

Preceptor Handbook

the Preceptor Group
Harvard University

Preceptor Handbook
by the Preceptor Group

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This document collects some information for new preceptors at the Harvard Mathematics department. This document got started in 2000 and was updated since then by members of the preceptor group. It is intended for internal use only.

This is part of a historical document, last modified in 2004. Much has changed of course since. It was initially written by Andy Engelward and was later maintained by others. It was used during the early years of the preceptor program as an initial guide. This is only part of the book, it includes the beginning and a chapter about technology added by Oliver Knill in 2003-2004.

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Introduction

Welcome to the Preceptor Handbook! This document contains information on some of the responsibilities of the preceptor group. The goal is to provide a comprehensive guide for new preceptors covering as many different aspects of the job as possible. The idea is that by putting all of this information in one place, we'll be able to spend less time tracing down information, and more time creating an excellent calculus program. In addition to this guide, new preceptors should also read through the "guide for Teaching Fellows" produced by the Derek Bok Center as well as the Harvard Faculty Handbook.

Chapter 1. Preceptors

What is a "preceptor"? The term is not used in other universities or has an other meaning. Even at Harvard, preceptors at different departments have different jobs. Here is the official blurb from the application form: "The preceptor group works alongside other faculty of the Mathematics department on teaching, developing and supporting sections of entry level courses through multivariable calculus and linear algebra."

Figure 1-1. Tree



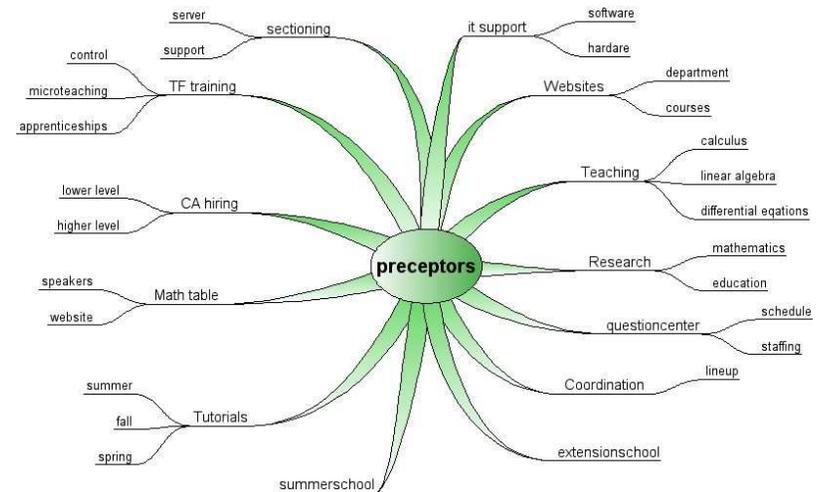
The activities of the preceptor group include:

- coordinating the calculus program
- course heading/teaching during semesters
- teaching extension school
- hiring and training CA's
- websupport for course websites

- computer support
- microteaching
- overseeing placement tests
- sectioning and advising
- teacher training
- organizing the math table
- running the question center (MQC)
- tutorial organisation
- reading senior theses
- organizing talks for the preceptor seminar
- data mining
- writing calculus texts
- staying tuned on educational matters

Besides teaching, preceptors do lots of administrative and organisational work as well as some research. They do in a professional way what in other places is done by "adjoint faculty".

Figure 1-2. Mindmap



1.1. The transition from teacher to preceptor

As a teacher you look after your charges - your students. Looking after means teaching, guiding, prodding, encouraging, ... learning about their strengths and weaknesses and doing what you can to help them both learn the material and develop intellectually. As a preceptor you look after your charges, who are now graduate student teachers, new teachers at all levels, undergraduate course assistants, and math concentrators. Looking after means teaching, guiding, prodding, encouraging, ... learning about their strengths and weaknesses and doing what you can to help them both develop as teachers and, for undergraduates, as students. While some of this teaching, guiding, prodding, encouraging happens formally, much of the most important interactions don't come under formal responsibilities. You can often have the most impact in informal interactions. I'd like to say that part of the job is to look for opportunities to do this. The impact that you might have on a "weaker" teacher can actually have the most far-reaching impact on students in general, since many of the students teaching here for the first time in their careers will make a career out of mathematics, and therefore a career out of teaching. Be sure to share teaching ideas and strategies. These may seem natural to you, but may not be something that other teachers are thinking about. Just as our weakest students are smart people who are not thinking when it comes to math, (they just don't believe their brains are supposed to be used when doing math), so too, our weakest teachers are very smart people who are not using their whole brain when it comes to teaching, (they just don't believe their brains are supposed to be used when teaching.) Some of this sharing and prodding people to think can happen at course meetings. Some of it will happen more informally.

