

1993: A cyberspace odyssey today Computer nets offer limitless worlds of knowledge

I've just returned from visiting cyberspace. For two hours I danced across the Net, weaving in and out of computer news groups and bulletin board services. It felt like only two minutes.



MACK HARRISON
Opinion Editor

Time seemed to flash by as I explored the realm of computer networks, reading messages from users as far away as Sweden and as close as the next room. I had lived what was considered science fiction only 20 years ago.

Computer networks such as Internet, Prodigy and Bitnet have grown to encompass many smaller bulletin boards and news groups, merging into a giant interactive "cyberspace" — the Net.

I fell into this new world when I signed up for a basic computer course this summer. One of our homework assignments was to get a computer account and explore some of the options available to us.

In addition to uses such as word processing, graphics and computation, which most students are familiar with, computer account holders have access to electronic mail, on-line information services and news groups.

These services are available to any student with a computer account — that is, any student who has paid his or her computer use fees.

Technology — especially computer technology — is increasing at a breakneck pace. What's new yesterday is routine today and obsolete tomorrow. The least powerful laptop of today is more powerful than the computer of yesterday that filled several rooms.

What does this mean to you and me?

It means that, in the very near future, the average citizen will have more information at his or her fingertips than was available to the entire U.S. government 50 years ago.

Human knowledge is growing exponentially, and computer databases make this information convenient and easy to access. Right now the contents of a 30-volume encyclopedia can fit onto a single regular-size compact disk. Shortly, the computer industry will be able to put the same amount of information on a disk the size of a pinhead.

This isn't just blind extrapolation. Experts are discussing this and other nanotechnology applications on Internet's sci.nanotech news group. (Nano means one-billionth, as opposed to micro, which means one-millionth.) Nanoscopic

computational and medical devices will have a staggering effect on society in the future.

But Netriders don't just look inward. On Internet's sci.space, for example, leading experts in the space industry are explaining and arguing about what new vehicles will be flying long after the Space Shuttle has been grounded.

The Net isn't, however, just for science fiction readers. Current events and entertainment comprise a major part of discussion. In addition to arguing about which heavy metal band is the best, readers can contemplate movies, fashion, philosophy or just about anything else.

Participants in alt.conspiracy, for example, are discussing the Branch Davidians and whether or not the government killed them on purpose. Assassination theorists shout out who killed the Kennedys on their own subgroup, alt.conspiracy.jfk.

One of the more active news groups is alt.cyberpunk, which takes its name from a type of science fiction which emphasizes the blurring line between man and machine. Currently, however, the main subject in alt.cyberpunk seems to be whether or not rock star Billy Idol "sold out" the cyberpunks when he released his album of the same name.

These groups are just a small sample of what the Net has to offer. From the latest UFO sightings to child care tips, computer networks have something for everyone.

Just an aside: If you're sick of a certain saccharin purple dinosaur, then check out alt.barney.die.die.die.

In today's future, knowledge is power. To keep yourself charged, you'll find the most up-to-date information flashing on that monochrome monitor.

It's so simple, even computer illiterates (like I was) can do it. To get started, just go to one of the computing centers on campus, grab an instructional handout and type away.

Don't be afraid (like I was) to ask someone for help. Be careful, though. Once you get going, you can quickly lose track of time, ignoring the clock, the people around you and even bodily functions.

(This is a great way for smokers who are trying to kick the habit to stop thinking about cigarettes — but it's probably more addictive.)

Have you ever wanted to visit the future? I've been there. And the future is here at Texas A&M, right now. There's an entire universe available to you, and it's as close as the nearest computing center.

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The Battalion
100 years at Texas A&M

EDITORIAL Siege mentality A&M hides behind wall of secrecy

Filing open records requests is getting to be a pastime at The Battalion. The newspaper staff is finding that, more and more, such requests prove necessary to obtain from Texas A&M even information which is obviously in the public domain.

Sometimes, The Battalion even has to fight to get information from the University that other newspapers have already obtained through open records requests.

Add to this the A&M Physical Plant policy of not talking to Battalion reporters about even the most non-controversial subjects, and one sees a University committed to keeping its students in the dark.

