available before. Our Systems Administrators are routinely asked by new instructors to reset passwords in the time running up to a new semester and this procedure should be followed. Instructors wishing to maintain their own personal archives should do so by copying their website material to a destination of their own choosing at the close of the semester in which they have taught the course.

**Archiving:** content for individual semesters should be clearly broken out into subfolders with understandable names. For example, fall13 or spring14. The exact naming convention is not prescribed here so long as it is understandable.

**Portability:** everything necessary to re-create a working version of a course website should be present in the semester specific subfolder. In other words, a clean install of the contents of that folder on a new Web server on a new machine should have the result of reproducing the complete working website. To satisfy this practice all internal links must be relative.

**Redirection:** a URL going to the top level for the course should redirect to the most recent semester in which the course is or was being taught. This may be accomplished either by using a PHP redirect or a UNIX symbolic link.

**Seeing the past:** Instructors are encouraged to leave available the course website as it existed at the close of the semester. Instructors in future semesters should refrain from altering these sites. Adding some visual cue, such as a background watermark, will help in avoiding confusion between current and past semesters. There is a practical limit on how long these sites should remain in general, and the rule of thumb shall be that after five years instructors or the department will take down old sites by moving them to a directory path outside of public_html. The default is to leave these open. Instructors may choose to password protect these archives if deemed necessary.