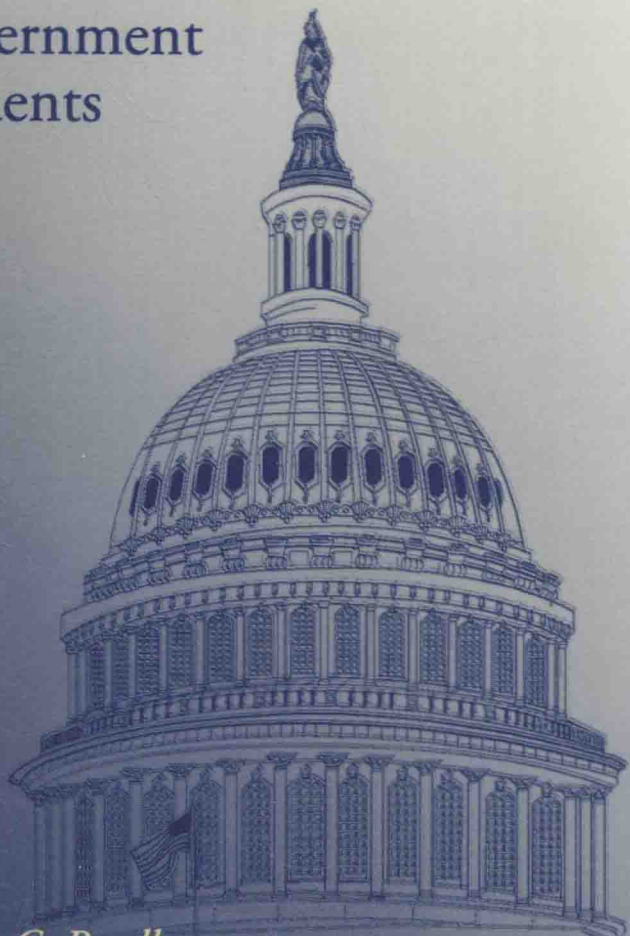


A World Wide Web Guide for American Government Students



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THE INTERNET

What Is It?

The Internet is a global network of computer networks. A computer network is a system that allows computers to communicate with each other. For instance, many high schools have computer labs that have several desktop computers using one or two printers and a common package of software. A **local area network** (LAN) connects the lab computers to a central computer. The network allows a student using a lab computer to access a software program on the central computer. If the student wants to print a paper, the desktop computer will communicate the print request via the LAN to the central computer, and then the central computer via the LAN will determine if a printer is available to print the paper and when the printing will be done. There are thousands of these networks connecting millions of computers in homes, schools, companies, and governments throughout the world. Computers in one network can communicate with computers in other networks by the Internet. This is possible because different types of computers in different networks communicate in a standardized format on the Internet. This essentially means all computers linked

to the Internet communicate with each other in the same language. This language is called **TCP/IP** (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol). TCP breaks down information sent from a computer into little packets for transmission on the Internet and reassembles the packets at the target computer. IP makes sure the packets arrive and are reassembled at the correct target computer.

In many respects, the Internet, also called the Information Superhighway and Cyberspace, is the largest computer system in the world. No one government or organization owns the Internet. There are no restrictions on who can use the Internet, and no government regulations on the content of the materials available through the Internet. Most of the day-to-day operating policies of the Internet are established by mutual agreement of its users.

A Brief History

The Internet began in the late 1960s as a Department of Defense (DOD) initiative. The DOD wanted to develop a communications system for government computers that could not be knocked out by a single nuclear missile strike or a natural disaster. In 1969, **ARPAnet** (the Advanced Research Project Agency network) was created to

connect government computers with those of defense contractors throughout the nation. The network was designed so that if any one installation was destroyed computer communications could continue.

In the 1970s, ARPAnet grew rapidly as major universities and research organizations joined the network. This created a priority demand for the network to develop a standardized format for all the different computers to communicate with each other in an understandable manner. TCP/IP was introduced in 1973 to meet this demand.

Due to the creation of TCP/IP and greater awareness of ARPAnet, more universities, organizations and companies joined the network in the 1980s. As the amount of computer communications increased on the network, the speed of transmitting those communications decreased. The DOD realized the network was becoming clogged, and that there was an increasing intermingling between military and civilian computer communications. So the DOD split the old ARPAnet into two parts: a network exclusively for military use, and a new ARPAnet, which would be overseen by the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The National Science Foundation soon phased out ARPAnet and created NSFnet, which

was designed to support computer communications between scientists and supercomputers at major universities. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, computer communications on the NSFnet increased so rapidly that the NSF realized that overseeing the network was beyond its capabilities. In 1995, the NSF dropped its oversight role.

