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www.atlantic.edu/program/academic/stratton/jshome.html

General Physics II (PHYS 226)
Spring 2008

Course Description

Prerequisite: General Physics I (PHYS 225)
Prerequisite, may be taken concurrently: Calculus II (MATH 156)

Calculus-based. Topics include simple harmonic motion, wave motion, sound, interference phenomena, electricity, and magnetism, AC and DC circuits, and electromagnetic waves. Modern Physics is a running theme. Laboratory utilizes computers for data acquisition and analysis. Meets the general education requirement for science. Fall only.

Course Focus

A general physics course is a calculus-based course designed for students whose majors include physics, chemistry, engineering and some life sciences. The course is taught on a mathematical level that assumes Calculus I has been completed and Calculus II is being taken concurrently.

Text, References and Materials

Bring the required materials to all class meetings.

Required:	"Physics For Scientists and Engineers", 6th ed. by Serway (ISBN 0-53-440842-7)
Required	Course Pack: General Physics Lecture Notes & Laboratories (Bookstore)
Optional:	Study Guide
Required:	Scientific Calculator, USB Drive (1 person from each lab group)
Required:	Lab Notebook (See criteria below)

Course Schedule

Room:	A-152	
Lecture:	Tuesday / Thursday	5:30-6:45 PM
Lab:	Thursday	7:00-9:45 PM
Office Hours:	Monday	11:00 AM - 12:00 PM
	Wednesday	2:00-3:00 PM
	Thursday	4:00-5:00 PM

Other office hours are available. Also see the attached schedule for more detail.

Course Evaluation

90%-100%	A
80%-89%	B
70%-79%	C
60%-69%	D
< 60%	F

Lecture:		75%
	Exams (Equally Weighted)	65%
	Quizzes	10%
	WebCT Conceptual Quizzes	(+2%)
Lab:		25%
	Each Lab	100 pts toward total
	Full Lab Reports	200 pts toward total
	Notebook	100-200 pts toward total
	Penalty for misuse or absence of Notebook	-10 points
	Penalty for Missing Summary	-10 points

Students must have passing averages in both the exams and laboratories to pass the course.

For example, if a student earns a 77.0% exam average, 82.0% quiz average, 62.0% WebCT conceptual quiz average, and an 88.0% lab average, the student's grade would be (excluding extra credit):

0.770 × 65 =	50.05	
0.820 × 10 =	8.20	
0.620 × 3 =	1.86	
0.880 × 25 =	22.00	
Total =	82.11	B

Attendance & Lateness

Lecture: Students are expected to be at all lecture meetings with all class materials. Unscheduled activities that count as labs or quizzes may also occur on lecture days. In general, missed classes are difficult to recover from and will greatly affect a student's ability to succeed (i.e. missing a class puts you in a BIG HOLE!).

Lab: Students may miss one lab for a valid, documented excuse (medical, family emergency, flood, famine, nuclear holocaust, plague of locusts, asteroid collision, etc.). Missing or not submitting more than 1 lab will result in a failing lab grade. If all labs are completed for a grade, the lowest lab grade will be dropped. Points will be deducted for lateness in lab.

Late Work:

Lecture: WebCT quizzes cannot be taken after the due date since the answers are discussed at the next class meeting.

Lab: Lab reports are due at the beginning of the next lab meeting unless otherwise specified. Late labs will be penalized one half grade after the start of class on the same day they are due, and one grade thereafter. Labs will not be accepted after one week from the original due date.

Quizzes

Questions will either be conceptual (based on the class notes) or problems (representing either class examples or homework problems). Quiz questions and problems will be posted online via WebCT. In class, deadlines will be discussed by which the instructor must post a quiz if it is due at the next class meeting. Take-home lecture (quiz) problems and online quizzes are due on the due date with no exceptions.

Extra Credit

An extra credit assignment may be done or a retest may be taken to bring up one test score (except the last exam). The instructor will choose the assignment and the conditions under which it is completed. The assignment or retest must be requested by the student and must be completed before the next exam. The makeup grade will be averaged with the test grade and the resultant grade will replace the test grade. This can only be done for tests with a grade lower than 65% and can bring tests up to a maximum of 65%.

The conceptual quizzes given online will be totaled and can add up to 3% to the course average.

