

Typing the day away

Students battle addictions to instant messaging

By Kristin McNulty
THE BATTALION

Greg Smith, a junior agriculture major, said he was just an ordinary college student with good grades and a good relationship with his girlfriend. That is, until two words sparked his interest: instant messaging.

"I spent 10 to 15 hours a day on IM chatting with buddies, and I usually put off all of my reading and homework," he said.

Smith said he often communicated with the opposite sex, which his girlfriend found hard to swallow. He said his girlfriend could not handle being second to IM, and she left him. While this ended his IM addiction, his girlfriend did not return.

Instant messaging is the latest trend in communicating with long distance friends, family or just with someone down the hall. According to a recent survey conducted by four University of Dayton students, 85 percent of 100 people surveyed use IM multiple times a day, while just 3 percent use it a few times a week.

Of these users, 60 percent said their conversations last an

average of 10 minutes. While IM users range in age, 67 percent were ages 18 to 23.

Melissa Muegge, a sophomore agricultural journalism major, has battled IM in the past.

"I thought I could use it and still be productive, but it just didn't work," she said.

Muegge said the time she spent communicating with her buddies was valuable time taken away from reading and completing her homework. She said that because of her addiction to IM, she had to delete it from her computer completely.

Kenny Cotten, a junior agricultural development major, also found IM so addictive that his school-related priorities shifted.

"I could never get anything done because IM was so addicting, but fortunately my grades never suffered as a result of IM," he said.

Lindsay Buchholzer, a 20-year-old junior at the University of Dayton who helped conduct the study, said IM gives users the ability to hold numerous conversations at one time, but miscommunication tends to be a problem.

"What someone types versus what they intended to say can be related to the same type of miscommunication that we see in other ways of communicating," Buchholzer said.

She said that if a person does not keep eye contact throughout a conversation, it is considered rude.

Buchholzer said she believes the same can be said for someone not responding immediately to an IM conversation. She also thinks there is a lack of understanding about the language of IM.

"Just like in many cultures, IM has created its own values, rituals and cultural systems through a language that is non-existent in any other culture," she said.

Buchholzer said it is difficult for any person who is not familiar with the language to become part of the IM culture.

"The abbreviations such as, 'LOL'

(Laughing Out Loud) and 'BRB' (Be Right Back) to someone who has never used IM before, is almost the same as saying, 'Guten Tag' or 'Wie geht's' to someone who has never heard German," Buchholzer said.

IM also creates a barrier in communication, language and understanding between cultures and generations, she said.

Buchholzer's survey revealed why users choose IM over other forms of communication, such as the telephone. Three-fourths said IM was faster, 66 percent said they choose IM because they can talk to multiple people at the same time, and 55 percent said the programs are cheap and allow users to avoid long distance charges.

"IM is virtually a free form of communicating with other users around the world at any time and literally within an instant," she said.

Buchholzer said IM has the potential to become the leading method of communication in a business organization that prides itself on getting as much done in as little time as possible.

"IM is a benefit to those who enjoy meeting others without initial face-to-face contact, or to those who value time to respond in a conversation," she said.

Lauren Ehlinger, a sophomore business major, said she benefits from communicating with her relatives through IM.

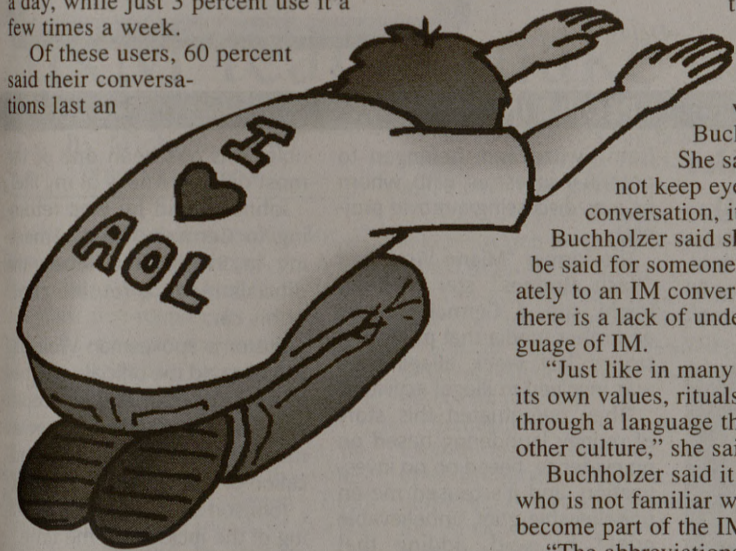
"I use it to talk to my family who lives a few hours away, and it is cheaper than long-distance charges on my cell phone and house phone," she said.

Yet for those who cannot find a stable balance between IM and other responsibilities, Smith — who no longer spends hours on his computer each day — offers one piece of advice.

"Get out, and get a life," he said.

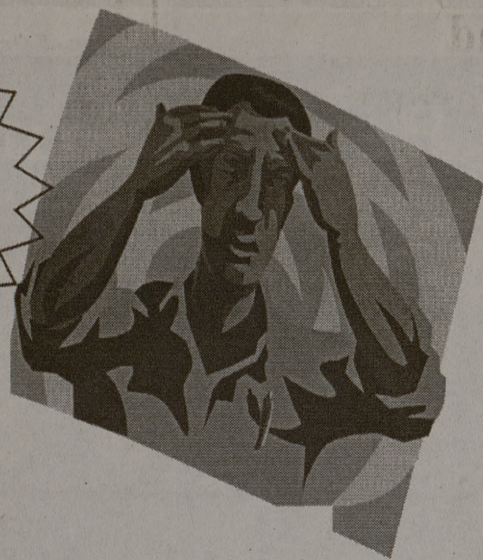


JOSH DARWIN • THE BATTALION



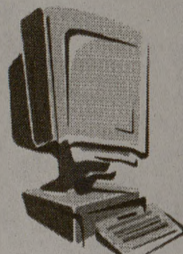
Academics causing you a Headache??

Get relief through Learning Skills Services at the Student Counseling Service!



Services Provided:

- Individual Counseling and Groups to improve Study Skills
- Study Skills Workshops
- Academic & Career Educator (ACE) Volunteer Program
- Academic & Career Resource Center open 8:00a.m. to 5:00p.m. Monday—Friday



NEW!! Online Registration. Schedule initial appointment online!!!
SCS.TAMU.EDU

SCS... Just a click away...



Texas A&M University
Student Counseling Service
Henderson Hall, Room 115
(979) 845-4470 ext. 108

The Student Counseling Service is a Department in the Division of Student Affairs

Softball

VS. NEBRASKA
SATURDAY 2 P.M.
SUNDAY 1 P.M.



TAMU

Tennis

TUESDAY (MEN)
N. ARIZONA - 1 P.M.
WICHITA ST. - 6 P.M.

THURSDAY (WOMEN)
OKLAHOMA - 6 P.M.

FRIDAY (WOMEN)
COLORADO - 6 P.M.

SATURDAY (MEN)
ALABAMA - 6 P.M.

MAROON & WHITE FOOTBALL GAME

— presented by AT&T Wireless —

April 12th - 2 p.m.

AggieAthletics.com

AVOID THE RUSH...GET TICKETS NOW!

TICKETS: 845-2311