APS 105F – Computer Fundamentals

Using News Groups and ut.ecf.aps105

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1 Introduction

A very important aspect of engineering is learning how to get the information that you need. In this *Age of Information Technology*, there are many mechanisms for distributing information. Hopefully, you will learn some of them through this course because you will need them throughout the rest of your engineering career.

One of the earliest ways of distributing information on the internet, before the days of *HTML* and the *World-Wide Web* was through **news groups**. They required very minimal technology. You can access news groups with only a modem and a simple terminal.

On this page, we will introduce you to news groups and how to use the one for this course.

2 What is a News Group

News groups are one of the many applications of the internet. News groups are very similar to email because messages can be sent to a news group. However, unlike email many people can read the message you *post* to a news group instead of just a single recipient. In fact anyone who *subscribes* to the news group will be able to read your message. There are now more

that 10 000 news groups on the internet. Each news group is devoted to a particular topic. For example **comp.lang.c** is a news group devoted to the C programming language, similarly comp.lang.c++ and comp.lang.java are news groups where you will find discussions pertaining to the C++ and Java programming languages. You may find these news groups useful as an additional source of information for your lab assignments. Other news groups you might find useful are **ut.ecf.general** for discussions about UofT engineering and **ut.general** for discussions about UofT in general.

3 ut.ecf.aps105

There is even a news group devoted entirely to this course called **ut.ecf.aps105**. If you are having difficulties with the lab assignments you can post a message to this news group to elicit a response. Chances are other students may have the same question. The news group will be read by the TAs and other students who may post a response to your question where everyone will be able to read the reply.

If you are reluctant to post your question directly to the news group, then you can mail your question to one of the TAs. They will respond to you and if they think it would be useful to the rest of the class, then they will also post it to the news group anonymously, removing any indication of who asked the original question. Therefore, it is always good to monitor the news group for the course.

4 Accessing ut.ecf.aps105

Here is how to add **ut.ecf.aps105** to your list of subscribed news groups using *Netscape News*.

Start Netscape by issuing the following command:

`spark1.ecf%` **netscape** &

After *Netscape* has started select the menu option **Window** from the menu bar. Select the menu item **News Window**. This will open *Netscape*'s news reader window.

Select the **File** menu option from the title bar. Underneath that select the menu item **Add Newsgroup...** A window will now appear prompting you for the name of the news group. Enter the text **ut.ecf.aps105**. That news group will be added to the list of news groups to which you are subscribed. If you now select the name of that news group with your mouse, the subject of messages posted to that news group will appear in the right side of the news windows. If you select a news article with your mouse the message body will appear in the button half of the news window.

To post a new message to the news groups press the **To: News** button. This will open a new message window. You can leave the **Mail CC** field blank. If you fill in this field a copy of your message will be sent to whomever you specify. Some people like to put their own email address there to keep a record of messages they have sent. The **Newsgroup** field should contain the name of the news groups you are posting to. Fill in the subject line to let people quickly know what your message is about. You can leave the **Attachment** field blank. You would use this field if you wanted to send a file along with your message. Finally fill in the body of the message with what you want to talk about. Keep in mind that many people will be able to read your message. Do not send anything that other people may find offensive! Once you are satisfied with your message, press the **Send** button and your message will be submitted to the news group.

Now that you know a bit more about the news reader, you can go directly to the newsgroup by clicking on the direct link on the home page.

5 Other Things

Try experimenting with some of the other functionality available from *Netscape News*. This quick tutorial only describes a small subset of what you can do. In addition, if you do not like *Netscape News* there are other news readers on ecf like *trn* or *pine*, which is both a news and a mail reader. There are UNIX man pages for these programs, so trying

```
spark1.ecf% man trn
```

will give you information about the program *trn*.

6 Acknowledgements

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