Exam Makeups

Exams may only be made up if the student contacts the professor with a valid, documented excuse (see above) by phone, written note, or Email. The professor reserves the right to give a different

exam that may be more difficult, or to adjust the grading scale to account for the fact the student is taking the exam under different testing conditions.

Lab Makeups

If students need to miss laboratory for a valid, documented excuse (see above), the instructor must be notified before the scheduled class or immediately after as above. If this is done, a makeup may be possible. Missing or not submitting more than 1 lab will result in a failing lab grade. Students may miss one lab for a valid, documented excuse. If all labs are turned in, then the lowest lab grade will be dropped.

Prelab Summaries

Prior to every lab session, you will write a short summary of the lab that you are about to do. It should not be written in the lab notebook because it will be collected at the beginning of the lab. It cannot be late. Summaries are worth 10% of a lab report's grade. See the criteria attached below.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to uphold the integrity of the academic process. In addition to personal acts of plagiarism or dishonesty, students are also obligated to report any act of cheating that they witness. Acts of dishonesty will result in disciplinary action as outlined in the Student Handbook. In essence, this means you will receive a "0" for the assignment OR an "F" in the course if the assignment is central to the course. A report will also be made to the Dean of Students. Two such infractions will result in dismissal from the college.

In this course, every person does his or her own work. You may discuss and work on the laboratories together, but the report must be your own work. Blatant copying will result in a "0" for the lab that cannot be dropped. In general, this applies to any assignment that is collected for a grade. Cheating on an exam will result in a failing grade for the course.

Academic Advising

Many students self-advise and pick their own courses, while others seek the advice of registration staff. For one reason or another, we sometimes learn (too late) that students have unrealistic or ill-advised schedules. Please feel free to ask my advice or the advice of your other professors in such matters.

Class Conduct

1. Don't be late. It's rude and it interrupts the class. If you miss a prelab discussion, points will be deducted.

2. Turn cell phones off!

3. Do not talk, sharpen pencils, staple or do anything else at times when it might be a distraction to your classmates.

4. I value your input, I want to have discussions, and I must hear your questions. However, you must raise your hand. Sometimes, I wish to let the class think, and you will ruin that if you call out the answer.

The Survival Guide: How to do well in a science course

1. Do all homework on time because
   a. If you let it pile up, you will find it very difficult to do well on the exams.
   b. Studying for a test involves doing the homework *again*, not the first time.
   c. Review time is review. It is driven by <u>your</u> questions. A conceptual quiz will also occur!

2. Studying in groups can be helpful!

3. Read the appropriate sections in the text. If I said everything, you wouldn't remember it. In class, we learn to DO and APPLY. Read to round out you learning.

4. Do not understudy for the first exam. Although you get to do a makeup for one exam, you don't want to use it on the first exam.

5. Do not wait until the day that a lab is due to complete it because:
   a. As time goes on, you will forget what was done in lab. Do it while it's still fresh in your mind.
   b. If you have questions (and you will), then you will not be able to get them answered in time and will have to turn the lab in late. This results in a deduction of 5 to 10 points.
   c. If you just decide to hand it in with a major mistake, then you will get it back to do again. Your grade *starts* at an 85 on the second try, and the second time is more difficult (see "a").

6. Keep a careful lab notebook. It is worth a lab grade.

7. Do not plagiarize or copy. It is dishonest and speaks to your character.

8. Have some fun and enjoy the course. This may be your only opportunity to take a lab science, so enjoy it and take away all that you can from this experience.

Course Goals

Students will

1. develop an appreciation for physics and an understanding of what it can tell us about the universe. Students should see how physics can explain various phenomena that they encounter every day.

2. think critically to solve both quantitative and qualitative problems.

3. learn basic concepts of wave and simple harmonic motion, sound, electricity, and magnetism that will allow them to continue in programs that include physics, chemistry, engineering, and some life sciences. *Subgoals are detailed in the performance objectives.*

4. practice modeling physical situations using calculus level mathematics.

5. work independently and in groups to solve problems.

6. gain practice in experimentation and data analysis.

7. to practice writing full laboratory reports that fully present an experiment and the theory behind it.

8. become familiar with using a computer for data acquisition analysis, presentation, and communication.

Performance Objectives

Unless otherwise indicated, mastery of the following performance objectives is achieved by accurately defining and describing the specified concept, and applying this concept to assigned problems and derivations. All basic equations will be given on exams, and students will derive needed relationships from them. Exams will consist of short answer questions and problems, and the greater weight is placed on the problems.

