

# PROJECT 1

## A WEBSITE OF MISINFORMATION

### CSE100/INFO100 Fluency with Information Technology

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### Historical Context

What does it mean to have “photographic proof” of an event? Twenty years ago, photographs were taken at face value. A photograph could serve as evidence for what it pictured: certain people or things had been in a particular place, together, at a particular time, doing particular activities.

What does it mean to publish valid and authentic papers? Factual reports and accounts of current events? For many, many years traditional publishing houses [for books, research journals, government documents, and magazines] have used well-established criteria for validating and authenticating the materials they print. A publishing house print or media signature carried meaning about the level and rigor of review for the content – with some imprints conveying greater rigor (e.g., The MIT Press, NPR) than others (e.g., *The National Inquirer*).

This world of twenty or more years ago, while far from being perfect, did have the benefits of being able to validate content at a glance. That’s the upside. The downside was the barriers to publication. If your ideas were not “accepted” or “validated” by the various review boards, your options for publication and dissemination could be limited. A case in point: Albert Einstein’s original paper on relativity was turned down by numerous scientific and mathematical journals.

Enter the Digital Age, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Technology provides unprecedented opportunities for self-publishing and freedom of expression. If Einstein was alive today, he could post his findings on relativity on a Web site and his ideas would instantly be available to billions of individuals across the globe. That’s the upside. But, with unchecked self-publishing comes the downside of content that has never been edited to check for authenticity, for completeness, etc. How is the typical user who down loads a page from the Web to distinguish between the careful considerations of a scientist like Einstein and those of an amateur science fiction writer? Or if the user is looking for travel information or stock recommendations or whatever you wish to fill in here, how is the user to know that

information is current, accurate, and complete? With the advent of digital images that can be easily manipulated (and as you will experience in lab), even photographs that previously might have served as “supporting evidence” are called into question.

In the world we live in today, where the opportunities for self-expression are seemingly endless, how do we discriminate between truth and fiction? Information and misinformation?

What are the ethical limits on how content should be manipulated? Project 1 is designed to help you experience first hand the issues surrounding authenticity and self-expression. Remember that on the Web, the motivation for publishing misinformation does not always have to be intentional misdirection. Many, many sites contain inaccurate information that is published with the best intentions.

## Project Overview

In this project, your challenge is to create a Web site of “misinformation” that *appears* as authentic as possible to the user. That is, while the content of your Web site will be questionable, everything else about your Web site should convey the opposite. The only limitations to your topics are these:

- The topic must be selected from one of the following “current events” areas:
  - Mars Landing
  - Bush Administration Rules for Contracting Iraq Reconstruction
  - California Governor Recall
  - Democratic Primary Race
  - UW Athletic Department Woes
  - Any international news item since September 1

For example, the site might report that the Mars Rover discovered carbon in the form of diamonds. The misinformation must be believable. You cannot simply produce a “joke” site that would not convince any user of its validity.

- The topic must be one on which people will not already have a strong opinion or extensive knowledge that would tip them off. For example, a site that claims that smoking has never had any negative effects on the population will not be considered very mis-informative.
- A good way to create a believable site on a news topic is to create a fictitious organization concerned about the topic.

## Overall steps

[These will be broken down into 2 parts for submission. Read those directions carefully]:

- (1) Locate a digital photograph that is public domain or copyright free from an online or other source (you can take your own digital picture if you have access to a digital camera).
- (2) Using Adobe Photoshop (or some other image design software), modify that photograph in a subtle but significant way.
- (3) Create some text, “the story”, to support your modified image.
- (4) Put your text and image together on a Web site that appears as authentic as possible.

- (5) Test your Web site with at least two individuals to see how successful you are at conveying the authenticity of your “fictional” content.
- (6) Publish the results of your tests along with a summary of your findings.