Unless of course, it is required to do otherwise.

The Battalion reported Wednesday that the Attorney General's office had sided with the newspaper on its request for records of a Corps of Cadets investigation into allegations of rape and sexual harassment by a senior cadet in December.

University officials maintain that the Buckley Amendment, which states that educational records are private and belong to the student and the university, prohibits the release of any such information.

No names have been requested, however, and the Attorney General's office specifically stated in its letter that portions of the records

which would personally identify any student must be withheld.

It seems awfully convenient, then, for University counsel to state that the entire report would compromise the identities of accuser and accused, since, they say, the case is so widely known.

However, if the case is so widely known, yet no names have yet been disclosed, simply passing on the results of the investigation is not going to provide any new knowledge of the identities of those involved.

What it will do is shed a little daylight on a disciplinary proceeding conducted in secrecy.

One is led to believe by the stonewalling of A&M officials that their actions will not look good in such a light. Further delays in releasing investigation records will serve only to reinforce this suspicion.

If, as we hope, Texas A&M University has nothing to hide, then it should disclose records and information that it knows to be a matter of open record.

If administrators at Texas A&M are above harboring petty grudges, let the A&M Physical Plant end its policy of refusal to speak to Battalion reporters.

If the leadership of this University expects its students to believe in an Honor Code for even one minute, it's time for it to start setting a better example.



Students don't know as much as they should about NAFTA

How much do you know about what's going on in the world today? There are millions of things happening every second of the day, and it is virtually impossible to keep up with even the slightest portion of them.

One thing taking place as we speak (or read), is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada and Mexico. The agreement will combine all three countries into the world's largest free-trade zone by eliminating most tariffs and other trade barriers over 15 years.

With only six months left until the proposed starting date of NAFTA (January 1994), the United States and Mexico still have not worked out all the

kinks in the agreement. But that is not for us to worry about, it's our federal officers' job. Here at A&M, we have a problem of a different nature.

Do the students at Texas A&M University allow themselves to receive information about what's going on between the United States and Mexico? Are we taking it upon ourselves to learn about what is going on in the world today? The answer is NO.

The majority of students are not keeping in touch with international relations. I am not saying we need to learn about every aspect of it, but just enough that it will help us when the time is right. I am sure that it will affect us all in one way or another, at some point in time. Don't you think it would be worth it to know a little bit about what is going on in the world?

I took the opportunity to talk with students here at A&M from two different backgrounds — Texas and Mexico — about their knowledge of international relations. I was surprised to find out that some of the people I spoke with did know a thing or two about what was happening between the U.S.

and Mexico. They expressed their opinions about NAFTA and some concerns that might affect them once they leave college and go off into the real world. Some of the main points that came up were the environment and jobs.

Environmental concerns focused on air pollution, water quality and waste management. The students felt that since Mexico was a developing country, how could it place the same emphasis on costly environmental protection as a wealthier country such as the United States. They believed that once the free trade agreement was under way, Mexico would be able to put more money into the cleanup of the environment. Once it accomplished that, everything would start clearing up.

With cheap labor available in Mexico, many U.S. companies (mainly manufacturers) may want to pick up and move south of the border to set up shop. The probability that many companies may want to take this route would only mean less jobs available for us when we get out of college. That would be purely unfair, but at this point, companies can do that if they

want. Where does that leave us? UNEMPLOYED!

With job availability scarce as it is, it will be even harder for us to find jobs if companies move. We would probably be luckier in winning the next lotto drawing than finding a job.

The students only knew of the general aspects of NAFTA that they learned from watching T.V. and reading what was printed in newspapers from Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. But not everybody read these newspapers.

How else is a person interested in international relations supposed to get more information about it — Evans Library?

The other portion of students that I spoke with did not know very much — if anything at all — about the United States trading with Mexico and vice versa. They had seen Perot several times on the T.V., but paid no attention to him.

I was surprised to learn that they really had no idea all three countries were going into business together.

We should take a couple minutes of our time to read, watch or listen to

what is going on.

I am sure that it would make for a better interview with a prospective employer to know a little about foreign affairs. Coming from a school partly known for its agricultural programs, we should keep in touch with this new agreement.

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