

Uniform Resource Identifiers

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URI History

- Web Addresses [Berners-Lee] 1990
 - Universal Document Identifiers 1992
 - Universal Resource Identifiers RFC 1630
 - URL: Locators RFC 1736,1738,1808
 - URN: Names RFC 1737,2141
 - Uniform Resource Identifiers RFC 2396
- A simple and extensible means of identification
 - <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~fielding/talks/>
 - <mailto:fielding@ics.uci.edu>

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Etymology of URI ... Identifier

- Establishing identity by reference
 - name, handle, moniker, location, ...
 - global scope
- Simple
 - Just a string of common characters
- Transcribable
 - bar napkins, advertisements, and e-mail
 - a sequence of characters, not coded character octets
- Usable
 - no additional entry barrier to deployment and use

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Etymology of URI ... Resource

- What we want to identify: Resources
 - match the semantics of a hypermedia reference
 - ephemeral and persistent information
 - new and existing information sources
- A resource can be anything that has identity
 - a document or image
 - a service, e.g., "today's weather in Irvine"
 - a collection of other resources
 - non-networked objects (e.g., people)

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More precisely, a resource is ...

- A temporally varying membership function $M_R(t)$ that, for each time t , maps to some set of semantically equivalent values
- Values may be resource representations or identifiers to other resources
- Can map to the empty set, allowing references to be made to a concept before any realization of that concept exists
- The resource is the conceptual mapping, not the entity that corresponds to that mapping at t

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Representations of a Resource

- The Web is designed to manipulate and transfer representations of a resource
- A single resource may be associated with multiple representations (content negotiation)
- A representation is in the form of a media type
 - provides information for this resource
 - provides potential hypermedia state transitions
- Most representations can be cached
- GET URI transfers representation, not resource

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Etymology of URI ... Uniform

- Uniformity allows
 - different types of resource identification within a single protocol element
 - uniform semantic interpretation of common syntactic elements; shared implementations
 - relative syntactic interpretation independent of scheme
 - extensibility for new identification schemes
 - bounds variability along common paths, making it easier to extend the use of URI to new applications

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Uniform Extensibility

- URI scheme allows new types to be defined without affecting old uses
 - file, news, http, telnet, gopher, wais, ftp, ...
- Naturally lends itself to table-driven implementations
 - browser uses table to select handler
 - handler can be dynamically loaded/downloaded
- Unfortunately,
 - some people haven't figured that out yet

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Uniform Hierarchy

- Scheme defines interpretation and structure
 - <scheme>: <scheme-specific-part>
- Hierarchical when desired [Engelbart]
 - <scheme>://<authority>/<path>?<query>
 - <scheme>://<segment>/<segment>/<segment>
 - <scheme>: <opaque_string>
- Name components may be meaningful
 - http://www.ics.uci.edu/~fielding/talks/
- Hierarchy enables relative URI

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Relative URI

- An identifier that obtains global scope when interpreted relative to a base URI
- Only valid when the base URI is well-defined
 - Saves space
 - Allows document content to be partially independent of its location and accessibility
 - Document trees (groups of inter-related documents) can be moved without changing embedded URI
 - Documents can be shared by multiple access schemes and servers

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Design Failures

- Transcribable, but not easily spoken
 - aitch tee tee pee colon slash slash double-you double-you dot eye see es dot you see eye dot ee dee you slash tilde fielding slash
- Hierarchical path assumes only one root
 - not true for FTP resources, leading to ambiguity
 - gopher path isn't layered left-to-right
- Reliance on DNS as only naming authority
 - vanity hostname explosion
 - flat namespace under dot com

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Questions?

- Places to see for more URI design information:

<http://www.ics.uci.edu/pub/ietf/uri/>
<http://www.w3.org/Addressing/Addressing.html>
<http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/>

- Slides:
 - <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~fielding/talks/>

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