

Students attend virtual school in high-tech Information Age

by Christy Hoppe
Knight-Ridder Tribune
January 25, 2000

AUSTIN, Texas — The start of classes used to mean searching crowded bookstores, bouncing from aerospace to zoology, then waiting in a mile-long checkout line stooped by 50 pounds of hardback knowledge.

Poof, or rather "click," it's changed.

Thousands of University of Texas students, and others nationwide, begin the new semester Tuesday, January 25, virtually altered.

The virtual student goes to the University Co-op's Internet site, clicks on a course number, types in a credit card, and picks up their bundled textbooks like so much take-out pizza.

And that's nothing. Students now download class notes, term papers, tutorials, and even entire self-paced classes. They converse with professors via e-mail and visit Web sites instead of teaching assistants to get broader explanations of difficult topics.

Educators say computers have changed everything, or they say that in some ways, it's just sped up the same old things.

Judy Ashcroft, director of UT's Distance Learning Center, said 6,000 students are enrolled in university classes that never meet and have no walls. They rely on the Internet.

"But we've been doing this for 90 years," Ashcroft said. Instead of the Internet, they used to mail materials back and forth. It was called a correspondence course, she said. But imagination matched with technology has made many of these courses dramatically different, Ashcroft said.

"Everything is being looked at with fresh eyes," Ashcroft said.

She said biology students now dissect one frog a million different ways using a computer program — saving scores of real frogs. Or physics students use animation to mix different chemicals — saving scores of real laboratories.

"A history course about Vietnam can have students link to government documents, political speeches, newspaper articles, and TV news clips. They can go to bulletin boards where Vietnam vets are talking to each other," Ashcroft said.

The students choose long-distance courses for a variety of reasons: some have internships out of the city; some are seniors who need one hard-to-get class to graduate; or they are professionals who come back to take refresher courses.

"There are other folks who might have majored in a technical area, and they're in middle life and they're coming back and taking philosophy and art," Ashcroft said.

All the technical change is just a beginning, said UT education and technology professor Paul Resta. He said students have registered and filled out forms on-line for years, and now educators are working with technology to see how it augments traditional instruction.

"I think what you're seeing is the initial wave of the impact of technology on teaching," Resta said.

For instance, students of education are introduced to a make-believe school district, Mustang ISD, that has problems taken from the real world. They meet their videotaped superintendent and get their marching orders. Mustang's problems are solved or

worsen based on the students' series of recommended solutions.

Resta said he also sees problems with the new technology. The quality of on-line instruction varies widely. And some of its uses are akin to old-fashioned cheating, he said.

Numerous Web sites provide term papers on any topic written to "exact specifications," for about \$13 a page. One site touted, "our writers only work on subjects in which they have earned their master's or PhD." The student can request specific points to be mentioned and delivery is guaranteed within five days. In small print, the site says the reports are copyrighted and sold for "reference purposes only."

Other sites offer notes from specific class lectures, book reports, and course synopses, all for a price.

While the ease and speed is troubling, in many ways they're the same old problems that teachers have fought since before the invention of Cliff's Notes.

"It's only an electronic version of what used to be passed around a fraternity house," Resta said. "But the faculty are aware of this and concerned about it."

He said instructors can help combat Internet-produced papers by assigning specialized topics and knowing a student's capabilities.

The harder challenge is keeping up with knowledgeable students in this field, he said. "This is not new technology to them. This is part of their culture. The Internet is just a given," Resta said.

Exactly, said Thomas Steele, vice president of the University Co-op, the main campus textbook supplier. The Co-op's Web site, after years of of-

fering Longhorn merchandise, began last summer offering textbook sales on-line.

"I'd have looked like an idiot if I hadn't done it," Steele said.

About 5 percent of customers buy their books through the Co-op's Web site. That number will only grow, he said.

But the change isn't as sweeping as it may appear, Steele said.

When the Co-op sent out a letter asking students if they wanted to use the on-line service, about 2,000 responded. Even though they could have e-mailed their answers, 80 percent filled out the form and mailed it back, he said.

Matt Peeples, a second-semester archaeology student, said he's never bought textbooks any other way than through the Web.

"I just fill out the classes I need, and they have the books waiting for me," he said.

E-mail is also his preferred way of talking to professors, instead of visiting during office hours: "It's less threatening," he said.

Misha Shaver, a sophomore, said her zoology professor had links on his Web page to additional information on a variety of topics covered in class.

"It was definitely helpful," she said. But two of her professors wanted her to learn a new way to research.

"Both English classes I took, the professors wouldn't allow us to use the Internet. Nothing could be sourced from it," Shaver said.

She said for years she's learned how easy it is to find information on the Internet.

"But they wanted us to actually go to the library," she said. "It wasn't very nice."

