

opinion

# Computers Illiterate rates reclaimed

By Maxwell Glen  
and Cody Shearer

WASHINGTON — Armed with an architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Christina Harlander found work two years ago at a small Philadelphia consulting firm. For Harlander, a four-year investment in a liberal arts education seemed to have paid off.

Last year, however, the 24-year-old Riverton, N.J., resident discovered she lacked the training to make it as a modern businesswoman. Having passed up Penn's assortment of computer sciences and related courses — "I was too busy taking other things," she explained — Harlander had neither the experience to advance as a manager nor the academic qualifications for a top-flight business school.

Harlander fits the description of what some people call a "computer illiterate." If computer-competents are those who've either been formally schooled in programming or have learned it at work, computer illiterates are those who've fallen through the gaps and, without special training, could be left behind. They constitute a lost generation of Americans whose inadequate quantitative skills may be one of the most unfortunate legacies of the nation's educational crisis.

According to Katherine Pollak, vice dean of Penn's College of General Studies, the typical computer illiterate probably graduated from college between 1975 and 1982, earned respectable marks as a humanities major, but now realized that he or she is woefully undereducated when it comes to computers.

"It was almost without consideration that students during the late 1970s went through four undergraduate years without taking math and computer courses and emerged without those skills," Pollak said. "Anybody who went to college in those years thought, 'I'm not going to do stuff like that in my life.'"

Indeed, even as late as 1980, computer science was regarded by many collegians as all but exclusive to IBM-bound engineers or future NASA technicians. Until recently, computer courses were generally the domain of math departments — a tendency which only fanned students' irrational fears of infinity, integrals and matrices.

Meanwhile, some students found "interfacing" with a big mainframe compu-

ter a little queer: Even if they could foresee the array of personal computer applications available today, few believed then that their life's work would involve a terminal.

A few years later, of course, that assumption seems primitive. Data processing has infiltrated businesses of all kinds, and computers have grown more user-friendly. Computer illiterates face a scary, premature obsolescence as the demand for technically-trained college graduate grows in an otherwise sluggish job market.

To help this strangely disadvantaged class — roughly 20 million Americans, Pollak conceived a program last spring for "retooling" liberal arts graduates in quantitative skills. In September, 33 students, including Christina Harlander, registered for introductory courses in calculus, statistics, economics, accounting and the "decision sciences" (computers).

Some of Pollak's "Post-Baccalaureate Pre-Business" students are eyeing an MBA; others just want to make themselves more valuable to their current employers.

Consider student Paul Rader, a 1983 graduate of Notre Dame. An English literature major with a weakness for Shakespeare, Rader was able to bypass Notre Dame's science requirements and, he says, received only gentleman's grades in economics. Rader, 23, now works at his brother's shoe store and kicks himself for ignoring the computer mania that swept South Bend in late 1981.

"It was getting crazy," he recalls. "Everyone realized that the computer was going to affect their lives and wanted to get some experience (with) it."

Perhaps not surprisingly, Pollak contends that her program will self-destruct by 1993. As high school and undergraduate computer courses overflow with students (and, no doubt, graduates in other cities return to school to pursue computer skills), computer illiteracy will diminish. By Graduation Day 1993, computers will have become as rudimentary to liberal arts as James Joyce.

It's too early to gauge the extent to which the "lost generation" will see the need for retaining. But if the current job market provides any indication of future demand, this group's members may have to recognize that need soon or remember college as literally the best years of their lives.



# It takes more than publicity to make a world university

The phrase "world university" is being thrown around with increasing frequency here at Texas A&M. Achieving world university status seems to be one of the major goals of this institution, but nobody agrees on how to accomplish that goal.

A lot of people aren't even clear on what a world university actually is, but are still gung-ho about doing whatever you have to do to be one.

It might help to define the term. President Frank E. Vandiver originally used the phrase in a column released by United Press International in July 1982. World universities, he said, would be strategically located and "linked together through a network of cooperative programs, sharing their expertise and helping one another and the people they serve."

The world universities would facilitate the expansion of human knowledge and contribute to maintaining world peace, he said.

So much for the definition. Now how do we get there?

"While research and related activities would be the backbone for a world university, it would also have to be superior in its teaching function," Vandiver said. "In the future we must turn out people far more advanced than we are now."

Read that again. What makes a world class university? Two things: research and teaching. Those are the building blocks. If a university's teaching and research are first-class, the university will be first-class.

But organizations at Texas A&M, from the Board of Regents to the Memorial Student Center Council, have missed



Kathy  
Wiesepape

that point. Instead of building programs that set high standards of learning for students and give the faculty greater incentives for research, we've concentrated on externals, statistics and "big names" to attract publicity.