1.2. Some ways to make a real difference.

Identify graduate students who are either having trouble with their teaching or are marginalized or disconnected in some way. Talk informally with them about their teaching, their classroom dynamics, their students. See what they are happy with and what is bothering them. Give a concrete suggestion or two. Illustrate how to diagnose the problem and demonstrate that looking for solutions is a doable and creative task. Check back with them about specifics. I've found graduate students universally grateful for the individual attention and specific suggestions. Have you discovered that a B.P. is having trouble in the classroom? Try to find an informal way to help him or her. Once you've established some sort of relationship with that person it will become easier for the BP to come talk with you when things are going astray or to bounce ideas off of you. All the most constructive "BP bailing out" in the past have been very informal. But they can really make a difference; there have been people who have said as much when they move on to other jobs. Act as a mentor to CA's who have sharp corners or lack of confidence or other issues that are holding them back from reaching their potential. Again, this can make a world of difference for the person. Read the midterm questionnaires. It's really important and gives you an easy way to initiate and carry out difficult discussions. For instance, how in the world was I going to approach a haughty graduate student and say "you act like you think you're far better and more important than anyone else and that's getting in the way of your teaching"? Instead, we sat down with his midterm questionnaires. (We had to do this because we didn't want him to get a nasty letter from the Dean's Office - folks with low teaching scores get letters.) So we started out both on the same side. Protecting him from the big bad Dean. (And there are big bad Deans at many schools, so learning to protect oneself from the wrath of a Dean is a good career move.) Student after student described this fellow as arrogant. So I could ask for his comment - which was "most people think I'm arrogant". So I could ask "what does that image do for you that is good for you and what does that image do for you that is not useful for

you?" Once he had established that the image of arrogance was more of a hindrance than a help I could ask him to analyze what he does in the classroom that promotes that image. (It's sometimes great to have never been to the class when doing the most difficult "advising" because you can say - 'look, I wasn't there - you're going to have to think about what you could be doing and tell me about it.')

So midterm questionnaires let you have really hard conversations that end up with you and the teacher you're working with on the same side - feeling more like a team than adversaries.

1.3. Basic preceptor guidelines

Study carefully the entire "Information for Instructors" booklet issued by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (see www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/handbooks/instructor (http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/handbooks/instructor). but for matters that involve people, rules, or money outside the Department, contact the Calculus Director or Senior Preceptor before proceeding. The Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Chair may also be consulted as appropriate. For all but the most routine e-mail or communications with people outside the Department about calculus courses or students, it is a good idea to send a copy to the Calculus Director.

1.4. Start of classes

Research and experience show that the first day of class is extremely important. Every calculus section leader should prepare, practice, and get feedback on their plans for that day. For those who have not taught before, it is especially important to do this in detail and well in advance. Some general advice about the first day:

- Say a bit about who you are and why you are delighted to be teaching this course.
- Present goals for the course as a whole and refer back to these throughout the semester
- Get to work on some content. Minimize time spent on administrative details since these matters should all be covered in writing anyway.
- Get to know the students and their names
- Encourage participation and set a positive tone right from the start.

A good source concerning first days is the chapter by Jeff Wolcowitz in "The Art and Craft of Teaching" available at the Bok Center. To allow time for student to get from one room to another, classes start five minutes after the announced hour, but end precisely as announced. Thus, a section listed as meeting from 10:00 to 11:30 would usually begin at 10:05 and end at 11:30. Use those five minutes to get to know your students informally, but then start promptly, especially at the beginning of the semester. If you wait for everyone to arrive, they will just come later and later. Students sign up for classes with the Registrar after a week or so of "Shopping Period." They may not drop or add courses after the fifth Monday of term. Be sure to get to know your students and give them sufficient feedback well before the drop/add deadline so that you can counsel them into a more appropriate course if they are not well placed. FAS rules state that: "Instructors are expected to be in residence throughout the academic year, including the Reading Periods and Examination Periods. However, short absences may become necessary and are permissible, so long as academic responsibilities are met or adequately covered and [the prescribed] procedures have been

observed." If you may be absent for two or more consecutive classes, speak with the Calculus Director or Chair in advance. Absences of a week or more during term require permission from the Dean.