The content of your website of misinformation should permit comfortable viewing by everyone in the course. If you’re unsure about the “tastefulness” of any particular content, it is probably a good idea to talk with your instructor or TA first, or choose something else. Here are some possible ideas:

- Create a web page for a fictitious candidate for the Democratic nomination or the California Recall election.
- Explain how fictitious voting irregularities in the California Recall election could invalidate the election.
- Create a site offering to go into business with foreign companies so that they can compete for Iraq reconstruction contracts.
- Locate a news story from a country of interest to you, e.g. the Queen of England’s knighting of rock stars, and explain how it has caused tension [or cooperation or new exports or ...] between that country and the US.
- Invent yet another scandal for UW’s Athletic Department.

Remember that in the US it’s OK to make up quotations for public figures like President Bush or Governor Schwarzenegger, but not so for private citizens.

Lab 4 will provide practice for searching for public domain or copyright free images online as well as information about what constitutes copyright of an image on the Web.

## IMPORTANT!!!

The Web site should be in your Dante web space (public\_html or student\_html), but should be in a separate directory (folder) within that web area. Create a new directory within your public\_html. **Name the directory**

### **project1**

**The page(s) you create for Parts A and B must be placed in your project1 directory. *DO NOT* create any files with names that begin with “index”, such as index.html, index.htm, etc in either of the folders.** Use the exact spelling and capitalization given for the directory above so people (such as course staff!) can find your sites easily. Other than that, file names can be whatever you choose.

Make sure the directory and the files in it all have general Unix Read permissions (you will know if they do not when you try to look at your web page on line and receive a “permission denied” message).

Once the due date has come and gone, do NOT alter your web page files for Part A again in any way. Files with a modification date later than the due date will be considered late, and your freebie will be used. Files that are modified more than 24 hours after deadline will not be graded. Any changes you make between the due date and receiving your grade for that project piece will

eliminate any position you may have to question the grade. Once Part A is complete, you do not need to touch those files again.

## Objectives

- To design and implement a Web site using HTML
- To manipulate a photograph in Adobe Photoshop (or some other photo manipulation program)
- To experience first hand the ease with which "misinformation" can be made available online
- To become aware of and systematically explore the "cues" that users may use to assess the content of a Web site
- To conduct user testing to evaluate your Web site
- To reflect on the challenges for misinformation online
- Ultimately, to become an appropriately cautious user of online information

## Copyright and Fair Use of Text and Images

Images and other files and content on the Internet are protected in the same way as print materials and photographs. Use of digital images for purposes of alteration and display on the Internet has limited coverage under the conditions of fair use. See the Four Factor Fair Use test at: [<http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/copypol2.htm>] and the pages 340-343 in the FIT textbook.

Public Domain items are those in which the copyright has been lost, has expired, or the author of the work makes no copyright claims to reproductions or enhancements of the work. Photographs taken by Federal Workers and posted on Federal Government sites are public domain. Photographs posted on City, County, and State sites have varying copyright policies but tend to fall in line with Federal copyright guidelines. **ALWAYS** note the copyright policy of **ANY** site you visit, regardless of its status as a commercial, non-profit, government, or educational site.

If you use an image or trademark that doesn't belong to you, you must get permission.

## Recall Class Policy on Cooperation/Collaboration

It is valuable to work with a friend or classmate when learning a new application or working out a problem. However, the work that you perform in FIT100 for a grade must be your own work unless "working in groups" is explicitly allowed. The Projects involved in FIT 100 are NOT group projects. However, one way that you may collaborate is to connect to a classmate's project as one of the "sources" that back up your information. In other words, you may do a misinformation site on discovering diamonds on Mars and your classmate / friend may do a site on finding investors for a mining mission to Mars, and reference your sight. Both sites are graded separately.