At a recent meeting of the MSC Council, the topic of discussion was the program for the 1984 Endowed Lecture Series. The Endowed Lecture Series committee proposed two programs involving former president Richard Nixon.

"If he were to come to A&M to speak, it would be quite a coup for the MSC and our committee," Jason Wischmeyer, chairman of the committee, said during the discussion.

Fine. I personally think a program by Nixon would be extremely interesting. What bothered me was the attitude of the committee and some of the council members. Their primary goal for the program was not its educational value, but rather, the national publicity that would follow Nixon here. Since he only accepts a li-

imited number of speaking engagements, his coming here presumably would draw world attention on Texas A&M's world-class program for a world university.

The fact remains that publicity does not make a world university. If Richard Nixon came to College Station to set permanent residence, we still would be one step closer to reaching our goal.

Texas A&M will not become a world university by recruiting "big name" speakers.

Texas A&M will not become a world university by adding Nobel Prize winners to its faculty, or recruiting more National Merit Scholars than any other university in Texas.

And Texas A&M will not become a world university because it has a campus just like all the other big, prestigious schools.

Texas A&M will become a world university by following one of the basic principles of public relations: first building programs, then building its image through publicity.

But the publicity cannot come first. Before that, Aggies — that means students, faculty and administrators — must have a clear understanding of what the goal is and a definite sense of how we reach that goal.

Only then will Texas A&M be closer to becoming a world university.

## Is weather cold or hot?

# It's a matter of perspective

There seems to be a slight discrepancy in the type of weather we are having.

On an average walk from the Commons to Reed McDonald in 50 degree weather, a person can see everything from people in shorts and t-shirts to people in sweaters and ski jackets.

Well folks, where I come from 50 degrees is not that cold. In fact it is mildly cool.

In the Panhandle, 50 degrees is the temperature of a middle May night or a middle September morning. It's normal. It's average. In fact it's downright nice.

Down here, people get a chill in 70 degree weather.

I guess all can be put in perspective when you compare a Texan to someone from Minnesota.

When I graduated from high school, my aunt, uncle and cousin from Minnesota came down to Amarillo. While we



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Humidity is another thing people tend to deal with differently here than at home.

When I first moved to College Station, I couldn't walk outside without becoming ringed wet. Now I have adjusted to everything except the way of thinking about humidity.

One day I heard someone saying, "60 percent humidity, it's going to be nice today." I walked outside and before I could turn around to go back inside, I felt as if I had just walked through a sprinkler.

In Amarillo, we start complaining at 30 percent humidity.

I think that person is the same one that was complaining about how flat it was in College Station.

Honey, you ain't seen nothing yet. In the Panhandle, few people get speeding tickets because they can spot a cop from five miles down the road. It is possible to see the lights of Amarillo from 30 miles

away. It's easy; there are no trees.

Besides 60 percent humidity and trees, rain is another thing virtually unknown in the Panhandle.

I didn't know how to work an umbrella until I moved down here. Whenever the need for an umbrella arose, it would quit raining before we could dig it out from behind the snow boots in the closet.

Snow? Yup that's what I said. Last winter we had 27 inches of snow, not counting the snow we had received in 1982, and missed five days of school.

I showed some pictures of a 10-inch blizzard in March to my suite-mate from Corpus Christi. She couldn't believe that all that snow was in Texas. To tell the truth, at the time neither could we. The blizzard followed a warm front which had gotten the temperatures up to an unseasonal 60 degrees.

Unseasonal and drastically changing weather is common place in Amarillo. In fact, we have a saying that goes, "If you don't like the weather in Amarillo, stick around for 15 minutes and it will change."

were going to school and working, they were relaxing in the backyard in their swimming suits and working on their tans. My aunt was in a bikini, while I couldn't stand putting shorts on yet without having a quilt to under crawl.

# Prof shouldn't accept invitation from Russia

Editor:

A few weeks ago I was irritated by a person who copied several letters of invitation for a "special" trip to Russia for a selected chosen prof. I consoled myself thinking that it wouldn't matter how many copies they got, there would be only a cold no for reply. Then to my grief I read that Uterbejer not only accepted but "looks forward to the trip." I'm chap-

ped. As if it's not enough that our doesn't take action for 007, Uterbejer going to bless them with her presence and discuss history.

Ref: People Dept. 19-83

Why doesn't Uterbejer discuss history with Olga Hjalmarsson and help her fatherless children to bed etc., etc., etc.

Forrest Jones

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Communications.

Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

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Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed and show the address and telephone number of the writer.

Columns and guest editorials also are welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, or phone (409) 845-2611.

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