

The Battalion

Thursday, January 19, 1984

Video computer course 'fills the bill'

United Press International

For no frills learning, hunker down in front of the television set and pick up the nuts and bolts of an introductory course on computers — for college credit.

Thousands nationwide are doing just that since the debut this month of "The New Literacy," a state-of-the-art Public Broadcasting Service Adult Learning Service telecourse available over many PBS stations.

To get credit, a viewer must sign up with a college. Text books, tests, the works are included. People not wanting credit can view and develop computer smarts, too.

From San Mateo, Calif., to Durham, N.H., and dozens of places in between educators are applauding the newest entry in telecourses for college credit.

At the College of San Mateo in San Mateo, Calif., Michael Kimball, director of instructional services, said those signing up include timorous students, the handicapped and housebound mothers of small children — people who can't come to campus.

The televised computer course also is helping San Mateo, as other schools, to make up a shortfall in a very impacted course on campus — introduction to computers.

An impacted course, as Kimball told it, is one in which demand exceeds a school's ability to supply enough places for students.

On hundreds of campuses this academic year the big shortage is in introductory computer courses. A part of the problem is a dearth of qualified instructors.

The \$1.2 million TV course, "The New Literacy: An Intro-

duction to Computers," was two years in the making, produced by the Southern California Consortium, and funded by the Annenberg-Corporation for Public Broadcast Project.

"Understanding computers no longer is considered the exclusive turf of computer science and engineering majors at universities or an exotic hobby of games-players and futurists," said Sally V. Beaty, executive producer and director of the Consortium.

"This knowledge has become a necessity, for computers are now serving every facet of society."

The course consists of 26 half-hour units grouped into six learning modules covering concepts, data flow, applications, programming, enhancing system capability and impact on society.

A pilot test of "The New

Literacy" was conducted among college students and adult learners in Arizona, Illinois, Texas, Michigan, and California. Participants were randomly divided into control and experimental groups.

"Students in the experimental group using 'The New Literacy' materials scored significantly better on their knowledge of computers than those in the control group taking a computer course without those materials," reported Dr. Robert La Rose, vice president of research for the ELRA Group that ran the study.

The Southern California Consortium includes Chicago City Colleges; Coast Community Colleges; Dallas County Community College District; Department of Education, State of Florida; Suburban Community College Television Consortium; and the Wisconsin Foundation

for Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education.

The Annenberg-CPB Project was founded in 1981 to provide grants for developing quality college-level materials using the new technology and demonstrating the use of telecommunications to address higher education problems.

Why a course on computers? Experts agree that literacy today is not only a capability to read, but an ability to understand and use computers. The number of

computers in operation in the U.S. today, 2.8 million, is expected to more than double by 1985.

The course gets away from the stereotype of television instruction — a professor in a classroom lecturing, scribbling or sketching on a blackboard or demonstrating equipment.

Sequences were videotaped in a computer camp for children, an attorney's office, a daily newspaper, a plumbing business, an insurance company, a

grocery chain, a fire department, a bank, hospital, computer manufacturer, swine farm and homes. For contrast, there also is a sequence in a one-room school house that was the center of community life in Beloit, Kans., in 1979.

Interviewed during the course were more than 100 who develop or use computer technology, including authors Isaac Asimov and Michael Crichton.

Asimov calls computers the "high-tech horses of the future."

Panel wants longer school day

United Press International

DALLAS — A subcommittee of Gov. Mark White's blue-ribbon panel on public school reform Wednesday recommended school days be lengthened to nine hours and extracurricular activities be limited to only students passing all their courses.

The school day and academic recommendations were among a list of proposals which have been approved by the Select Committee on Public Education's subcommittee on educating the child. Other proposals included:

— Sanctioning extracurricular competitions on Sunday afternoons.

— Requiring tutoring programs for students not passing all courses.

— Making school facilities available from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days per week. — Establishing a "community school" concept allowing school district facilities and staff to be used to educate people beyond school age.

The proposals all will be submitted to the full committee in the form of formal recommendations for inclusion in the panel's March 1 report to White.

The proposal to lengthen the school day would require that classes commence at 8:30 a.m. daily and continue until 5:30 p.m., with a short break for lunch, said Dr. Jon Fleming, president of Texas Wesleyan College and head of the subcommittee on educating the child.

"We have many students who go home and home is an empty house with a television set and a warmed-over hamburger," Fleming said.

Fleming said that under the proposal, students from middle school on would concentrate on core academic subjects from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with the remaining two hours of the day set aside for "life enriching" activities like tutoring, seminars, sports and teacher-student conferences.

"And all students engaged in extracurricular activities would be required to maintain a grade of 70 or higher in all subjects," Fleming said.