Laboratory

1. In most cases, a topic will be discussed in lecture before it is used in the lab. The student will apply concepts from lecture. Performance will be satisfactory if students demonstrate through preparedness, performance, and answers to questions that they understand how a given experiment is related to physical principles discussed in lecture.

2. The student will prepare for lab. Performance will be satisfactory if students arrive at the lab on time having read the experiment. Students will demonstrate their preparation by writing a short summary that describes WHAT is being measured or tested in the experiment and HOW it will be measured or tested. Students should know the purpose of the laboratory, be familiar with the procedure, and be able to vocalize any questions concerning the theory or procedure during the prelab discussion.

3. Students will be monitored during the laboratory. The student will demonstrate sound measurement technique. Performance will be satisfactory if students routinely participate as ACTIVE members of their laboratory groups and are observed to take measurements carefully and precisely.

4. Students will keep a proper laboratory notebook as described on the attached sheet. This lab book must be used for all laboratories.

5. This is a graded part of every experimental calculation. The student will calculate using significant figure conventions. Performance will be satisfactory if students routinely apply significant figure conventions to calculations based on experimental data to avoid overstating the accuracy of calculated results.

6. The student will calculate using error analysis. Performance will be satisfactory if student can estimate measurement errors and carry these estimates through calculations to arrive at a range of error for an experimentally determined quantity.

7. Full laboratory reports will be written for some laboratories. A format will be provided. The student will write laboratory reports. Performance will be satisfactory if the student writes laboratory reports that show that the student understands the theory, clearly presents and analyzes

the data, and draws reasonable conclusions about the results.

Lecture

1. Students will demonstrate proper techniques of measurement and computation. This includes proper use of the metric system and significant figure conventions.

2. Students will describe what is meant by a linear restoring force (Hooke's law), and show how simple harmonic motion is obtained for such a force. Students will define frequency, angular frequency, amplitude, and phase. Students will also use calculus to derive expressions for velocity and acceleration. Student will apply these concepts to a simple pendulum and define the concept of resonance.

3. Students will describe wave motion. Students will relate wave motion to simple harmonic motion and define reflection, superposition, wavelength, frequency, angular frequency, wave number, and phase. Students will state the mathematical form of a wave and identify the wave equation.

4. Students will describe sound waves. Student will differentiate between intensity and intensity level, and explain the Doppler effect.

5. Students will derive standing wave conditions for a string and a tube with one end open. Students will also explain the origin of beats.

6. Students will describe the nature of electrical forces and fields. Students will apply Coulomb's law to problems involving point charges. Student will also apply the concept of electric field to point charges and extended objects. Students will sketch electric field lines around charged objects.

7. Students will use Gauss's law to derive expressions for the electric field produced by given charged distributions.

8. Students will define potential difference and electrical potential, and relate these concepts to potential energy. Students will relate equipotential surfaces to electric field lines. Lastly, students will derive the electric potential due to a charge distribution.

9. Students will define capacitance. Students will explain the effect of a dielectric on capacitance, and students will be able to find the equivalent capacitance of capacitor combinations. Derivations of capacitance for some plate arrangements will be presented.

10. Students will define and calculate resistance. Resistance will be calculated from both current / voltage data (i.e. Ohm's Law) and material / temperature data.

11. Students will model DC circuits. Students will be able to calculate the equivalent resistance of resistor combinations and find voltages across and currents through individual circuit elements. Kirchkoff's rules will be used for more complicated systems. Lastly, students will model the behavior of a RC circuit.

12. Students will define the force on a moving charged particle by a magnetic field and apply this concept.

13. Students will derive expressions for magnetic fields of several arrangements using the Biot-Savart law and / or Ampere's law. Formula for wires, coils, and solenoids will be derived and applied.

14. Students will state and apply Faraday's law, and use it to derive expressions for the induced the emf in some homework problems. Students will also explain the meaning and origin of induced currents and Lens's law, and predict the direction of induced currents.

15. Students will define inductance and model the behavior of an LC circuit, and describe the behavior of an RLC circuit.

16. Students will model the behavior of an AC circuit. Students will fully derive and apply expressions for impedance, phase, power and resonance conditions. Students will be able to fully discuss and derive the voltage phase differences in a series RLC circuit.

