

Byte me

Turbo Term Papers?

"OK FOLKS, YOUR VIRTUAL TERM papers are due Friday. And I expect at least two rap video clips to go with each section of commentary. If you have any questions, just catch me on the Web chat...."

Students at many colleges have come to expect this kind of assignment. Innovative computer-oriented courses are popping up in every discipline, from philosophy to agriculture.

"Since I teach media and pop culture analysis courses, the ability to use visual, moving images is a big bonus," says Tom Kushman, professor of sociology at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.



All Over the Bit Map

LINKING THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY WITH the old-fashioned concrete highway, a young band of virtual travelers piled into a van with some high-priced technology and hit the road.

Five 20somethings are exploring the United States and relaying their findings via America Online in an adventure dubbed *Lost in America*.

One of the travelers, Tony Lystra, describes the process as "rumblin' from town to town, doin' some late-night drivin', then wakin' up to a whole new city and different people around you."

The crew has run into a few roadblocks along the way. Two of the five PowerBooks fizzled out. And with the idea being to visit the smaller towns of America, some of the hotels they've stayed in haven't exactly been introduced to '90s technology.

"The phone lines don't always work, so they have to transmit

from local diners, or the back offices of bars," says co-creator Alex Okuliar. "That's probably the biggest problem."

The intrepid cast — Lystra, Shannon Guthrie, Kiely Sullivan, Amaani Lyle and Nick Wise — have developed a bit of a cult following.

"We have a few people that seem like they're living through us," says Guthrie from a pit stop in Chattanooga, Tenn. "People write to us and say, 'This is just like the trip I took in the '70s.' You don't want to let them down."

AOL users actually control the fate of the travelers. Each week, one of three destinations is selected by the online masses.

Kushman pioneered the virtual term paper in 1993. "It allows students to break away from using magazines and newspapers as their only sources for media examples," he says.

Wendy Wong, a sophomore at Wellesley who took Kushman's media analysis class, says, "The emphasis on computers made [sociology] seem less dry. We could really personalize our work."

Lucinda Roy, a Virginia Tech professor, has taught interactive classes, but she cautions against relying too heavily on computers.

"My students seemed to really enjoy the class I taught online last summer," Roy says. "But the topic — the civil rights movement — included some highly emotional material. Students seem to need [some] face-to-face discussion with that kind of subject matter."

David Hibler, an English professor at the U. of Nebraska, Lincoln, is blazing a trail with a Web-based class. "Students of the 21st century will need to know how to manipulate text effectively, and they will have to manipulate the entire environment in which that text is displayed."

Hibler's students have created a class home page (<http://cwis.unl.edu/mama/mama.html>) and have completed many projects and assignments on the Web.

So hold on to your hard drives, computerphobes, your class may be the next to go online.

Tara Tuckwiler, Virginia Tech/
Illustration by Darrin Bell, U. of California, Berkeley

"That makes it kind of interesting for us," Guthrie says. "But one time I really wanted to go to the Florida Keys, and we got sent up into Tennessee. I was a little bummed, but everywhere we've been has been cool."

Nowadays, any time a group of strangers has to live together for awhile there inevitably are comparisons to MTV's *The Real World*.

"We're very much a different story," says Lystra, who took the semester off from the U. of Oregon to participate. "Those people are

Bits & Bytes

Towering above the rest

Northwest Missouri State U. students will be getting a bonus in their 1995-96 *Tower* yearbooks: a CD. No, not Alanis Morissette. CD-ROMs, with audio and video to accompany the stories in the printed version. *The Tower* will be the first college yearbook with an interactive component. The book won't cost any more. But if you want *Jagged Little Pill*, too, that'll be another 12 bucks or so.

Cyberprudes rule

A Carnegie Mellon U. study on Internet use indicates that the average network user is not interested in cyberporn. Researchers reported that fewer than one-fifth of the users sampled have looked at any sexually oriented newsgroup more than twice since the project began in February. Take that, Cindy Silicone Chip.

I want my InternetTV

Look out, MTV. U. of Texas, Austin, students can now see music videos on the Web via student-run KVR-InternetTV. The station offers a mix of music videos, an animated program, a rap/hip-hop documentary and a weekly visit to Austin. Tune in at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/output/tstv.html>.

Home page contest

Wake up and smell the cash! Vivarin's giving away a \$10,000 scholarship and other neat-o prizes to students with zippy home pages in its "There's No Place Like Home Pages Contest." Enter your home page by Dec. 31, 1995, at <http://www.vivarin.com/vivarin/>.

pretty controlled by the network. Our employers can't really stop us from doing what we want to do. We're much more... well, *real* than *The Real World*."

AOL members can type the keyword LOST to visit the travelers and learn how to be one in future trips. The next trek starts in January.

PowerBook? Check. Digital camera? Check. Snowshoes? Check. You're armed and ready.

Shad Powers, Assistant Editor



Scholarship sunk

The old adage "If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is," was never more applicable than in the case of Peter Panos.

Panos, a sophomore at the Metropolitan State College of Denver, answered an advertisement for a "guaranteed" scholarship. Just pay a modest fee (\$30 to \$125), then sit back and wait for opportunity to come knocking, the ad read.

Panos followed the ad's instructions and contacted a company called Academic Investment Money. When he made the call to AIM's 800 number, he found that the company asks for an \$89 fee upfront, and it's automatically withdrawn from students' bank accounts.

"I paid the fee like they asked, but I never got a response," Panos said.

After more than a month of waiting, Panos called the company.

Panos says he was told that he needed to talk to a customer service representative, who was supposed to be available from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Eastern time. When Panos called the new number he was given, it turned out to be a fax line. Undaunted, he called the first number again.

The receptionist became so irate with Panos, she started insulting him, Panos says.

"She called me a dummy and told me I needed to learn to tell time," he said.

This isn't an isolated incident for this company. According to the Better Business Bureau of New York, Academic Investment Money has chalked up 44 complaints, 27 of which came between August '94 and August '95.

Academic Investment Company would not comment on the allegations.

Panos still hasn't received a scholarship or refund, but he has learned a lesson.

"I just got took," he says. "I'll be tougher with my money next time."

Students don't have to go to outside companies for scholarship information.

Jeanne Goody at the BBB in Colorado says these companies generally provide information that students can obtain through their financial aid offices.

"If students can do the work on their own," Goody says, "they won't need to take the risk of using these companies."

Robert Arrieta, Metropolitan State College of Denver