

# Profs receive grants to teach deaf with computers

By MARK DIANTONIO  
Collegian Staff Writer

Two University professors were awarded grants totaling more than \$450,000 to continue research in using microcomputers to teach deaf children reading, writing and communication skills.

Philip M. Prinz, assistant professor of communication disorders, and Keith E. Nelson, professor of psychology, received the two technology-effectiveness research grants from the U.S. Department of Education to continue their research for at least two more years.

Prinz said the research, operating for almost a year in the Philadelphia public schools and at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in Philadelphia, uses microcomputers to assist deaf children between the ages of 2 and 10 to develop their communication skills to the levels of hearing students. The children involved in the program

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— Philip M. Prinz, University professor

have normal intelligence and are capable of acquiring the skills, Prinz said, but they ordinarily would be denied the opportunity because of a lack of equipment or because teachers cannot provide individual attention.

"By giving (the deaf children) a head start... we can provide them with early language input that will speed up the development of communication skills," Prinz said.

The program included about 60 children and Nelson said children using the micro-

computers significantly increased communication skill development. Because deaf children rely on their sight as a major information gatherer, Prinz said, the use of microcomputers can bring together words and pictures to aid children where speech is left out.

Using microcomputers incorporates pictorial input, the printed word and graphic representation, he said. He said the computer screen shows a picture of an object, the name of the object and may show the object in action.

For example, if the child presses the buttons marked "Man," "Throw" and "Ball," the screen would illustrate a picture of a man with a ball in his hand with the objects identified by printed words. The man would then throw the ball and the sentence, "Man throws ball," would appear under the activity.

Another feature of the microcomputer lessons is sign language graphics where a picture of a hand demonstrating the sign for a word appears on the screen. "As far as we know, no one has used sign language graphics. We have been successful with this since many younger deaf children understand sign language," Prinz said.

# free lance

# Student entrepreneurs: There's no business like your own business

By JEANNE ANN CURRY  
Collegian Staff Writer

When Michael Edwards was 12 years old he operated a skateboard shop out of his family's garage. Now, seven years later, he is the owner of Rent-A-Student, a lawn care and residential maintenance service in State College that employs nine other students — two of them full-time.

Edwards ( sophomore-business administration), whose business venture netted him enough over the summer to pay for his tuition this year, is just one of several Penn State students and recent graduates running their own companies in this area in their spare time.

While their services differ — they range from delivering singing telegrams to exterminating bugs to developing and marketing computer software — most of these entrepreneurs agree on one thing: The independence they gain by being their own boss is their greatest reward.

"I think the ideal situation in anyone's life is to own your own business and have it be profitable — it's to be able to survive and not have to work for someone else," says Brian Slawin, owner of the Disc Jockey Service, Party With Professionals.

But Slawin, who graduated last fall with a major in psychology, says the independence is often difficult to deal with. "You have to be more serious. First you have to be a professional, and to be able to come off as one requires maturity and the ability to schedule your time," he says. "But anybody can make it if their product is sound and they're working hard to promote it."

Joe Englert, owner of the Lamore Family Singers telegram delivery company, which employs 10 students, says: "Days when I'm busy from 6 in the morning till 10 at night I tell myself, 'It's my business, and nobody tells me to do anything.' If I can do all this on my own, I'll never work for anybody else."

But even though independence is important to these young business people, other factors — like working with their hobbies, gaining business experience or simply making some quick cash — were significant reasons for starting businesses of their own.

Englert, who graduated in the spring with a major in English and history, sees his

business as a means to write the novel he has always dreamed of writing. "In due time, I know I'll be independent, and I'll be able to write my novel. I'm investing my time now so I'll have a lot of time in the future. And who knows?" he laughs, "in a long while from now maybe I'll have my own publishing company!"

Michael Allen (senior-mechanical engineering) is another entrepreneur using his business as a way to work at his hobby. He has applied his interest in computers to the creation of Artemation, a company that develops and markets programs for the Sinclair computer.

Although Allen plans to get a job in his major, he says his company will always be a part-time interest. "It now only takes my spare time — it's like an extracurricular activity that allows me to work in almost all of my areas of interest," he says.

**'If nothing else, it's been an educational experience. If you fail in a business, it's not that bad — business failures are common. The tragedy is if you fail to learn something from it.'**

— Thomas R. Dahlberg, student entrepreneur

With a smile, Allen adds that he hopes to someday use his business to create what he calls "a truly intelligent version of the game 'Mastermind.'"

