

# Computer instruction knocks on classroom door

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Nebraskan Staff Writer

The traditional classroom may soon be as outdated as the one-room schoolhouse. Experiments with computer-assisted instruction (CAI) may lead to a revolution in education.

In a CAI program, each student receives instruction through a remote terminal connected by telephone to a computer.

Using normal language, the student responds to the computer through a keyboard on the terminal. The computer communicates by an attached video-screen.

CAI is potentially a highly individualized means of instruction. The computer "knows" the academic history of each student and is programmed to vary its method of instruction with the student.

The student can conduct a dialogue with the computer by asking questions which are answered from the computer's stored-up files. The computer can ask the student practice questions with hints to steer him in the right direction if he answers wrongly.

During tests, random questions are called up on the computer so that each student has a slightly different exam. The machine will grade the exam and feed back the results to the student. It suggests where to find the correct information.

The instructor who programmed the computer can analyze his method of teaching through the "response history" of the students.

NU has experimented with CAI through its five-million-dollar computer at Nebraska Hall and the smaller unit on East Campus.

According to a report to the

Teaching Council on instructional developments last year, Donald D. Jensen, a psychology professor, used the computer to give his exams. In Jensen's class, students received immediate feedback on items missed and page references for the correct answers.

A few weeks ago the Physics II lab under Robert G. Fuller held a tutorial session where students called up sample questions from the computer, responded and received hints to correct or reinforce their answers.

Last year an animal science lab used the computer to conduct an experiment in genetics. Presently the computer is used for calculations by Physics labs.

Calling CAI a "very exciting field," Ronald J. Lockard, assistant director of the computer center, said, "It takes a dull thing and makes it more interesting."

The biggest obstacle to an expansion of CAI experiments on campus is the expense, Lockard said. "It's too large a chunk of our resources to do too little."

The remote terminals, numbering about 60 on campus, rent for \$150 a month apiece, he explained. Phone lines and the operation of the computer itself are additional expense, Lockard added.

Another problem with CAI is training professors to use it, said Wesley C. Meierhenry, chairman of the department of Adult and Continuing Education. He also compiled the report on instructional developments.

"There's been no orientation and people have no idea how the computer can be applied," Meierhenry said. He added he would like to have programmers

to work with professors.

CAI is conducted in normal language, Lockard said, and the computer is presently oriented toward the "foreign languages" used in science research. He added that it's harder to program the computer to use normal language.

"It's a tragedy that the computer is so dedicated to research," Meierhenry said, adding that he would like to have it used for more CAI ex-

periments.

Meierhenry said the instruction and research functions of the computer should be separated, with the CAI handled through the Office of Academic Affairs. Applications for computer time would be sent to this office for allocation and the University would pick up the cost, he explained.

The funds to operate the computer come from the state legislature's research fund, Lockard said. Free computer

time is allocated to departments on the basis of their past usage and future requests, he added.

Conceivably there could be a conflict between allocation of computer time for CAI or research once the cost of CAI is reduced through mass production, Lockard said.

However, "allocation is an administrative problem," he said, and it's ultimately decided by President Joseph Soshnik.

## 'Bias causes Indian drop-outs'

Macy, Neb. — Indian children are defeated before they even start in today's educational system, according to a prominent South Dakota educator.

"The minute an Indian child walks into an elementary school he is doomed to failure by the bias of his teacher," said Thomas Golden, chairman of the Educational Psychology Department at the University of South Dakota.

Golden, speaking at a teachers' workshop here Friday, said white elementary teachers in effect tell Indian children "first you learn how to behave my way, then I can teach you."

As a result, he continued, Indian children begin to feel "less than human". This low self-opinion leads to an enormous drop-out rate among Native American students.

"This poor record is our responsibility," said Golden. "We are failures as educators."

The prejudice which causes a teacher's failure is extremely

hard to overcome, he said, because people have a natural tendency to recreate others in their own image.

"If you do that," Golden explains, "then you don't have to deal with their extraneous behavior which you'd otherwise have to learn to accept."

But professional educators trying to teach children of another culture must accept the "extraneous behavior" of the child's culture, Golden

stated. Otherwise the educator will fail to reach the child.

New programs and structures of education will not keep Indian children in school, Golden said. But unbiased and understanding teachers will.

The three-day workshop, held in this northeast Nebraska town on the Omaha Indian Reservation, was attended by about fifty teachers.

## Nebraskan applications

Applications are now being taken for second semester staff positions on **The Nebraskan**.

Application forms may be picked up in room 34, Nebraska Union.

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