David Backus <david.backus@gmail.com>

books and other media

John Stachurski <john.stachurski@gmail.com>   Sun, Jun 15, 2014 at 10:29 PM
To: David Backus <dbackus@stern.nyu.edu>
Cc: Thomas Sargent <thomas.sargent@nyu.edu>

Hi Dave,

> * Media. In our MBA classes, we tend to use two things in parallel:
> a book that covers the material in detail (a reference) and slides
> that organize class time. Do you use your online Sphinx materials in
> class, or more as a reference?

I've taught directly from the previous version of the website. I would just go to the lecture hall, open up a browser and go to the site. It worked fine, although it's obviously not optimized for viewing on a projector.

If I have time I prefer to write separate slides using LaTeX/beamer, since they look better when projected on a screen.

> * IPython. I'm new to this, but Spencer wondered whether IPython
> would be a good substitute for Sphinx. He says you can embed code and
> generate both slides and html.

Indeed you can. If you're writing a medium size series of lectures I think that's a very good option. It's very straightforward to add text / equations / etc to the notebook, and then you've got that all together with the code, and, moreover, the students can download a copy while you're lecturing and actually run the code, fiddle with the parameters, etc.

Also, it's possible to convert IPython notebooks into slides. I haven't looked into this yet but Spencer and Chase know about it.

Here's some examples of what you can create:

https://github.com/ipython/ipython/wiki/A-gallery-of-interesting-IPython-Notebooks

There are a couple of reasons that we prefer sphinx over IPython notebooks for quant-econ. One is that sphinx is better at integrating all the lectures, so they all have the same look and feel, and it's easy to put internal links between them. Moreover you can either compile the source files into a website or you can compile them into a LaTeX document and corresponding PDF. Since we also want to produce a textbook this has obvious advantages.

All that said, it's a close call. Both are great.

> * Book. How would the book compare to the online version? More text?

At the moment they're basically isomorphic. We haven't really decided what the final differences will be.

> * Publishing. I've noticed a number of examples where publishers
> allow simultaneous publication and posting of (an identical) pdf --

see link below. One advantage for users is that they can print out individual chapters and not lug the whole thing around. It also allows authors to make minor corrections at will. Is that something you'd consider?

http://statweb.stanford.edu/~tibs/ElemStatLearn/

I like the idea.

I also like this guy's approach: The book is a traditional format but he pairs it with a large number of IPython notebooks:

http://www.amazon.com/Python-Signal-Processing-Featuring-Notebooks/dp/3319013416/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402885352&sr=8-1&keywords=ipython+notebook+signal

PS: John: It will be great having you here in a year, but if you want to come by for a shorter visit earlier that would be great for us.

Thanks Dave! I'll be in touch.

All the best, John.

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Visit me at http://johnstachurski.net