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Surfing The Information Superhighway

Students connect tomorrow's technology with the campus of today

The first time I remember feeling old, really old, was during high school after a friend's microwave broke down. I remember his 8-year-old brother looking distressed. "What are we going to do without a *microwave?*" he asked, visibly shaken.

He acted like Columbus discovered the microwave. I remember a time when it took 10 minutes to boil a hot dog and we roasted popcorn over an open flame.

I'm feeling even older now. The way he felt about that oven is the way our kids will feel about e-mail. The most sophisticated piece of AV equipment at my school was the overhead projector. But all that is changing.

America's campuses are at the forefront of a technological revolution, and lest you think the changes taking place won't affect your soon-to-graduate behind, think again. The information superhighway — running through our schools, homes and offices — will affect us all.

Thankfully, universities around the country are jumping on the high-tech bandwagon, and with good reason. If universities are going to train us how to operate anything more advanced than a deep-fat fryer, they had better take notice. The technology on today's campuses will become the tools of tomorrow's work place.

CYBERADMISSIONS OFFICE: THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

The campus of the future starts at the admissions office. Some universities, including the U. of Southern California, are moving to a paperless application process. And before you say "Ha! My SAT days are over," keep in mind the pastime displacing alcohol as everybody's favorite form of escapism: grad school.

A new version of the Graduate Record Exams will be administered this month: Called computerized adaptive tests (CATs), they adjust to the test taker's ability.

future Answer easy questions correctly and you get more difficult ones. Answer easy questions incorrectly and the computer feeds you less difficult ones. If two GRE takers have the same number of correct answers, the person with the more challenging questions gets a higher score.

"We are going to phase out paper and pencil [GREs] completely in the next four or five years, as we will SATs eventually," says Kevin Gonzalez of the Educational Testing Service, which administers both tests.

Graduate school hopefuls who take the CAT can receive their scores immediately. Graduate school not-so-hopefuls can choose to delete the CAT before seeing their scores.

Someday you'll tell your grandkids how your hand ached from painstakingly filling out scantrons.

They'll yawn as you tell them how you had to walk to class, in the middle of winter, two, sometimes three times a day. And it was uphill both ways.

CONNECTING TO THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

Where were you when you first heard 'Rock Lobster?'
How was your hair day?
Chicken McNuggets: What kind of sauce?
Let's talk Madonna

If you're surfing the Internet, an electronic computer network subsidized by — surprise — the National Science Foundation, you too can be privy to meaningful discussions like those listed above. You can also discuss camel research with a Finnish scientist, converse with a best-selling author or engage Billy Idol in a rousing disputation.

Take your pick. With the recent explosion of electronic communication, the possibilities for students are unlimited.

is Anyone with a phone line can tap into the Internet and communicate for little or no cost with other users from around the world.

Students can share software, "talk" in real time by splitting the screen, or access the Library of Congress or the libraries at Harvard U. and Johns Hopkins U.

"The Internet is the best resource I've found at school," says Racheline Maltese, a senior at The George Washington U. "I have learned more on the 'net than I have in a lot of classes."

Electronic communication isn't a new technology — the Internet started with ties to the Department of

By Paul Heltzel, Editor on Fellowship