Developed/Revised : 1/25/08

Proposed Calendar

The instructor reserves the right to change the topics that are covered or their order.

Week	Date	Chapters / Labs /	Topics
1	T 1/22		Introduction
		Chapter 15	Simple Harmonic Motion
1	R 1/24	Chapter 15	Simple Harmonic Motion
		Lab	Simple Harmonic Motion
2	T 1/29	Chapter 16	Wave Motion
2	R 1/31	Chapter 16/17	Wave Motion / Sound
		Lab	Waves on Strings
3	T 2/5	Chapter 17	Sound
3	R 2/7	Chapter 18	Interference Effects
		Lab	Speed of Sound: Resonance in a Tube
4	T 2/12	Chapter 18	Interference Effects
4	R 2/14	Review	Simple Harmonic Motion, Waves, Sound,
		Chapter 23	Electric Force and Fields
5	T 2/19	Exam 1	Simple Harmonic Motion, Waves, Sound,
5	R 2/21	Chapter 23	Electric Force and Fields
		Lab	Force Between Two Charged Plates
6	T 2/26	Chapter 24	Gauss's Law
6	R 2/28	Chapter 24	Gauss's Law
		Lab	Electric Field (Finish in Class)
7	T 3/4	Chapter 25	Electric Potential
7	R 3/6	Chapter 25	Electric Potential
8	T 3/11	Review	Electric Forces, Fields, and Potential.
8	R 3/13	Exam 2	Electric Forces, Fields, and Potential
9	T 3/18		Spring Break
9	R 3/20		Spring Break

10	T 3/25	Chapter 26	Capacitance & Dielectrics
10	R 3/27	Chapter 27	Current & Resistance
		Lab	Ohm's Law
11	T 4/1	Chapter 28	DC Circuits
11	R 4/3	Lab	RC Circuit
		Review	Capacitance and DC Circuits
12	T 4/8	Exam 3	Capacitance and DC Circuits
12	R 4/10	Chapter 29	Magnetic Field
13	T 4/15	Chapter 29	Magnetic Field
13	R 4/17	Chapter 30	Sources of Magnetic Field
		Lab	Magnetic Field of a Solenoid
14	T 4/22	Chapter 30	Sources of Magnetic Field
14	R 4/24	Chapter 31	Faraday's Law
		Minilab	Induction
15	T 4/29	Chapter 31	Faraday's Law
15	R 5/1	Chapter 32	Inductance Exercise
16	T 5/6	Chapter 33	AC Circuits
16	R 5/8	Chapter 33	AC Circuits
		Lab	Alternating Current
	TBA	Review	Faraday’s Law, Inductance, and AC Circuits.
	TBA	Exam 5	Faraday’s Law, Inductance, and AC Circuits.

Prelab Summary Criteria

Prior to every lab session, you will write a short summary of the lab that you are about to do. It should not be written in the lab notebook because it will be collected at the beginning of the lab. It cannot be late. Summaries are worth 10% of your lab grade.

The summary should address the following questions. Number them.

1. What is the Goal? Specifically, what will you have measured, calculated, compared, etc. by the end of lab? (Typically 1 to 3 sentences)

2. What measurements are you taking? How or with what are you taking them? (A few sentences to a paragraph)

3. How is the result (goal) calculated or determined from the measurements? How is the data being analyzed? Give the equations if known.

4. Anything else worth mentioning?

Laboratory Notebook

(A link to interactive sample notebook pages may be found on my homepage.)

Purpose: To provide a formal, organized work space/log in which one can record data and work through the calculations of an experiment. It will help you organize your thoughts and retain useful information.

General:

The pages should be fastened securely, so the laboratory notebook should not be spiral-bound or perforated. A string-bound composition notebook is a good example of an acceptable notebook. Carbon paper is not needed.

1. Write in pen. Neatly cross out mistakes. No white out!

2. The inside cover should have information such as your name, address, home phone number, instructor, etc. This will ensure that the notebook and all the data that you have worked so hard to obtain will always find its way back to you.

3. The third page is where you should start a table of contents. Update this as necessary.

4. Number the pages as you go, using both sides of each page.

5. The first experiment should start on about the 10th page.

6. Skip a few pages between experiments.

7. Keep the notebook in chronological order. Avoid leaving space for things and filling them in later.

8. If you miss a lab, you must still write the title and date of the experiment at the appropriate point in the notebook.