The recommendations followed the philosophy espoused by Dallas computer magnate H. Ross Perot, chairman of the select committee and a staunch opponent of non-academic activities during the school day. Perot has repeatedly lashed out at activities like sports and vocation education for stealing the school day from the student.

"Thirty cents of school dollar is spent for academics," Perot said. "Thirty cents goes for electives and 40 cents goes for extracurricular activities, administration and retiring the school debt."

"When you realize that 30

cents of every dollar is going for electives, there's a lot of room for play there."

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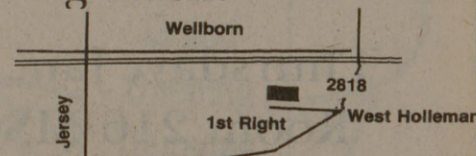
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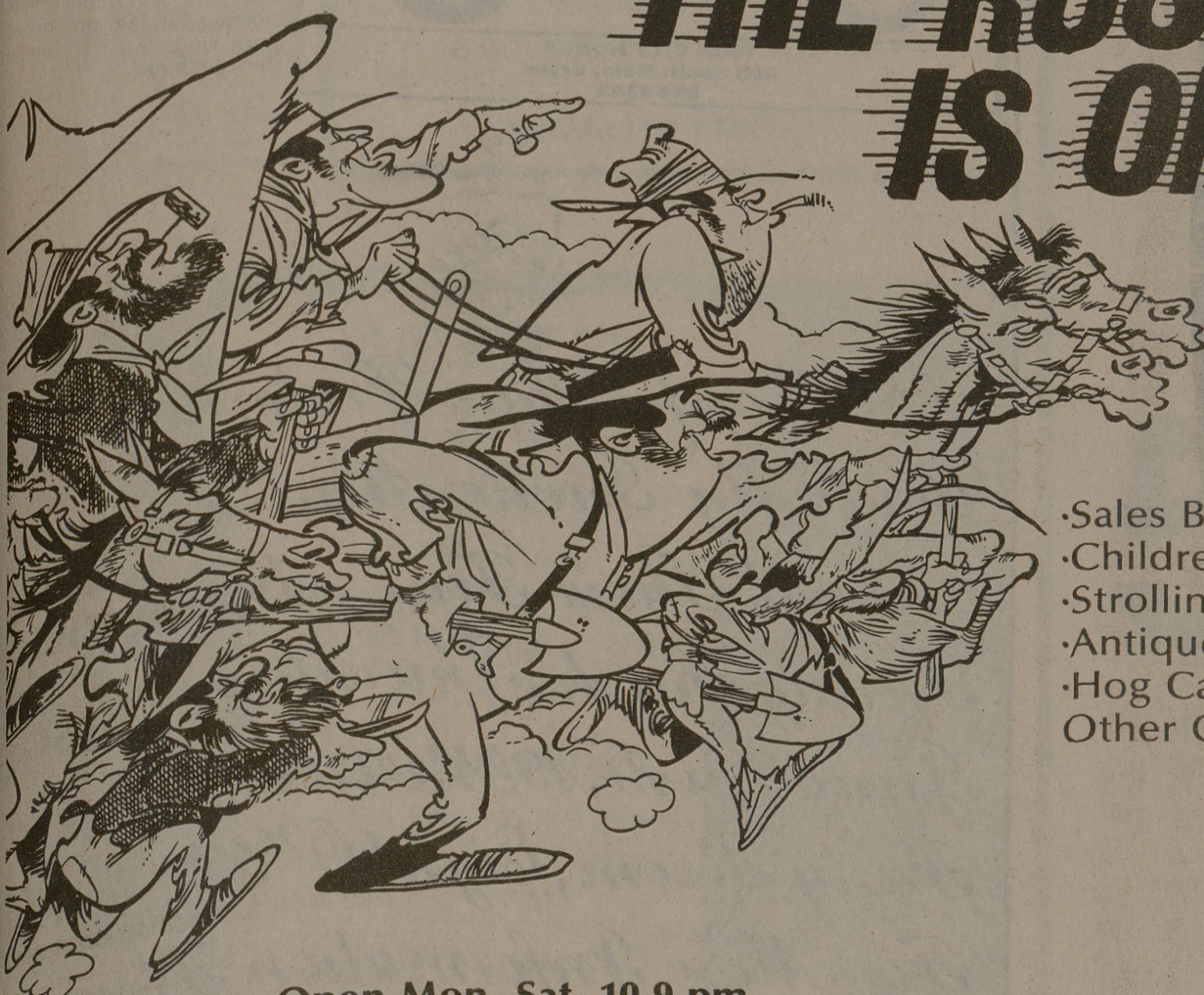
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