Chris Casciato (junior-industrial engineering) started his own business to work as a "hired killer." What he kills are bugs — he is an exterminator in his spare time. "My business doesn't take a whole lot of time, and the extra cash helps a whole hell of a lot," he says.

Another Penn State student, however, started his company, he says, for altruistic — not monetary — gain.

In the summer of 1982 Thomas R. Dahlberg (graduate-community systems planning and

development) with another student created the American Institute for Diversionary Studies, which has since changed from a partnership to a corporation. By consulting with attorneys from across the country, the company shows criminal justice officers — including district attorneys and police chiefs — ways in which better results can be achieved with limited resources.

Dahlberg, who is 21 years old and a member of Mensa (the association made up of people whose intelligence test scores are higher than 98 percent of the population), says he has received much support from the federal government.

"A couple of Supreme Court justices and even the Executive Office of the President have said they're behind what we're doing," he says.

However, the future of his company is questionable. "It says that while his profits have been marginal compared to his investment of time, the real problem is that many of the people he deals with are elected officials who fear that by consulting his firm, it will look as if someone else could do their job better."

Dahlberg adds that his company's unfortunate choice of a name has not helped business — it is known as AIDS, for short. Nevertheless, Dahlberg looks at his business venture philosophically.

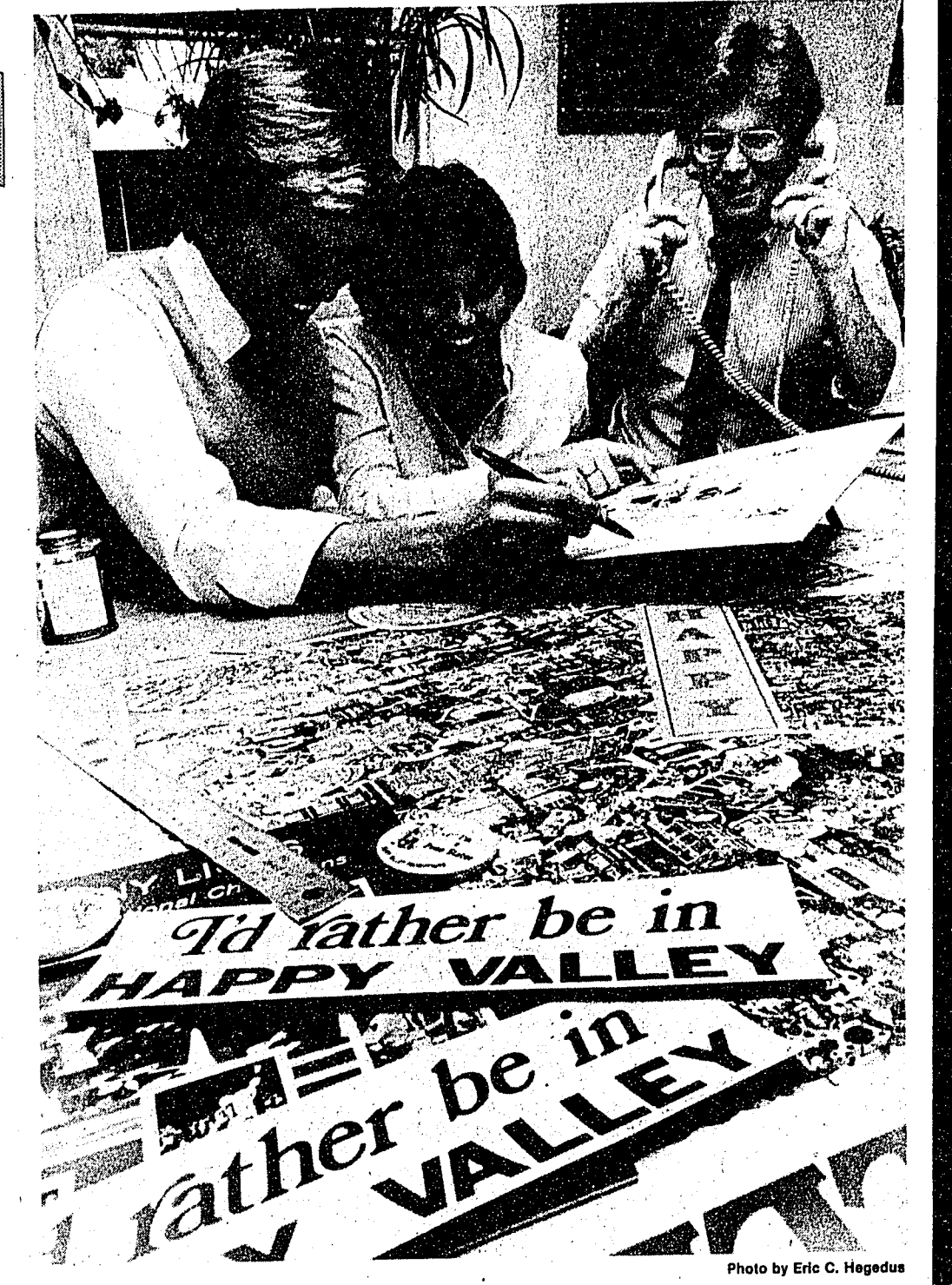
"If nothing else, it's been an educational experience," he says. "If you fail in a business, it's not that bad — business failures are common. The tragedy is if you fail to learn something from it."