1.5. Reading period and Exams

Humanities courses usually do not meet at all during Reading Period, but some upper level mathematics and science courses continue throughout. Calculus classes should, in any case, avoid introducing new material during reading Period. It is a good idea to hold review meetings during that time. You are not supposed to accept any coursework after the last day of reading period (other than the final examination, of course). Finals are scheduled and proctored by the registrar, but Course Heads need to be present for the start and end of the examination. It is the Course Head's responsibility to come early, bring enough copies of a carefully proofread test, answer questions, and sign for the completed papers at the end. However you arrange the grading, be very careful to make sure no examination papers ever get lost. Students may only take finals at the time and place determined by the Registrar. You cannot allow any exceptions. The Administrative board may grant students who miss an exam the right to take a make-up, usually near the beginning of the next semester. It is therefore a good idea to prepare a make-up examination, too, at the same time you prepare the regular final. Check with the Calculus director and other experienced course Heads about your grade distribution. Never post the final grades. Give a copy of all grade sheets to the department office. FAS rules state: "Most instructors return exam booklets, papers, and other academic work to the students enrolled in their courses. Work that is not returned to students must be kept in a safe, accessible location on campus for at least one year after the end of a course. By law, students have the right to review all materials submitted to a course, and for a reasonable charge, may have copies of any originals not returned to them. Course heads should be sure to collect from section leaders and tutors any course assignments that have not been returned to students for appropriate storage. Faculty who are leaving the FAS or who will be on leave and away from the University should make appropriate arrangements for maintaining the availability of students' work."

1.6. Professional Conduct

Excerpts from "Information for Instructors": Authority: By virtue of their authority within the academic community, teachers have the power to influence thought and behavior, and the concomitant responsibility to recognize the potential weight of their verbal and nonverbal expressions. As leaders in the classroom, teachers have the responsibility not only to impart the excitement of ideas and the challenge of academic debate, but also the importance of courtesy and respect in intellectual dialogue. Fair Treatment of All Students: Students should be treated even-handedly. Equity is not necessarily achieved, however, by treating all students in precisely the same way. For example, some students respond positively to hearty, well-intoned criticism while others are discouraged by it. Some students welcome public comments about their work, while others are embarrassed by them. Genuinely even-handed treatment of students depends upon making a conscientious attempt to recognize and appreciate such differences. Teachers (and students) should guard particularly against ethnic, religious, sexual, and other discriminatory stereotyping. Interpersonal Relations: The power teachers exercise over students to penalize or reward in the form of grades and recommendations requires caution in interpersonal interactions, and the need to avoid the kind of familiarity that compromises objective and