9. Use the last several pages for reference. Write universal constants, equations, and reminders that you find frequently useful.

10. Show your lab notebook to the instructor before leaving lab!

For each experiment, label the following sections:

1. Title, Experiment Number, Date, Lab Partners, etc.

2. Lecture Notes

   Record any diagrams, mathematical derivations and procedural notes given by the instructor. The **purpose** of the experiment should be prominently displayed first. Everything mentioned in the prelab discussion should be here.

3. Data/Calculations

   Any data you take goes here first!!! Data must be taken directly into the laboratory notebook as you acquire it. The laboratory report is a final draft only. I reserve the right to deduct points if you are not taking data directly into the notebook. Also, attempt all calculations in the notebook first. Again, the laboratory report is a final draft only. Your **results** should stand out!

Remember: Data is taken directly into the lab notebook. Your first attempts at calculations are also written there. You don't have to write everything twice, but make sure your calculations are correct in the notebook before attempting to fill in the lab report. *If you are observed not using your lab notebook, a penalty of 10 points off your lab grade will result!*

'Full" Laboratory Report Format

See the link on my homepage for an example of a full lab report.

Abstract: Summarize your results in written form. What was measured? How was it measured? What was your result? Did it agree with theory? (1 paragraph).

> *"The local gravitational constant was measured by timing a falling metal bearing with a pendulum of known period. Our result was $g = 10.0\ m/s^2 \pm 0.1\ m/s^2$. This does not agree with the accepted value of $9.806\ m/s^2$. Possible sources of error are … "*

Theory: In this section, you should:

1. Write a general introduction describing the relevant theory. Describe the theory behind the lab, introducing any needed concepts and quantities.
2. Use basic equations to derive those used in the experiment. Don't just list equations. Explain how they are applied to the experiment. In many cases, you will need to refer to a diagram of the apparatus or a free-body diagram. For example, a portion of the theory section may look like:

> *"One common definition of torque is*
>
> $$\tau = I\alpha$$
>
> *If you can measure the applied torque, τ, and the angular acceleration, α, "I" may be determined. For the system shown in Figure 2, the applied torque is given by*
>
> $$\tau = Fr\sin(\theta)$$
>
> *where r is the radius and the tension, T, is given by*
>
> $$T = m(g - a)$$
>
> *This may be derived as follows.…*

Experimental: The goal of this section is to tell the reader how the experiment was performed and what was used so that it may reproduced.

1. List equipment used in this laboratory.
2. Draw any apparatus used to take measurements and label measured quantities.
3. Summarize the procedure using the past tense. Don't use a "recipe" format (i.e. Step 1, 2, 3…). Use a discussion format. Explain how the apparatus was used, relating it to the quantities listed in the Theory section.

Data & Analysis: Present the data using one or more tables. You may include the results of the analysis in the same tables, if appropriate. Then, perform calculations using the data to obtain your results. Put any needed graphs here. Perform error analysis, if applicable.

Results/Discussion: Discuss probable causes of errors and the meaning of your results. Dig deep! How would you improve this experiment next time? What is the next experiment you would do?

Welcome to WebCT!

WebCT is a suite of tools developed by the University of British Columbia to deliver sophisticated Web-based courses. It is presently being used by universities and colleges all over the world to deliver online learning. If you have taken an online course at ACCC before, chances are you may have used WebCT already.

In this course, your instructor has decided to use some of WebCT's tools to help enhance your overall learning experience. Some of the tools you might use are for communicating with your instructor and fellow students, like the Mail, Discussions or Chat tools, while other tools allow you to access course handouts and materials, or take online quizzes. If you have any trouble using the tools, you can click on "Help," next to "Course Map" at the top of your screen.

To get into WebCT, follow these directions:

1. Go to http://webct.atlantic.edu:8900/
2. Click "Log on to My WebCT."
3. Enter your User Name, which is your last name and the last 4 digits of your Social Security #. For example: **smith1234**. Do not use any spaces, and use all lower case letters. ***(Note:*** *If your last name is hyphenated, for example: Smith-Jones, then only use the first part of the name, followed by the last 4 digits of your Social Security #. For example: smith1234.)*
4. Enter the Password, which is your birthday (mm/dd/yy - no dashes or spaces). Eg. If you were born on May 21, 1967, you would type: **052167**
5. Click OK.
6. Click on the course name located in the upper left corner to enter the course.

