Answering the Call of the Web

UVa crafts a Web certification program for its staff

by **Sandra T. Lee**

Many staff members at the University of Virginia are responsible for creating and maintaining Web pages for their departments, yet they do not have the skills or training for this task. In response to the their increasing need for Web development and design skills, last year the university created a Web Certification Program.

To develop the program, an instructional designer from UVa's Training Services department worked with a committee comprised of ten people from various university departments. The committee gave feedback and suggestions about existing and potential new Web classes and the different certification levels they thought the new program should offer. They also looked at existing programs in the industry. Eventually the committee agreed on a three-level program (see Figure 1) that would offer certificates for Web Basics, Web Designer, and Web Master.

- The Web Basics courses would offer introductions to the Internet, Web editor tools, Web design, and graphics.
- The Web Designer courses would cover Web scripting languages, advanced Web editors and graphics applications, and Web marketing concepts.
- The Web Master courses would teach Web security, search engines, server solutions, and databases.

Certification Criteria

One of the challenges in designing the Web Certification Program was determining the criteria for awarding certificates. The committee considered four options:

The first option would require participants to demonstrate the knowledge and skills learned at each level, with certification depending on a satisfactory evaluation

The second option would require participants to design a Web site that met set criteria. Demonstrating advanced skills could enable participants to move to the next level without taking required courses at the previous level. For example, a participant with proficient skills in Web editors, design, and graphics could submit a Web site that he or she had developed that contained these features. If the site was satisfactory, the participant could skip the Web Basics level.

The third option would require participants to pass a test after completing each level.

The fourth option would simply require workshop attendance for certification at each level.

Most of these options would create several challenges, such as developing criteria for evaluation, needing extra personnel to evaluate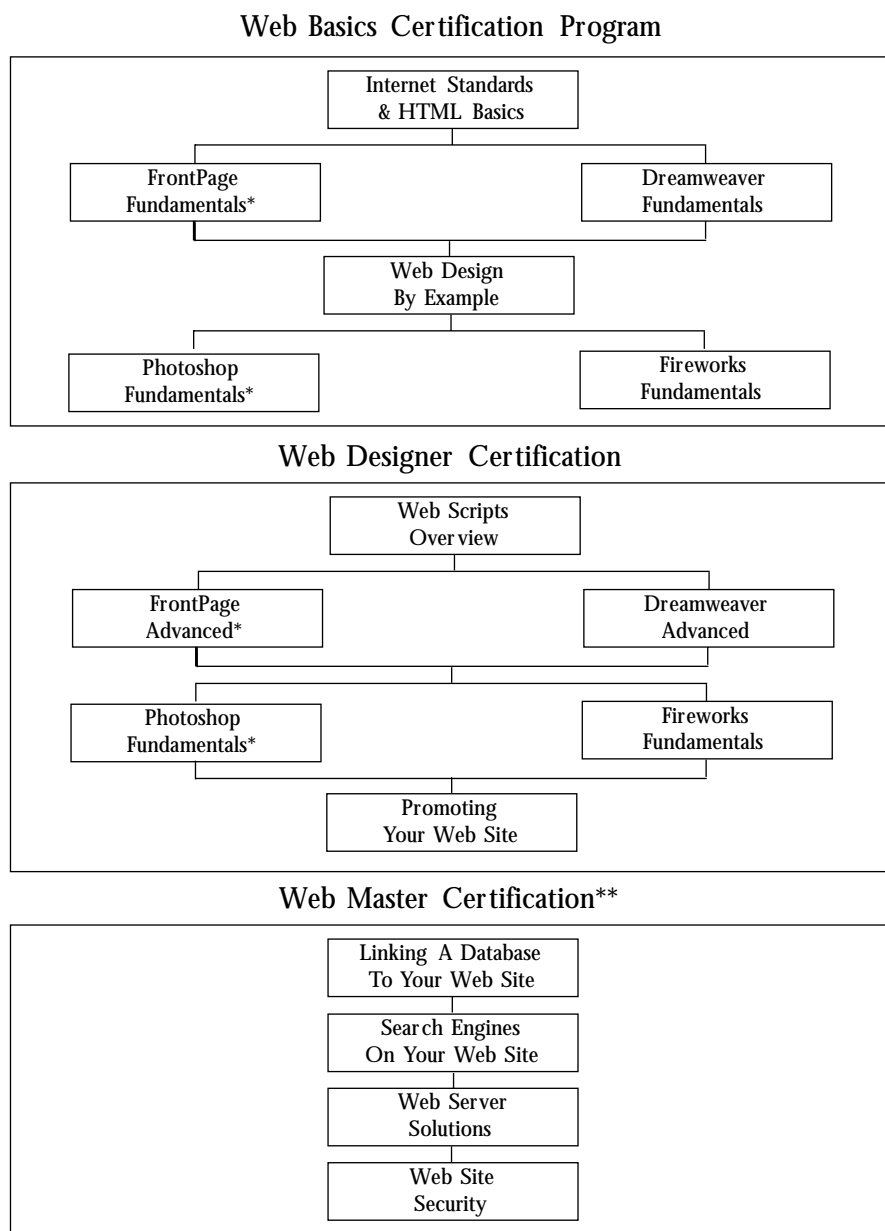 Web sites, and determining if participants could earn certification without attending any of the classes. In one or more of these scenarios, people could conceivably earn certification without taking any of the courses.

