

U. of Arizona 'humanizes' classes with computers

By THOMAS J. MCLEAN

Arizona Daily Wildcat, U. of Arizona

A new computer system is being used at the U. of Arizona College of Medicine that allows for more student-teacher interaction and may end the days of boring classroom lectures.

The IBM Advanced Academic System uses small keypads hooked up to a computer that allows students to respond to multiple-choice or true-false questions during a lecture, said Steve Louie, senior support systems analyst with the division of academic resources in the College of Medicine.

Student responses are collected by the computer and displayed in graph form on an overhead projection screen, Louie said.

The instructor can then see if students are understanding the material based on the number of correct or incorrect answers.

The UA College of Medicine is the first medical school to use this technology, Louie said. "What I see here and elsewhere is that professors are becoming increasingly disenchanted with lectures," Louie said.

The new system helps both students and professors determine their weaknesses so they can be corrected.

The system has been in use for less than two months and



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Keypads like the one above allow professors at U. of Arizona to quiz students during lectures.

already has been used in a few medical classes with good results, Louie said.

The computer can handle up to 400 keypads at one time and is connected with a personal computer that displays the questions on an overhead projector. The medical college is

equipped with 100 keypads.

The advantage of the system is that all students respond to the questions anonymously and no longer need to feel embarrassed if they give an incorrect response, Louie said.

Professors also are able to continually test students and no longer need to wait for an exam to see if the students learned the material, Louie said.

The system is relatively inexpensive considering the advantages, he said. Each keypad costs \$94 and a large lecture hall could be set up for about \$25,000, he said.

Student response has been positive so far, mostly because the system helps "humanize" lectures, Louie said.

Medical students at the U. of Arizona think the new system will help them prepare for classes, and some students like the keypads because it gives them insight as to how teachers are going to test their classes throughout the semester.

"It gave us an idea of the type of questions he would ask (on an exam)," said Kerry Schlecht, a second-year medical student who has used the system.

Schlecht said she liked using the keypads and felt they helped her get more out of the lecture. Louie said he feels that this technology will revolutionize undergraduate teaching because it is so flexible.

"The future of it is going to be great," he said.

Jobs

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He belonged to Phi Beta Kappa, graduated as class marshal and worked as assistant news editor at his school's newspaper. Although he found a job, he still couldn't reach the goal he set for himself.

"I said I would aim for a salary of at least \$20,000 a year and a paper with a 30,000 circulation," he said. "I had to settle for about \$16,000 and a circulation of 14,500."

Eileen McGearry, career planning and placement director at the U. of Nevada-Las Vegas, said she also is seeing more underemployed students than non-employed students.

For example, she said hotels are offering graduates desk positions until they can afford to open top management positions.

But many recent graduates who don't want to wait until the job scene improves are discovering that graduate school is one way to bide time and prepare for the competitive market.

"What's been going on is some fairly substantial increases in applications over the past two years," said Peter Sverson, of the Council of Graduate Schools.

Sverson's organization maintains contact with 400 universities with graduate programs. On a nationwide average, he said most schools have seen about a 10-15

percent increase in applications during the past two years.

For grads who are willing to work for almost nothing yet get the opportunity to help people in underprivileged parts of the world, the Peace Corps is another option.

Jeff Ferry, an employee in the director's office at the Peace Corps' national headquarters in Los Angeles, said inquiries into the Peace Corps have increased, but applications have not.

"It's generally because people cannot find a job and they're willing to do whatever to occupy their time... and they have a desire to help these third world countries," he said.

Although the employment market does not look good for first semester graduates, there may be light at the end of the recession tunnel for those who can be patient. Experts expect the job market to open within a year.

"Some of the reports I've seen are saying that things will let up by the beginning of winter," McGearry said. "Often the rebound from this might take a full year."

Other college administrators and faculty agree that the economy is getting healthier.

"We're getting signs the recession is ending, though it's quite murky at the moment," Gardner said. "A college education is still one of the best buys there is, and we continue to place people. It's just taking longer."

Kathy Drown, Daily Orange, Syracuse U., contributed to this story.

Budget

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hell of it."

He said the mid-year tuition increases varied around the country, ranging from 3 percent at the U. of Oregon to a national high 59 percent in the State U. of New York system.

Sweeney decried some state legislatures for political posturing during a time when they should be concerned with curing the college budget crunches. "Raising taxes is very unpopular, so they look for revenue sources — like jacking up tuition some more," he said.

Sweeney said there is no particular pattern to the budgetary woes, but said that clearly the nation's coasts — especially the two large state-supported university systems in New York and California — are feeling the brunt of the economic downturn.

The SUNY increase, which amounts to roughly \$500 per student, came after eight years of stable costs for students there.

The nine-campus U. of California system suffered a \$312 million cutback, causing fees to increase 40 percent, said Judson King, provost for the professional schools and colleges at UC, Berkeley.

Berkeley is saving money by offering an early retirement plan to its employees who have many years of service. About 600 faculty and staff, including a Nobel Laureate, took the early retirement option,

he said. The U. of California system also plans to decrease the number of students admitted by about 5,500, King said.

Dick Gable, a professor at the U. of California, Davis, suggested in May that the university's top administrators take a pay cut to help soften the budget crunch. King said nothing has been done on that suggestion, but other measures have been taken to cut administrative costs.

"We're in the mode of slimming down our operation," he said. King also described the early retirement plan as "encouraged attrition." Even more grim, Sweeney says, is the possibility that it could get worse. Budget cuts and tuition increases at state-supported colleges and universities may not stabilize when the recession ends, carrying rising costs into the next century, he said.

There aren't enough mechanisms in place to protect funding for higher education, he explained.

The biggest priorities in most state budgets are federally mandated programs like Medicaid, and elementary and secondary education. "When the recession ends, the mandates won't disappear. (The states) will still have funding crunches, and there's not a lot of public desire to raise taxes," Sweeney said. "And the federal government is restrained by its own budget problems."

"It doesn't look good," he added. "State budget problems will probably continue through the rest of the decade, so we're not out of the woods yet — it's only 1991."

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