If you have any technical trouble with getting into your course, feel free to contact the Instructional Technology Department during business hours by phone (1-800-617-2191) or via the Web at http://www.atlantic.edu/onlinehelp

A Note about accessing your course from home:

Please use one of the recommended web browsers: Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0, 5.5, 6.0 (PC), Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.1 (Mac OS9, OSX.1), Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.2

(Mac OS9, OSX.2), Netscape 6.2.x (PC and Mac), Netscape 7.0 (PC and Mac OSX).
AOL users: There may be some problems with taking online tests. If this happens to you, do not use the AOL browser to get into your WebCT course. Instead, connect to the Internet using AOL, minimize AOL and use one of the recommended browsers. Internet Explorer users are urged NOT to save their passwords when login box appears.

(If you do not have a computer at home, you can still access WebCT in any one of the computers labs at our Mays Landing, Atlantic City or Cape May campus locations.)

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I need on my home computer?
You'll need Windows 98, 2000 or XP, or Macintosh OS9, OS10.1.x, 10.2.x. You will need a connection to the Internet (e.g. 56K Dialup, Cable, or DSL, etc.) You should also have one of the recommended browsers:

- AOL 7.0 and 8.0 (PC)
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0, 5.5, 6.0 (PC)
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.1 (Mac OS9, OSX.1)
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.2 (Mac OS9, OSX.2)
- Netscape 6.2.x (PC and Mac)
- Netscape 7.x (PC and Mac OSX)

The semester's officially started, but I still cannot log in. Now what?
Be sure you are typing your login information (UserID and Password or Course codes) correctly as listed on the first page of this letter. If you still need help, call the ACCC Online Course Helpline (1-800-617-2191) or send your question via the Online Help Request Form at: *http://www.atlantic.edu/onlinehelp*

What if I'm able to access my course just fine, but later in the semester I cannot get in?
If at any time during the semester our academic servers go down for maintenance or technical problems, you can verify their status by checking the Server Status Page, at *http://www.atlantic.edu/status.html*

I have a personal firewall on my home PC. Is this a problem?
YES. Look at your firewall software documentation for how to temporarily disable the firewall when you want to work on your online course.

I have software on my computer that stops those annoying Internet pop-up ads. Is this a problem?
YES. Some of our online courses have tools that open in new windows (like Mail, Quizzes, etc). Refer to the documentation that came with your pop-up stopper software

to temporarily disable it when you want to work on your course.

I use Yahoo Companion. Is this a problem?
YES. Disable it when you want to work on your online course.

When I attempt to log in to WebCT I receive a message: "You entered an incorrect username or password."

Your username is your last name plus the last 4 digits of your SS#. your password is your entire SS# with no spaces or dashes. WebCT is case sensitive so be sure that your last is typed in all lowercase and that there's no spaces or dashes in your password.

When I attempt to log in to WebCT I receive a message: "Page cannot be displayed." OR "When I attempt to go to WebCT I receive a blank screen or message: "Unauthorized to view this page."

If you have a firewall installed on your computer, you must disable it or open up port 8900 on it to access your course through WebCT. Look at your specific firewall software documentation for how to temporarily disable it.

Every time I click to log on to WebCT, I am re-directed to a search engine (perfectnav).

Make sure that you do not have Kazaa or another peer to peer (P2P) file sharing service installed on your computer. If so, it's been known to conflict with logging into WebCT in many instances. If that's the case, it must be disabled or even sometimes uninstalled for you to be able to log into WebCT.

When I click on Mail and Discussions or when I try to take an exam nothing seems to happen.

If you are having difficulties with takings Exams or using the Mail and Discussions tools then you probably have a pop-up blocker installed on your computer. If so, disable the pop-up blocker software for those WebCT tools to work.

I can access my course, but when I try to click on any of the icons on the homepage of the course I get a blank screen.

Check to see if you have Yahoo Companion or another Internet Companion installed on

Internet Explorer's toolbar. If Yahoo Companion is installed, you will see a red Y on the toolbar near the top of Internet Explorer. You will need to click on this Y and uninstall Yahoo Companion to eliminate the problem.