No class: students bring rude behavior into classroom

by Christine Tatum
TMS Campus
January 31, 2000

CHICAGO (TMS) — Someone answers a cell phone while someone else, knife and fork in hand, dives into a blue-plate special. Just down the way, three more people are passing the day's newspaper around, eager to complete the crossword puzzle, and a woman is painting her fingernails.

Hubbub in the student union? The dining hall?

Nope. Try the classroom.

Complaints about society's loss of civility are nothing new. For years, professors have said students are disrespectful, even downright rude. Heck, in the 13th century, professors at the University of Bologna were so afraid of students — who beat them up if they didn't like their grades — that they formed unions to protect themselves. And then in the 1820s, students at Yale University staged the "Bread and Butter" rebellion. Upset with their difficult classes, they took to throwing food and silverware at their instructors.

Those incidents made history books, but many of today's professors — and their students — say students' rudeness and lack of consideration is so commonplace it's scarcely worth a mention in the campus newspaper. These days, actions once considered worthy of suspension, such as napping in the back of a room or whispering throughout a class, are mild affronts that happen every day. Professors say they're now dealing with students who hurl profane insults in class and even threaten violence.

A case in point: one professor at Virginia Tech reported a voice mail message he received from a student. "You fat fuck with yellow teeth!" the student shouted. "You hump!" Her problem? She couldn't resell her textbook.

When and how did the decorous world of academe disintegrate into this?

It seems everyone has the answer for that: poor parenting, grade schools and religious groups falling down on the job, substance abuse, and a myriad of media images.

"We shout first and think later," said Donna Halper, a journalism instructor at Emerson College. "And on TV, we pull out a gun and blow the other person away. No wonder kids are confused. Civility and courtesy are not valued the way they once were."

Agreed, said Christopher Martin, a student at Truman College of Chicago.

"Let's blame it on the 60s and its bra-burning and candid freedom of expression," he said. "Then toss on top of that the 90s and its lack of discipline in the home, parental fear of adolescents, and the rebellious behavior that is often given a thumbs up by media."

The money students are paying for their education may also figure into the lack of incivility many instructors sense, said Alan Deardorff, an economics professor at the University of Michigan.

"... They [students] are paying so much more, in real terms, for their education than students did years ago," he said. "Therefore they feel more like customers and less like students who ought to look up to us. That doesn't bother me too much."

But when they are rude to their fellow students and make it harder for others to get their money's worth, that does bother me."

Many instructors say they can overlook incessant student chatter, but find other instances of rudeness and inconsiderate behavior more difficult to ignore.

"Some students come to my office outside of office hours and just start talking without asking first if I have time to see them," Deardorff said. "I do invite them to interrupt if my door is ajar, but to me, politeness still requires that you ask if a person, any person, has time to talk to you."

Jane Piliavin, a sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin, said she didn't take too kindly to undergraduate students who last year called her by her first name without her suggesting or encouraging them to do so.

"It was rather startling considering my age," she said.

Halper said she's not fond of ringing cell phones.

"If one goes off and interrupts us, I confiscate it," she said. "In most cases, students don't do it on purpose; they just forgot to turn the bell off. But all it takes is one incident usually, and it seldom — if ever — happens again because I make a big deal out of it."

Though realizing they'll probably never pinpoint the exact problems causing students' egregious misbehavior — much less solve them — many universities are trying to prevent bad situations from getting worse. Student insolence among undergraduate students had gotten so bad at Virginia Tech that the institution's faculty senate established a "Climate Committee" to explore the issue. At Montana State University, the problem grew so bad that the institution formed a task force to study disruptive classroom behavior, particularly in large classrooms, where professors say they have the hardest time maintaining students' attention.

Cavernous lecture halls filled with up to 300 students at a time are indeed the worst, many instructors and students say. The large classes provide safety in number for students who want to act up and act out. They're also too big to invite much meaningful discussion — which only exacerbates students' disengagement. As a result, many institutions, such as the University of Michigan, are striving to reduce class sizes.

"It's hard to say if leaving early or arriving late is really a function of bad manners because who knows what that particular person may have to do that day?" said Deveron Sanders, a student at the UM whose economics course has about 250 students. "But one thing is still the same: students who are rude tend to sit near the back of the class, and those who come to learn sit near the front. It seems as if more people are always carrying on their conversations at the rear of the class."

Sherri Richards, a student at the University of North Dakota, said she longs for the more chivalrous and polite society she's heard about from her parents.

"Times have changed, and I feel students' attitudes have changed for the worse right along with them," she said. "We don't call people 'sir' or 'miss' or stress the golden rule as much as we used to — and we should."