fair evaluation of a student's work. In particular, sexual advances towards or liaisons with one's students are inappropriate, and violate University policy. Within these limits, however, intellectual mentoring and friendly interaction are important elements of the learning and teaching process. Clear Communication: Because the evaluation of students partly depends on their understanding of the requirements of a course, course heads should be clear in their articulation of expectations, assignments, and the rules of collaboration and citation. Providing written explanations of assignments and requirements reduces the risk of misunderstanding. Students have the right to expect prompt return of papers and exams and a clear justification of evaluation, just as instructors have the right to expect that assignments will be thoughtfully completed on time. Classroom Engagement: The classroom is frequently the site of intense intellectual debate-or, alternatively, unbearable silence. Maintaining an environment for a constructive contest between ideas and their supporting evidence is primarily the responsibility of the teacher. Teachers should be aware of any tendency to favor one mode of argument over another, in which only certain students thrive; of the importance of listening attentively and with respect; and of the significance of nonverbal clues (nods, frowns, gestures, etc.). Criticism of Work: Comments should be directed at the work, not the person; and they should contribute to the refinement of both thinking and presentation. Peremptory dismissiveness is not appropriate. Professors are responsible for the oversight of all grades given by teaching fellows. Letters of Recommendation: Students depend on instructors for letters of recommendation. Honesty and fairness in responding to requests for recommendations is essential. Advising: Access to advising should be offered and equally afforded to all. Confidentiality and Discretion: Teachers are privy to information (and opinions) about students that ought to remain confidential. Exceptions should be made only in cases of emergency, such as threat of suicide, or other harmful behavior, when confidentiality is secondary to a student's welfare. Talking with colleagues or other students about confidential student information is inappropriate, as is any form of public embarrassment or shaming of a student. Collegial Conduct: Status differences exist within the teaching staff of every university. Awareness of the relative positions of colleagues in the academic hierarchy may avoid placing them in awkward or compromising situations. The implications of making particular requests of one's junior ought to be considered before making them; the right to refuse, for reasonable cause, without consequence, ought to be guaranteed every member of the community. Professional and research opportunities should be awarded with equity and fairness. Sexual Harassment: The Faculty has devoted considerable attention to the topic of sexual harassment and has adopted guidelines describing harassment and procedures for resolving complaints. Both documents are available from the *Office of Academic Affairs* (http://www.fas.harvard.edu/home/academic_affairs/staff.html) The first document, entitled Sexual Harassment: Guidelines in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, is a policy statement describing what constitutes sexual harassment; it defines sexual harassment in the following way: "The determination of what constitutes sexual harassment will vary with the particular circumstances, but it may be described generally as unwanted sexual behavior, such as physical contact or verbal comments, jokes, questions, or suggestions. In the academic context, the fundamental element of sexual harassment is ordinarily the inappropriate personal attention by an instructor or other officer who is in a position to exercise professional power over another individual. [...]Such behavior is unacceptable in a university. It seriously undermines the atmosphere of trust essential to the academic enterprise." The statement also addresses the issue of amorous relationships between individuals of different university status: "Amorous relationships that might be appropriate in other circumstances always have inherent dangers when they occur between any teacher or officer of the University for whom he or she has a professional responsibility (i.e. as teacher, adviser, evaluator, supervisor). [...]Officers and other members of the teaching staff should be aware that any romantic involvement with their students makes them liable for formal action against them." The guidelines also indicate the manner in which sexual harassment may have an adverse impact in a scholarly community: "The Faculty of Arts and Sciences seeks to maintain a learning and work environment free from sexual harassment, including unprofessional conduct in

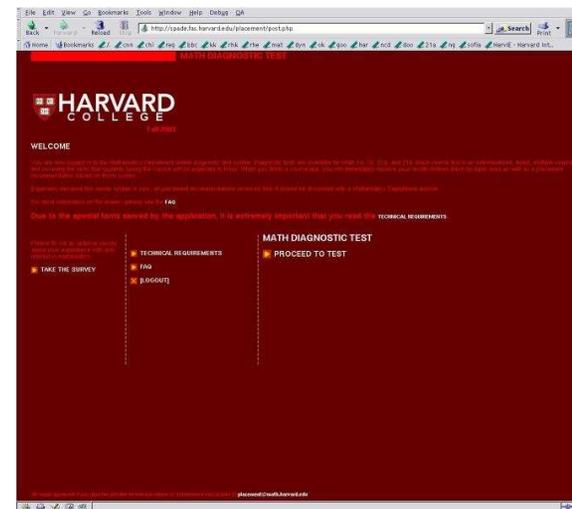
Chapter 11. Placement test

The placement test is still done proctored on paper. For many years the same test was used. It has been revised a bit in the years 2001-2002, especially rewritten in LaTeX.