The committee realized we did not have the resources that the first three options would require and decided to award certification based on attendance. The greatest benefit of attendance-based evaluation is that certification can be easily managed. As with the rest of the program, the certification criteria are evolving, and as the program grows there may be more resources available for other types of evaluation.

Program Status

The Web Certification Program staff realized during the initial rollout that the majority of staff and other university community members needed to begin at the Web Basics level. While many wanted to complete the program through the Web Master level, they had neither the requisite skills nor the job duties that required those courses. So as of October 1999 the program began to offer only the first two certification levels and to allow ongoing professional development Web classes to meet advanced needs. By replacing the Web Master level with professional development offerings, the program has become more flexible. The new

Figure 1: Initial Three-Level Web Certification Program

Web Basics Certification Program

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              Internet Standards
                & HTML Basics
        ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
   FrontPage                      Dreamweaver
  Fundamentals*                  Fundamentals
        └──────────────┬──────────────┘
               Web Design
               By Example
        ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
   Photoshop                        Fireworks
  Fundamentals*                   Fundamentals
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Web Designer Certification

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               Web Scripts
                 Overview
        ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
   FrontPage                      Dreamweaver
   Advanced*                       Advanced

   Photoshop                        Fireworks
  Fundamentals*                   Fundamentals
        └──────────────┬──────────────┘
                Promoting
              Your Web Site
```

Web Master Certification**

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             Linking A Database
              To Your Web Site

               Search Engines
              On Your Web Site

               Web Server
               Solutions

               Web Site
               Security
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*A fee is charged for these workshops.
**This level has now been discontinued, replaced by various professional development offerings.

structure better satisfies the training needs of most program participants, and the professional development courses are better suited to both the advanced skills and professional goals of university staff participating at that level.

Demand for the courses is high, and many classes fill quickly. As of April 2000, 98 people had earned the Web Basics certification and 19 had earned the Web Designer certification.

Program Effectiveness

Participants who completed the first level as of August 1999 were surveyed and interviewed about the program. Evaluations were positive, with "very good" to "excellent" ratings on all aspects of the program including structure, effectiveness, and relevance. Many of those interviewed thought the courses were valuable not only to them, but also to the university. According to the survey results and comments, the program is well received and is meeting participants' needs.

Future Plans

New versions of Dreamweaver and Fireworks software were released recently by Macromedia, and revisions to related course materials are in progress. Revisions will not only include the upgrades' new features but will also incorporate suggestions from participants and instructors. Presently, some participants have been exempted from first-level courses as they had taken equivalent classes elsewhere and already mastered the skills. The program may eventually require participants to submit a Web site meeting certain criteria to fulfill certification requirements in addition to the current course completion requirements. The professional development track offerings will change every few months as new technologies and resources become available.

While the Web Certification Program is a recent addition to the University of Virginia's training services, it has quickly become a valuable program. The program's success can be attributed to assessing the needs of the university community accurately, designing a program collaboratively across departments, and encouraging and implementing feedback for improvement. *e*

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