Protesters demand equal time at U. of Colorado career fair

by Amanda Hill
Colorado Daily
University of Colorado
January 27, 2000

BOULDER, Colo. (TMS) — A graduate student career fair at the University of Colorado at Boulder turned into a battlefield of sorts Tuesday, January 25, as protesters urged students to look outside big corporations for jobs.

Students, career services staff, and university security clashed with demonstrators from the World Action and Awareness Coalition of Equal United Progressives (WAAKE-UP!). Group members carried a banner that read, "Students are NOT products, Teachers are NOT tools, The University is NOT a factory!"

The protest came complete with "Crackers the Corporate-Crime-Fighting Chicken" and an Uncle Sam look-alike, both of whom dashed through hallways, handing out fliers to surprised students.

The three-minute protest ended when a campus security guard forcibly booted Crackers and Uncle Sam out of the building.

"We're protesting the whole idea that corporations can pay money to use our campus without our consent, and we can't go up and hand out our fliers," said CU student Aaron Ibur, who was kicked out of the career fair

for distributing fliers displaying information about several of the participating corporations. "This violates our First Amendment right."

WAAKE-UP! members said they have been trying for years to get a table at the annual career fair so they could share their views. Group members rejected university officials' claims that several student groups, including WAAKE-UP!, were invited to attend a series of meetings to discuss an appearance at this year's fair. WAAKE-UP! members did not respond, university officials said.

"We weren't at the meetings because we weren't invited!" said WAAKE-UP! member Chris O'Loughlin.

University officials immediately bounced protesters out of the fair because their tactics "intimidated" other students and employers, said Gordon Gray, director of the university's career services.

"Cooperative employees and the [university's] security helped avert a major confrontation," Gray said. "We don't want protesters and political issues to get in the way of the meaningful contact between students and employers."

WAAKE-UP! members said they would continue their push to show other students that there are alternatives to working for multi-national corporations.



COLORADO DAILY PHOTO BY MARK SLUPE

Security officers eject Crackers the Corporate-Crime-Fighting Chicken from the University of Colorado Career Fair at University Memorial Center in Boulder. The protesters were part of World Action and Awareness Coalition of Equal United Progressives (WAAKE-UP!).

Students push to be given seats on Va. public colleges' boards

by Alice Warchol
Knight-Ridder Tribune
January 31, 2000

A group of student leaders from Virginia public colleges is pushing legislation that would give students the right to sit on university governing boards.

Three bills, all containing similar language, would amend Virginia's code to require state universities to appoint one or more students to their boards of visitors if they don't already have student representation.

The students couldn't vote, but they would be able to participate in most university discussions.

"If a student can sit on a student conduct hearing, why couldn't they serve on a board of visitors?" asked

Tommy R. Smigiel, student body president at Old Dominion University.

Smigiel and 14 students from four universities visited Richmond last week to find a sponsor for their legislation. They found support in the Senate and the House.

"Since it's the student and his parent that are providing all the funding, it seems reasonable that they would have some kind of representation on the board of visitors," said Del. Frank W. Wagner, R-Virginia Beach, author of one of the bills. Other sponsors are from Northern and western Virginia.

Some universities — James Madison, George Mason, University of Virginia, and Mary Washington — already have student board

members. The legislation, if passed, would extend to all state colleges.

"I think it's a good idea because the university is about students and not the politics that have come into it," said Levi E. Willis, student government president at Norfolk State University.

"The real reason for this university is students," the junior said. "We need a voice in every place possible."

At one time, ODU's board Rector Edward L. Hamm Jr. thought that way, too.

He proposed having faculty members and students on the Board of Visitors three years ago, but became convinced that "it possibly would create more problems than it would cure."

One reason had to do with the nature of the relationship of the president to students.

"There are a lot of sensitive issues and confidential issues that public boards handle, such as presidential compensation and evaluation of the president," Hamm said. "It is not always wise to have people for whom the president is responsible for evaluating the president or being party to those sensitive discussions."

The bills would allow any board to exclude student representatives from "discussions of faculty grievances, faculty, or staff disciplinary matter or salaries." But they do not specify if university presidents are considered part of the faculty.

Investigators seize student's computer in Seton Hall fire probe

TMS Campus
January 31, 2000

NEWARK, N.J. (TMS) — Investigators seized a computer belonging to a student living in the same dormitory where a deadly fire broke out two weeks ago after university officials received an e-mail threatening of an even worse blaze.

The computer was taken from a second-floor room in Boland Hall

three days after the Jan. 19 fire, which killed three students and injured 62 — four of whom are still in critical condition.

Investigators are analyzing the computer's hard drive and software to determine if the e-mail was a prank, school officials said. They do not know whether the student who owns the computer had anything to do with the message or the fire, and they have declined to release the student's name.