11.1. Online Placement Test

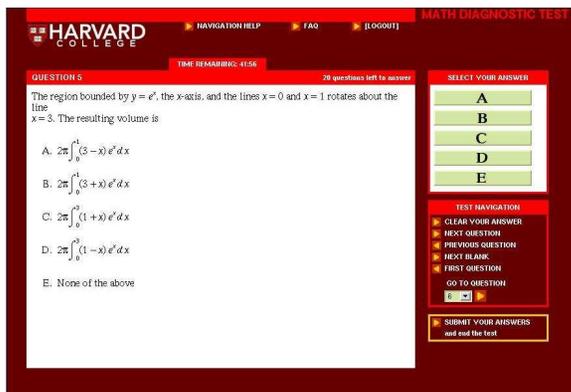
An online placement test was written in the spring and summer 2003 by Paul Bamberg and a few students. It was tested in the Summer and Fall of 2003. Like the written test, the online placement test is also given in a proctored environment. The test was running on a local Math department computer: <http://spade.fas.harvard.edu/placement> (You will have to install some fonts to run it <http://www.mozilla.org/projects/mathml/fonts>)

Figure 11-1. Online Placement Test



11.2. Questions examples

Figure 11-2. Questions Example



1) How many lines pass through the point (1,5) and are perpendicular to both the lines $x+y=6$ and $x-y=-4$?

- a) 2
- b) 1
- c) 3
- d) infinitely many
- e) 0

2) What are the center C and radius r of the circle with equation $x^2 + y^2 - 2x + 2y = 2$?

- a) $C=(-1,1)$; $r=4$.
- b) $C=(1,-1)$; $r=2$.
- c) $C=(1,-1)$; $r=4$.
- d) $C=(-1,1)$; $r=2$.
- e) $C=(1,-1)$; $r=2$.

3) If a particle moves according to the equations $x=2 \cos(2t)$, $y=\sin(2t)$ for $0 < t < 2$, its path is

- a) a line segment
- b) a circular arc

- c) an elliptic arc
- d) a parabolic arc
- e) a spiral

11.3. Handout with written Placement test MOPE

More Placement Information from the Mathematics Department. Welcome to Harvard! As a supplement to the pencil-and-paper placement exam, the Mathematics Department is making available a system of online placement exams. These exams are sponsored by a grant from the Provost's Fund for Innovation in Information Technology. The Mathematical Online Placement Exam offers students:

- Individual course tests to decide your readiness. We have separate tests to place into 1a (first semester of calculus), 1b (second semester of calculus), or 21a (multivariable calculus). We also have a test to help if you are trying to decide between Math 21a and the more theoretical first-year courses Math 23, 25, and 55.
- Mastery tests to determine satisfaction of prerequisites. If you are interested in taking a course with 1b, 21a, or 21b (linear algebra) as a requirement, you can take a test to verify your background knowledge.
- Feedback after each test to show what specific skills you need extra practice in before being fully equipped for a course, and
- The opportunity to take the test more than once to improve your score after a bit of review Each online exam consists of 3040 multiple-choice questions and can be taken at any time from any networked computer. We invite all first-year students to take the online placement exam, as it offers extra, more detailed advice on choosing your first math course. The exam is strongly encouraged for students who:
 - Have scored a 4 or 5 on the Calculus BC Advanced Placement Exam, or
 - Have completed coursework on the level of 21a before enrolling at Harvard. The online exam covers topics not in the paper exam but which are necessary for several higher-level math courses.

Both the pencil-and-paper and online exams are informational and do not by themselves grant or prevent enrollment. Please talk to any of the Math Department's advisors or your freshman proctor if you have further questions about choosing a course. For more information or to take the online placement exam, visit: <http://www.math.placement.fas.harvard.edu/> We look forward to your enrollment in any of our courses. (Tear this page off before you turn in the test.)

Chapter 12. Summer and Extension school

Some preceptors teach in the extension school and/or the summer school. The audience in those courses differs from the studentbody. While in the summerschool, one can see many high school students who want to get a head start in calculus, the extension school students include adults who brush up their knowledge in the evening. The summer school and extension school have informative websites and also publish a booklet every year.

12.1. Summer school peculiarities

- CA's are hired by Sergan Divac. About a month before classes start, you will hear the name of your CA.
- Midterms take place during regular class times, the final is administered by proctors.

12.2. Extension school peculiarities

- CA's (if required) are hired by the instructor

Chapter 13. Computer stuff

In this chapter we list some initial information for computer needs. Most of the information can be found on the Math department website.

