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University

Computer system offers variety

By Luis Fierro
Emerald Contributor

The Computer Information Exchange allows users to exchange information ranging from dinner ideas to political discussions and access a host of other diverse topics.

The CIE is a computer conferencing system developed by a student group for the University students, faculty, staff and alumni.

At this time, the program has more than 250 active members, who provide a large and diverse forum for discussion on more than 75 different conference subjects.

Jennifer Hadlock, internal manager of CIE, explained that most other large universities have electronic bulletin boards or conferencing systems provided by the University, and that most faculty and students participate in them. She feels that, in this respect, the University is still in the dark ages.

Hadlock said that the CIE is still a struggling student group, that has not been able to obtain office space or sufficient funding to buy a larger and faster central computer. Currently, the system is operating from an old minicomputer, nicknamed "Hal," that is literally locked in a closet.

Hadlock said she believes the University should provide more attention to the group be-

cause it has so many members.

Students can access the network from terminals set up in the EMU computer lounge, the Computing Center, the dorms, or from their own microcomputers, set up with a modem.

The group is trying to provide the service free, although there is still a \$6 annual fee.

Through the CIE, members can interchange free classified ads, personal ads, electronic mail, job opportunities, meet people and make new friends, discuss issues or help each other with academic or personal problems.

A brochure published by the group explains that by joining CIE, "you will have unlimited access to a free exchange of ideas, information and opinions between University students, faculty and alumni."

By paying an additional \$25 fee, members can also get a Unix account, through which they can communicate to other electronic bulletin boards across the United States and Canada. With this option, provided through the UONet system, one may instantly send electronic mail (E-Mail) over the country at virtually no charge.

Heather Brock, CIE publicity director, explained the major advantage of the networking system over "face to face contact" is that it provides a medium to engage in dialogue with

dozens of people at your own free time.

Brock pointed out that some people feel more at ease participating in these computer conferences than they would in live ones because they provide a forum for more candid discussion.

The brochure sets up a scenario in which one walks "into a crowded room, packed full of people who are all carrying on their conversations with everyone else in the room. Pretty intimidating, huh? Now imagine being able to jump right in on those conversations, following them and becoming a part of them, adding your views and opinions and having people listen and respond to what you've said. No longer will you be judged by how you appear, but by your true value as an individual; your ideas and opinions."

However, Brock dispelled the notion that the members of CIE are introverted, or, as she puts it, "computer nerds".

"You have all sorts of persons, as you would find in any other group of people as large as this," Brock said.

Each person's personality is reflected in their interaction within the system; some are very outspoken on a large number of issues, while others are content reading other persons' opinions, she said.

The issues discussed within CIE range widely, from mathematics and computer topics, to poetry and fiction workshops, human sexuality and gay issues, in addition to humor and parties.

Each subject matter, or conference, has a moderator, who controls that the basic rules of respect and etiquette are kept, which prevents personal attacks, illegal activity or other unruly behavior, Brock said.

Even though people feel more free to express their opinions because they are not in face to face discussion, members of CIE meet personally in parties and other events.

Brock stressed to point out that members are not generally computer hacks, and that most of them didn't know how to use a computer before they became members.

People interested in the conferencing system can leave a message in the CIE mailbox in EMU Suite 4, or call Asoka Diggs (343-1431), Heather Brock (344-9349) or Jennifer Hadlock (344-5874).

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