**Part A: Due Thursday, Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>, 11:30 PM**  
**[To be turned in in class on January 23.]**

### What to do

(Hint: read through all of these items carefully before beginning):

1. Using the Web searching skills you develop in Lecture 6, find an image in the public domain or that is "copyright free" and note the source of your image. *Be able to quote from the web site the content that tells you, in no uncertain terms, that you are able to use the image for this project.*
2. Decide how you will modify the image and use it in a Web site of Misinformation.
3. Using the HTML skills developed in the labs to create a web page that describes your future Web site of Misinformation. Include:
  - A. A title (*use a title tag AND a heading tag to note the title bar at the top as well as the title in the main part of the page*) for your web page.
  - B. Create a "bogus" Web site logo using additional features of Adobe Photoshop or any other image creation software. The logo will eventually be a part of your website of Misinformation and should be something obvious that alerts a user that the site is filled with misinformation. Ex. "Bogus Website" or "Website of Misinformation". You will place it in this description page and again in Part B.
  - C. Paragraph 1: A short description of the intended nature of your site (what you intend to do for your project).
  - D. The unmodified image. *Make the text of paragraph 2 flow around it using the appropriate tag attributes or more advanced formatting using tables. **NOTE:** If you decide later to use more than one image, then you must make sure they are all public domain or that you have permission to alter whichever you change.*
  - E. Paragraph 2 should state your source for the image(s). Make sure to include a statement of proof that the image(s) is in the public domain (or that you have permission to use and alter them). Your proof may be an excerpt from the site's copyright policy or email from the owners themselves giving you permission. However, you **MUST** include this information. Just saying that you have permission or that the pictures are in the public domain is not enough. *Consider the information you provide as a legal argument that you would point to if approached about the legality of your use of the image.*
  - F. Paragraph 3 should describe the "true" context of the image(s). What do the image or images really depict? Where did they come from? (Give the link to the site where the image is found.)
  - G. Paragraph 4 should describe the "fictional" context of your image(s) once modified. In other words, how do you **intend** to modify the image and what story will it be supporting. (**Note:** You do not need to modify a copy of the image until Part B.)
  - H. Links to 3 other sites what will help to authenticate your Web site of Misinformation. (These might be other bogus sites (such as a classmate's) OR they might be sites of similar content that help to validate your page). You will have to make the judgment on how well they will support your Part B bogus content.
  - I. Add the following piece of code to the very bottom of your HTML page. Place it immediately ABOVE the </BODY> and </HTML> tags in your source code:

```

<script type="text/javascript">
document.write("Last updated: ");
var modified ;
modified = document.lastModified ;
document.write(modified) ;
</script>

```

*You do not need to know what the tags and code mean at this time. What this code will do is display the date your HTML file was last modified on the web page for us. You will learn HOW this works in the next section of the course.*

### Turn-in procedure:

1. The deadline for making changes to your initial site is: **Thursday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 11:30 PM.**
2. **After this time, make no changes whatsoever to your page**, or it will be graded as late. Changes made more than 24 hours later will mean your site is NOT GRADED at all.
3. Browse to your web site using Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. Print it off, from the web browser. This will confirm to YOU that your files are inside of the public\_html directory in your Dante account.
4. From the browser, print out the HTML source for the site. ( Go to **View > Source** to see the HTML. )
5. Staple all pages together, write your name and section on the first page, and bring them to the next lecture (Friday). Late papers will not be accepted.

### Grading Criteria:

- By the deadline, a Web page conforming to the description of the required content, turned in according to the proper procedure.

## Part B: Due Thursday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 PM

[To be turned in in class on January 30.]

### Details

1. Make a copy of the image(s) used in Part A. Rename them appropriately.
2. Using the Photoshop skills you learn in lab, modify the copied image(s) as you described in Part 1A. Don't be afraid to try other features of Photoshop, etc. while you are at it!
3. Using your more advanced HTML skills learned in lab and class create the website of Misinformation you described in Part A. All pages for your website of Misinformation should all be within the **project1** directory. *Do not create any files with names that begin with "index", such as index.html, index.htm, etc.*
4. Do whatever you can to make the new page look authentic. This includes:
  - A title (*use a title tag AND a heading tag to note the title bar at the top as well as the title in the main part of the page*) for your Web Site clearly identifying it as a Web site of misinformation.
  - The "bogus" Web site logo that you created using additional features of Adobe Photoshop or any other image creation software. The logo should be something obvious that alerts a user that the site is filled with misinformation. Ex. "Bogus Website" or "Website of Misinformation".
  - Your modified image.
  - Write text to reinforce the authenticity of your modified image, etc (minimum of 2 significant paragraphs). In other words, add your "story" to go with the image on the page.
  - Add 3 hyperlinks that help to support your bogus story. They can be the same ones used for part A if you have not found better links.
  - Remember what you learned about evaluating a Web sites and work on "improving" some of those features in your Web site. For example, consider how you can use fonts, colors, spelling and grammar, presentation, textual content, and vocabulary to further enhance the "credibility" of your image.