13.1. Getting started

Our system administrator is Arthur Gaer. Most preceptors are computer savvy too and can help out too. Information technology changes extremely fast. Here are three things to get started with:

- Get a computer account
- Apply online for a FAS account too. This is handy if you want to use the kiosk computers or lab computers in the science center or if you want to connect to Harvard from home using a modem.
- Get your computers connected in your office.
- In case you have a laptop, it is convenient to have a wireless connection. This is especially useful if you want to use it for teaching.
- Learn how to hook up your computer in the classroom.
- Locate the printers in the 3rd, 4th and 5th floor.
- Walk through the computer labs in the science center to see what students can use. Knowing this can be useful if you plan to use new software.
- Learn about the resources which are available.
- Familiarize yourself with the ICG toolkit for course websites. Even so you might not want to use it for your class, it has useful features like facebook. You can send email to all students. It is also good to make questions and answers.
- Make sure your machine is always up to date with respect to operating system patches.
- If you have a laptop, it is advisable to lock it when unattended.

13.2. Course webpages

What are the possibilities to setup a course website? When setting up a course website, you have the following options:

- Use the toolkit on FAS website: go to <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~maths21a/admin>
- Use the toolkit with direct editing on FAS website: `ssh math21a@fas.harvard.edu, ftp math21a@fas.harvard.edu`
- Edit directly the FAS website: example: `ssh math21a@fas.harvard.edu`

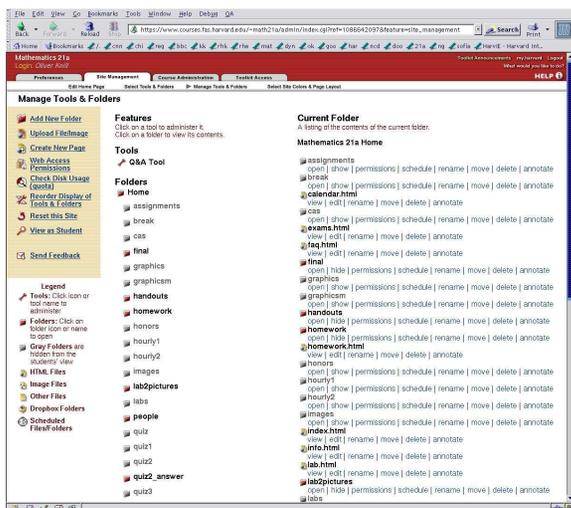
- Redirect the website to a private website on an other webpage.

13.3. The Toolkit

The documentation of the toolkit is quite good:

- <http://www.math.harvard.edu/computing/toolkit/index.html>
- <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~icg/FAQ/>
- <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/toolkit/tour/standard.html>

Figure 13-1. Toolkit



13.4. Without Toolkit

To edit the FAS website directly: telnet to fas.harvard.edu go to the directory public_html and edit the files. An other possibility to keep a local version of the website, which is copied regularly to the fas account via FTP. Some course heads set up their course website in abel and redirect the course URL to a

directory in the personal URL. The advantage to do so is that you don't have to login to an other account to update the website. The disadvantage is that the need of a URL redirection which disrupts the history path of a surfer.

13.5. Necessary ingredients of a course website

What information has to go onto the course website? A course website does not need to be complicated nor fancy. Most important is that all the information can be found easily and that the website is updated regularly.

- A syllabus with topics, grading policy, textbook information etc.
- A place for announcements, news
- Important calendar dates, midterm and final announcements
- Course head and section leader data
- Homework and solutions
- Additional handouts
- Labmaterial used in class
- Previous exams for practice
- Links to relevant websites about the topic

13.6. Basic formats of the web

- HTML, the markup language of the web is learned fast, especially for people who know Latex. One can learn a great deal from looking at existing documents to see how things are done.
- JAVASCRIPT is a simple yet powerful programming language which allows to make dynamic websites. Since Javascript is not compiled, one can learn quite a bit from existing pages by looking at the source code.
- JAVA allows the creation of interactive applets.
- PDF allows to publish documents in such a way that the format, fonts, style is preserved. People need a plugin or external viewer when hitting a PDF document on the web.
- FLASH allows to deliver multimedia content like sound, animations, video to the user.
- REAL/Quicktime/WindowsMedia are the current popular choices to deliver streaming video to the user.

Converting existing documents to webpages The following possibilities are the most commonly used ways:

- Writing the document directly in HTML
- Writing the document in SGML and translating it to LaTeX, HTML with sgm12latex, sgm12html
- Writing the document in LaTeX and translating it to HTML with latex2html
- Writing the document with a textprocessor like Abiword, Staroffice, Word perfect, MSWord and exporting it to HTML.
- Writing the document with a publishing software like LaTeX, Pagemaker, Quarkpress or Word processor and exporting the PDF document.