Although Dahlberg says he now sees that State College was the wrong location for his kind of business, most of the young entrepreneurs think the area is a good place to begin.

Greg Woodman is one such entrepreneur. Five years ago Woodman started a business that developed into Happy Valley Promotions, a company that produces posters, books and sportswear promoting what he calls "the Happy Valley experience."

Woodman, who graduated this summer with a major in general arts and sciences, says he has learned much about the area as a member of its business community.

"The way I look at it, Happy Valley is an incubator for small businesses," he says. "It has an artificial economy, so that no matter



University graduate Greg Woodman (right), owner of Happy Valley Promotions, talks shop with Tom Mosser, another graduate, and Pam Howells (senior-accounting). Woodman says he expects his company's sales to gross more than \$100,000 this year.

where there is a recession, Happy Valley is almost recession-proof." Virgil Christian, owner of Pro String, agrees.

This semester Christian started his own racket — by stringing rackets — at first for his fellow members of the tennis team and then by branching out. Christian (junior-

investment needed to start a company is often very great, and it takes a while for the entrepreneurs to recover that money.

While Allen, of Artemation, explains that it cost him only \$70 to register the name of his company and \$20 to copyright each of his programs, Christian, of Pro String, says he has \$800 invested in machinery and \$300 in inventory.

To invest this much money to start a business requires a lot of confidence in the product and its ability to sell. Slawin, of Party With Professionals, says that although the initial fear of failure is one of the hardest things to overcome, the fear lessens once the investment is made.

"I found the first major purchase I made, a \$250 pair of speakers, was a really scary experience," he says. "But once I plunked down the money, the apprehension died because I knew I was very serious and going full force ahead."

And for some, the investment is paying off. Woodman, of Happy Valley Promotions, says he expects his business to gross more than \$100,000 this year. However, most of the others say that their young companies have been slower to show a profit.

Slawin is philosophical about the financial aspect of self-employment. "I'm getting an education I couldn't possibly pay for, and it's helped out immensely. Never would I be able to get this experience anywhere else, and there's no substitute for doing the real thing."

**'The way I look at it, Happy Valley is an incubator for small businesses. It has an artificial economy, so that no matter where there is a recession, Happy Valley is almost recession-proof.'**

— Greg Woodman, owner of Happy Valley Promotions

marketing) says he spends a great deal of time thinking of strategies to try to capture part of the area's healthy market.

"The State College area is an excellent place to start a business because there's so many people," he says. "There are 40,000 people here and there are ways to get in touch with them."

Others, however, find the area profitable — not because of its marketplace — but rather for its educational opportunities.

Allen, of Artemation, credits his success to the Central Pa. Times/Sinclair Computer Users Group, which is made up of local people interested in business and the computer industry.

"Back at home I couldn't have done this," he says. "It was the contact with people I met in this area that helped."

Edwards, of Rent-A-Student, views his company as an extension of his education. "I'm getting an education I couldn't possibly pay for, and it's helped out immensely. Never would I be able to get this experience anywhere else, and there's no substitute for doing the real thing."

— Michael Edwards, owner of Rent-A-Student



"Dorothy Lamore" (obviously not her real name) delivers a stripper-gram to Dave Morehead (senior-accounting) on his birthday while his friends cheer on. The Lamore Family Singers singing telegram company is owned by Joe Englert, who graduated from the University last spring.

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