Currently, an estimated 55 million people in more than 70 nations used the Internet. The number of Internet users is projected to increase at a rate of ten percent per month. In this nation, the federal government made a commitment to connect all elementary and secondary public schools to the Internet by the year 2000.

The increase of users and growth of available information are causing some computer experts to speculate that the Internet is close to collapse. In response to these concerns, the NSF has recently created an experimental Internet II system to allow extremely high speed transmissions of large data sets between several major universities and the federal government.

This brief history has reflected that the Internet is constantly changing. Computer addresses on the Internet regularly disappear, change, or new ones are created. Information at many of the addresses is updated monthly, weekly, daily, and

even hourly. With the advent of WebTV, access to the Internet will become easier for more people creating more demand on Internet resources.

What Good Is It?

The Internet is claimed to be the most revolutionary technological development ever in the field of communications. Similar claims have been made about its impact on education. Whether you accept these claims or not, an ever-increasing number of people across the world are linking to the Internet. Why are more and more people surfing the Net?

The Internet has much to offer. The most widely used feature is **e-mail** (electronic mail). By using e-mail, you can send a message from your computer to someone else's computer in another part of the world in a few seconds. To send, receive, and manage e-mail messages, you will need a software program such as Eudora, which is currently the most popular e-mail program.

You can also use e-mail to join a **mailing list**. A mailing list is a discussion group that uses e-mail to communicate about a particular topic ranging from animal rights to world politics. Once subscribed to a mailing list, you will start receiving messages from other members of the discussion group. You can also send messages to the group, or

unsubscribe from the mailing list if the group does not meet your interests. By e-mail, you can also subscribe to an electronic newsletter or journal.

You can also use e-mail to join **newsgroups**, which are similar to mailing lists. Newsgroups are like public access bulletin boards where users can post messages and can read messages posted by other users. Newsgroups are organized into broad categories, like politics, recreation, and education, and then the categories are broken down into more specific topics. Newsgroups are different from mailing lists in that you do not receive e-mail messages directly from them like you do from mailing lists. To read messages on a newsgroup, you have to go to the newsgroup and read the messages posted on it. There are several programs, called **newsreaders**, that allow you to find and read newsgroups.

Another feature of the Internet is the ability to find, examine, and copy files from other computers to your computer. The feature is called file transfer protocol (**FTP**). FTP is a set of rules for the transfer of files. Many computer systems and networks have file libraries, also called **archives**, listing thousands of files that are open to the public. These files, such as computer software programs, government reports, and video images, can be

searched for and retrieved through a program called **Archie**.

The Internet offers several ways of finding information, apart from joining a mailing list or a newsgroup, or using FTP. Another way of finding information is by using **Gopher** (named after the University of Minnesota's mascot). Gopher is the name of a database and communications system that runs on the Internet. Gopher presents information in the form of menus, which display a list of choices very similar in format to a restaurant menu. When a choice is made on the menu, typically another more specialized menu will appear, and then you have to make a selection off that menu. Eventually, you will get a list of files from which you can pick a file to read or even copy to your computer.

The fastest growing method of finding information on the Internet is the **World Wide Web** or called simply the **Web** or **W3**. The Web combines text, still pictures, full-motion video, audio segments, graphics, and animations all in a single place. On a Web page, highlighted words, icons, or pictures can be clicked on by using your mouse to link you to another place on the Web page, a different part of the Web site or to an entirely different Web page or site. These highlighted

words, icons, or pictures are called **hyperlinks** because they can connect you to other parts of the Web.

The main difference between a Gopher menu and a Web page is that, instead of looking at a menu composed just of words and phrases, you can look at a page filled with different colors, images, pictures, and icons. The Web simply looks a lot more interesting than Gopher. Like Gopher, there are a variety of programs to help you find information on the Web. These will be covered in greater detail later in this book.

To conclude, by using the Internet you can access much information that might be difficult or impossible to obtain through other means. Also, you can use the Internet to stay in contact with your family, friends, classmates, and others. Familiarity with the Internet can bolster your chances of getting a job upon graduation. A resume that reflects a working knowledge of various Internet features, applications, and programs could create a very positive impression on potential employers.

How to Connect to the Internet?