13.7. Computer resources

Figure 13-2. Projector in Hall 507



Figure 13-3. Public Computer Room with Scanner



Figure 13-4. Meccah



- For most tasks, a generic PC or Mac will suffice. Many preceptors use Mac OS X, some PC's others the Linux operating system.
- For CPU intensive tasks, there is a Unix cluster available at the Mathematics department. It is called "meccah". modular.fas.harvard.edu/meccah (<http://modular.fas.harvard.edu/meccah/>) See William Stein if you want to use it.
- One of the Sun servers called "neron" modular.fas.harvard.edu/neron (<http://modular.fas.harvard.edu/neron/>) is equipped with 22 Gig of memory. If you should have a task which needs this, run it there.
- In particular, avoid the use of the main server Abel for CPU intensive tasks.
- It is good to know what students for their disposition. In the basement of the science center as well as in the second floor, there are Unix labs, PC labs and Mac Labs. While at the Math departement, we have Magma, Maple, Mathematica, students can get access to Mathematica. There is a cite licence. site-licence for Mathematica. In multivariable calculus and linear algebra, the computer algebra system Mathematica was used routinely since many years.

13.8. Archiving

We keep old course websites archived on abel. Most of these pages are not linked, some not accessible. If you want some material not public on the archive, just restrict access on the website. This restriction will be inherited in the archive. You always can access from within abel those pages with "cd /usr/local/Web/archive".

- Manual acces of documents in /usr/local/Web/preceptor/docs and /usr/local/Web/archive
- Access through the web on <http://abel.math.harvard.edu/preceptor/docs/> using the login name "preceptor" and the password "nolimits".

13.9. Groupware

A typical groupware application contains a subset of

- calendar
- todo list
- sync with handhelds like palm
- project lists
- document database, document exchange
- email, mailing lists, newsgroups
- workflow systems

- shared whiteboards
- chatsystems, discussion system
- news forums
- collaborative writing systems, wikis

Available groupware resources at Harvard are

- ICG toolkit: discussion list, email to groups
- The myharvard tool <http://my.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/portal.cgi> is a decent collaborative tool. It is not very sophisticated, but is completely web based and simple.
- Harvard uses Meeting maker at some places. Webevent is an addition to meeting maker which is used in the physics department for example but it is quite expensive.

Remarks:

- We experimented with online calendars on our own servers but preceptors have not used it extensively yet.
- The most effective groupware for a small group we are seems meeting in person or organizing by email.
- Group management tools need support and maintainance. Most have a database like MySQL or PostgreSQL under the hood.
- Users have to learn how to use it. The complexity is similar to the one of a word processor (my.harvard.edu has a fraction of the complexity of some commercially available groupware projects).
- Many open source projects are under heavy development like phpgroupware. It seems hat at this moment there is a choice between pretty robust but expensive commercial products (with frequent upgrades and associated relearning and maintainance and costs) and open source projects (with glitches and which are mostly "work in progress" and which need a lot of configuration and maintainance.) A newer option is the Suse OpenExchange Server, 4.1 (about 400 Dollars for 50 users), which allows interaction with MS Exchange.

13.10. For teaching

Especially for reviews or introduction meetings, people often use slides to review some material. The main lecture halls are well equipped for that. Many classrooms are also prewired with projectors. Sometimes a cable is needed to hook up your computer. If you have a wireless card on your computer, you can use it in all classrooms. If the connection should be too weak, you might have to open the door of the lecture hall a bit. Students appreciate the change of an occasional presentation but one should not do it too often. It can be helpful once to present a little Mathematica animation, but getting draged too much into the inner workings of the program defeats the purpose. Often it makes more sense to post an applet or graphics on the website with instructions and information how to use or interpret it.

13.11. Useful Websites

We live in the Google age. Google answers most questions better than any guide can do. Things change fast on the web. Make sure, you get to know the Harvard website, the FAS websites as well as the Math department website. It is also a good idea to look through existing course websites in order to get to know what is taught here and what syllabi are used.