

# Survive life on campus by becoming a TechnoWhiz

**I** imagine the following scenario: It's 2 a.m. and your term paper is due in six short hours. Of course, you've been to the library, but you still have more research to do. Logging onto the Internet, you access an online library, and find reams of information on your topic. You read through it and with your handy word-processing program, you type with lightning speed. You frequently save your work on a Zip disk, all while digitally recording your favorite songs on an MP3 player.

After taking a break to play with your digital dog, Fido, you get back to work and finish just in time to e-mail your paper to your professor.

Sound far-fetched? Not really. Technology has revolutionized college life. But to make the most of the tools at your disposal, you've got to learn to use them to your advantage. Here's the Cliffs Notes version to becoming a TechnoWhiz.

— Shannon Harper

## Choose the right computer

**T**he first step in your journey is purchasing a computer. If you're majoring in a technical field like engineering or computer science, chances are your college mandates what type of computer you should get. For everyone else, it's decision time. To help narrow your choices, here are a few things to consider:

- **Operating platform:** The heart and soul of a computer is its operating system (OS), software that controls a computer's functions and directs the processing of its programs. For most students, the choice of operating systems comes down to Microsoft's Windows XP or Apple Computer's Macintosh OS 10.1. Both systems have their strengths and weaknesses. For information on both, check out ZDNet's OS review section at <http://www.zdnet.com/products/finder/guide/0,7267,1500110,00.html>.

- **Desktop or laptop:** Once you pick an OS, you'll have to decide on either a laptop or a desktop computer. Desktops can be easily upgraded and offer more computing power for your buck. But they can take up a lot of precious desk space and can be difficult to transport. Laptops, on the other hand, are small and mobile — you can take them to class, study sessions or wherever you need to work. However, their size also makes them easy prey for thieves. For more on the desktop/laptop debate, visit the College Confidential Web site at ([http://www.collegeconfidential.com/college\\_life/notebook\\_desktop.htm](http://www.collegeconfidential.com/college_life/notebook_desktop.htm)).

— Liz Bartolomeo and Eric Goodwin



Laptop computers, although portable, make easy targets for thieves.



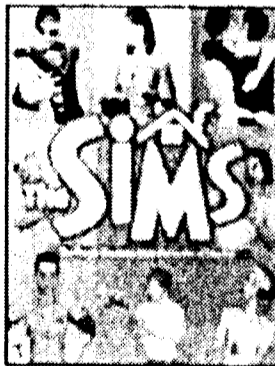
ILLUSTRATION BY JIM ALUMINI-ART

## Technology tips to pass the time

**L**et's face it — as much as you'll use technology for coursework, you'll use it even more for entertainment. With video games, DVDs, MP3s, digital photos and all the other technologies on the market, today's students have got it made. Add the fact that many college dorm rooms come equipped with high-speed Internet access, and you may wonder how anyone gets any work done at all. Here are a few hints on how to fill up those study breaks:

- **MP3s:** The advent of MP3s has allowed people to exchange music like never before. Two online file-sharing services that give you access to hundreds of fresh tunes are Kazaa (<http://www.kazaa.com>) and Audio Galaxy (<http://www.audiogalaxy.com>). Both services are free and offer a wide selection of music genres for your listening pleasure.

And once you've downloaded some songs, you've got to have a way to listen them. In addition to burning your tracks on CDs, you can transfer them to a portable MP3 player. The players range in price from \$95 to \$500 with



Since its debut in 2000, 'The Sims' has become the best-selling computer game of all time.

memory ranging from 64 MB (about 12 songs) to 20 GB (about 4,000 songs).

- **Video games:** Another way to blow off steam is by playing video games. One popular game is "Snood" (<http://www.snood.com>, \$14.95 registration fee). A cross between "Space Invaders" and "Connect Four," Snood can become quite addictive.

Of course, no PC is complete without the top-selling video game of all time, "The Sims" (<http://thesims.com>, \$39.95). This fall, "The Sims" will hit the Web with the highly anticipated "The Sims Online." Like the original game, users will be able to create and control their own virtual person (a "Sim"). However, "The Sims Online" will allow your Sim to interact with Sims created by other users, expanding the playing field from your computer to the entire Internet. You will even be able to instant message other players you encounter, adding even more depth to an already engaging game.

Be careful. Video games can easily go from a simple diversion to a full-blown obsession. Make sure you set limits on playing time.

— Liz Bartolomeo and Eric Goodwin

## Use the 'Net for research

**T**he Internet can be a powerful research tool, but only if you know where to look. In addition to search engines like Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>) and Google (<http://www.google.com>), several reference Web sites can help you gather background information for term papers or class projects. Just be sure to credit any information from your Internet searches, and don't even think about "lifting" passages verbatim — a big no-no that might help you go from TechnoWhiz to Dropout faster than you can reboot your computer.

- **For detailed searches,** log on to eLibrary (<http://net.eLibrary.com/index.asp>). eLibrary is a subscription-based digital archive that allows you to search a database of dozens of top newspapers, periodicals, books and media transcripts. Some of the site's content partners include The Washington Post, BusinessWeek, Newsweek, National Public Radio and CBS's "60 Minutes." The site offers a free seven-day trial for first-time users. Otherwise, a monthly subscription costs \$14.95, and a full-year subscription costs \$99.95. Other digital archives to check out include MagPortal (<http://MagPortal.com>) and Re: QUEST dot Net (<http://www.re-quest.net>).

- **If you're looking for historical information,** visit the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration Web site (<http://www.archives.gov>). NARA offers transcripts and analysis of important documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation and includes digital images of the documents.

— Eric Goodwin

## Easy credit can bring hard lessons later

**S**tarting college is scary enough. But new figures from a national poll just might terrify you. Almost 80 percent of college students have at least one credit card. And about 10 percent have at least \$7,000 in debt. These statistics, from an American Institute of Certified Financial Planners poll, show that forming solid financial habits early is essential.

You know the basics, but understanding the rules and following them are two different things. Again, technology can help. Here's how:

- **Having trouble balancing your checkbook?** Several computer programs can help you track your expenses, including "Quicken 2002 Home and Business" (\$40) or "Microsoft Money 2002" (\$65). These programs can monitor your spending habits, remind you of upcoming bills and alert you if you come close to overspending your budget. These pro-

grams might seem pricey, but they could save you a bundle in the long run.

- **With a click of a mouse button,** you also can monitor your credit card and bank account balances. Logging on regularly can help you curb your spending.

- **Know your limits.** If it's hard for you to be responsible, consider using another form of plastic. Check cards look like credit cards but the money is automatically deducted from your checking account. The trick to these is keeping track of what you use the card for. Another option is prepaid cards, like those from Visa (<http://www.visabuxx.com>) or MasterCard (<http://www.mastercard.com/cgi-bin/atec/searchresults.cgi?prctid=3>). Mom or Dad puts cash on the card, and you spend it until it's gone — or more money is added.

— Gayle Issa



Geology grad student Xu Xiqiao, 21, applies for his first credit card at the University of Michigan where, like other campuses, the lure of easy credit is everywhere.