As a student at a college or university, you probably have already been assigned an e-mail account or

have the opportunity to sign up for an e-mail account for free or minimal cost. To find out more information about an e-mail account, contact your American Government instructor, particularly if using the Internet is included in the course's assignments.

If the instructor stares blankly in response to your questions about e-mail, then find out where the university computer center is located. Go to the center and ask a staff person about how to get and use an e-mail account. If the computer center staff are busy or unavailable, then find out where the departmental and/or university computer labs are located. Go to a lab and try to get a staff person to help you. Some dorms and residence halls have their own labs where you should be able to get some help in regard to using e-mail.

Once you have an e-mail account and are ready to use it, then find out where the computer labs are on campus that have access to the Internet. Also, find out if there are any restrictions (have to be a particular major or enrolled in a specific course) on who can use the labs. Finally, find out what the hours of operation are for each of the labs that you can use. This could be very useful information as you try to finish some of those last-minute, late-in-the-evening projects or papers.

After using e-mail successfully a few times,

then you might want to talk to your instructor, ever-friendly computer lab staffer, or trusted informed friend about how to access the Web from a campus computer. The process should not be much different from using e-mail.

If you brought your own computer to your dorm room, then inquire at the university computer center if there is a **direct connect** (much faster than a modem) link to the Internet. If there is, make sure that someone from the university hooks up your computer to the direct connect link, and explains how to use it to get to the Internet. If there is no direct connect link, then you will need a modem and software to connect your computer via the modem to the university's computer center and then to the Internet. Most universities will provide this software upon request to students for no charge. If you are not living on campus and have your own computer and modem, then contact the university computer center to get the software and instructions necessary to connect your computer to the university's system and then to the Internet.

Of course, if you have your own computer, then you have the option of connecting to the Internet through a commercial on-line service provider, such as America Online, CompuServe, or Prodigy. The advantages of such providers are very

user friendly access to the Internet, some distinctive features, and clear organization of available resources. The primary disadvantage is cost. All of the commercial service providers are pretty expensive if you become a heavy user of the Internet. Also, as you become more familiar with the Internet, you will discover that commercial services provide more limited access to the Internet than the university computer system.

Plan of the Book

The rest of this book will be devoted to examining the fastest growing and probably most popular feature of the Internet; that is, the Web. First, **Web browsers** will be discussed and then considerable attention will be given to **Web search engines**.

Then a wide variety of Web sites related to government and politics will be presented. There will also be some Web sites presented that provide information on career selection and advice, financial aid, and test preparation. For each of the Web sites the following information will be provided: the title of the site, the **URL** (Uniform Resource Locator) of the site, and then a brief description of the site. Finally, there will be some material on how to cite Web sources, find help in setting up your own Web page, and a glossary of some of the more important terms covered in this book.

WEB BROWSING

Browsing the Web means to go from Web site to Web site without a definite destination or plan. It is like going to a shopping mall without a definite purchase or store in mind. You wander the mall going from store to store until something catches your eye. Once your attention is caught, then you go into a store. Basically, you browse or surf the Web to see what is available, what is new, or what is hot.

To surf the Web, you need to use a Web browser. A **Web browser** is a program that allows you to view and search the Web. Basically, a Web browser translates the computer language that Web pages are written in, which is called **HTML -- HyperText Markup Language**, into the text and images that you see on your computer screen. In addition to browsing the Web, browsers can send and receive e-mail, search newsgroups, access Gopher, and do FTP.

Typically, if you are accessing the Web through a university computer system, the Web homepage for the university will appear on the screen of your computer monitor. A **Web homepage** is the first page for a Web site, which provides links to other pages at the site. On that homepage, you most likely will see a picture of a

famous campus building, perhaps an image of the school's mascot, and some text with certain words and phrases highlighted (in a different color than the rest of the words on the page). You are able to see the picture, image, and highlighted words because you are using a Web browser.

As you look at the university homepage, move your mouse around so that the cursor on the screen moves also. You will notice that the cursor will change its appearance when it touches the highlighted words and phrases and certain of the pictures. Whenever the cursor's image changes that means it has touched a word or picture that is clickable, so that if you click on the mouse button something will happen to the screen. These clickable words or pictures are **hypertext**, providing a link to another Web page.

For instance, click on a highlighted phrase, such as financial aid, on the university homepage. Another screen should appear dealing with financial aid at the university. The screen probably will provide instructions and deadlines in regard to applying for financial aid.

When you are looking at a Web page, you will see the word 'Location' on the page and next to it a line of text, such as **http://www.greatcollege.edu**, that appears to make no sense. Actually, that