5. Using the more advanced HTML skills you developed in later HTML labs, continue to refine your Web site of Misinformation as follows:

- Add a mailto link to your email address.
- Use a color tag to control the format (look) of your web site.
- Use tables to format your page in a professional manner.

6. Create another Web page in which you reflect on the problem of misinformation. Keep this in the same directory (project1), and call it **disclaimer.html**

- On this "disclaimer" page, provide a disclaimer for the quality of information on your Misinformation Web site. In other words, let the audience know that the information is bogus and done for a class project.
- Provide a discussion of the ethical issues concerned with conveying the accuracy, completeness and validity of the information you are presenting. What are the issues surrounding the publication of so much "information" by so many people on so many different topics? What are the responsibilities of those who publish information and those who seek information on the Internet? This discussion will need at least two significant paragraphs to be sufficient.
- Include a link from this page (the disclaimer page) back to your Web site of misinformation.
- Add the same piece of code you used in Part A to the very bottom of all your new HTML pages. Place it immediately ABOVE the </BODY> and </HTML> tags in your source code [see top of page 11]:

```
<script type="text/javascript">
    document.write("Last updated: ")
    var modified
    modified = document.lastModified
    document.write(modified)
</script>
```

*You do not need to know what the tags and code mean at this time. What this code will do is display the date your HTML file was last modified on the web page for us. You will learn HOW this works in the next section of the course.*

## Testing your website:

7. How effective is your Web site of misinformation? Find out by trying it out on some unsuspecting visitor! This is a form of experimentation, a typical tool in many disciplines.

- **Create a copy of your Misinformation web page file.** Keep the page in the project1 directory, and call the new file something like **main.html**. On this copy, remove the misinformation title and anything else that gives hints that the page is bogus. Replace the title with something more authentic. Link this test page to your disclaimer page (but do not link from the disclaimer page to main.html).
- Show this version of your Web site to two individuals; ideally, people who do not know you've been working on this project. After they have looked at it for a while, have each visitor rate your Web site according to the evaluation criteria – source, currency, verifiability, and so forth. (Common criteria for believability are listed in FIT, p. 139, so ask your test subjects to rate your page on those criteria.) Create a table of the user evaluations of your site.

- Summarize the responses of your two users. Include the table and your summary on your disclaimer page. The summary should be at least one paragraph and indicate how the users reacted to your site.
- Write a final paragraph on your disclaimer page discussing how effective your Web site was at establishing the credibility of misinformation. How could you have improved the credibility of your site, especially if you had more advanced knowledge of HTML or programming? Be specific and give details of what you would like to have done.

### Turn-in procedure:

8. The deadline for making changes is: **Thursday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 PM.**

9. **After this date, make no changes whatsoever to your site**, or it will be graded as late. Changes made more than 24 hours later will mean your site is NOT GRADED.

10. Browse to your web site using Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. Print it off, from the web browser. This will confirm to YOU that your files are in the public\_html directory in your Dante account.

11. From the web browser, print out the HTML source for the site. Do this for the bogus page and disclaimer page. ( Go to **View > Source** to see the HTML )

12. Staple all pages together, write your name and section on the first page, and bring it to the next lecture (Friday). Late papers will not be accepted.

### Grading Criteria:

- How well your site meets the requirements named above, in a technical/HTML sense. The quality of your modified image.
- How well your site meets the requirements for format and content. This refers to the persuasiveness and coherence of your misinformation through use of text and formatting.
- The care taken in conducting and writing up the visitor experiment, and the thoughtfulness of your discussion on the disclaimer page.