



By Pooja Agarwal

COLLEGE LIFE IN THE INTERNET AGE

Today's college students are no strangers to technology, weaving it into every aspect of their daily campus life.

“Wake up!” My laptop, equipped with a scheduled task for Winamp, plays the music of my choice every morning at 8:45 a.m. Ten years ago, when computers weren't the first thing to greet me by my bedside, seems almost like a dream.



I remember having a computer then – with 5-¼-inch floppy disks. I remember inserting each one individually into my computer, opening the doors to the world of “Monopoly,” “Wheel of Fortune” and “Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?” I also remember the world of video games.

It was a time when I was having fun, without knowing what I was having fun with. I didn’t know how video games worked. I didn’t know where the graphics came from. I didn’t know how what I did on a Controller or Duck Hunt gun would change what was happening in the system and, consequently, on screen. I just knew I was enjoying myself.

About seven years ago, I remember “dialing-up” to the Internet. Now, we fought over the TV, Nintendo and the computer. I would come home from middle school, eager to chat online with friends. My brother would come home from middle school, eager to play games online with friends.

It wasn’t until high school that I began to surf the Internet. I got my first PC, began to learn Linux and constantly e-mailed other students, teachers and administrators. I picked up technology easily, and I began to figure out computer problems on my own.

Nowadays, accessing technology is the first thing I do when I wake up and the last thing on my mind before going to sleep. I wake up to my laptop. Before even going to the bathroom, I open the laptop lid and log onto IM, just in case someone wants to talk. Following my shower, I check two or three e-mail addresses, check the taskbar weather application, talk on IM and browse my songs in Winamp. All at the same time. Before going to class, I put up an “away” message, just in case someone wants to talk while I’m gone.

As I head to class in my car, I listen to burned MP3 CDs on my stereo. The majority of my lecture classes use presentation software; almost every classroom is equipped with a computer and ceiling projector. I’ve had an “online” course, where most of the reading and simulations were online and we met as a class

twice a week. Most of my classes have a class Web site, usually to post the syllabus, reading list and additional links. I can even access some readings for my classes on an online database of scanned articles and books maintained by our main library.

Before, during and sometimes after lunch, I check my e-mail at the nearest computer. Perhaps soon, I’ll get a wireless-capable laptop and my college will have a wireless network. I use this time to send up to about 10 e-mails to friends about activities, to professors about research and class projects and to advisors to set up appointments.

After class, I return to my apartment to check my e-mail, turn on Winamp and return to IM. After dinner, I check e-mail again. Forcing myself to study (sometimes at the library to prevent distraction from FreeCell and Google), I research projects online and access an online database of journals. And before I go to bed each night, I set my computer alarm song for the next day, do a final e-mail check and slip into slumber land, perhaps dreaming of the days before USB ports, cell phones and flat screens.

Envisioning the future, one must awaken the past. For me, technology has always been present but transparent. It wasn’t until I worked at the Office of Educational Technology in the U.S. Department of Education this past summer that I realized how much technology I was using.

For the next few years, I’m sure I will continue to use my computer to wake me up, until I find something else that gives me the flexibility and selection of music to listen to in the morning. In years to come will the computer of the future continue to wake the human of the future or will the human of the future wake the computer?

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