

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Computer's red pencil flags students' errors

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. — When a Mesa College student first turns in a writing assignment for Richard Berkey's English composition class, Berkey never sees it.

Instead, a computer produces a critique, complete with flagged misspelling and grammatical errors, and advises the student how to shape it up.

"We've found that students are running their papers through on all of their classes, and most of them will raise their grade by at least one letter just by doing this," Berkey said.

The program was developed by AT&T and fine-tuned at Colorado State University and again at Mesa by Berkey and Jerry Nolan of the college's computer services staff.

The Mesa College program demands less from the students, "not necessarily dumping down, but setting goals our students can reach," Berkey said.

"You could program a computer for any type of writing — academic, technical or news," Nolan said. "It would depend on what you wanted it to do."

Berkey said most freshmen writers used the passive voice too often, relied on slang too much and reached for vocabulary that was too advanced for what they were trying to say.

"We try to get them to use active language, and the computer will point out specific sentences," he said. "We like less than one preposition per sentence, and this will point out the 'wooly' words that you shouldn't use, like 'prioritize' and 'plausible deniability'."

When students rewrite an assignment based on the computer's pointers, their grades rise, almost without exception, Berkey said.

What hasn't been mastered yet, Nolan said, is directing a computer to analyze punctuation.

"It's tough for computers to deal with commas. They have a hard time with any internal punctuation and we haven't figured it out yet," he said.

Even with other grammatical matters, the computer isn't always right, a fact Berkey says he constantly stresses to his students.

Women earn 70¢ to male dollar

WASHINGTON — The big gap between the earnings of women and men can largely be blamed on clustering of females in certain occupations and in their lack of work experience, a Census Bureau study suggested Thursday.

Overall, it said, women continue to earn only 70 cents for every dollar taken home by a man.

While the disparity remains great, it represents progress from the 62 cents on the dollar women were earning in 1979, aide Gordon W. Green Jr., or the Census Bureau's socioeconomic statistics division.

In addition to job-clustering and less experience, other factors setting women workers apart from men include time taken off from work and differences in their fields of study in college.

"There is an important message here for the woman who is career-minded and wants to get ahead at work," Green said in an interview.

It tells them that if they go to college, they should study fields men have traditionally studied — such as law, engineering, science and mathematics — and if they do not choose college, to try and develop technical training or

enter the skilled trades, he said.

And, Green added, if family duties call them away from work, women should try to limit those interruptions so they will not let their skills become obsolete or lose seniority.

Nearly half of employed women — 47 percent — have been off work for at least six months sometime in their work lives, compared with only 13 percent of men, the study found.

Family duties were the most common reason for women to interrupt work, while inability to find a job was the major reason for men.

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In Brief

Big PACs support incumbents most, study says

WASHINGTON — The nation's largest political action committees, representing the views of business, labor, agriculture and other special interests, gave at least 80 percent of their campaign donations to incumbent office holders in 1985-86, according to a private study released Thursday.

The study by Common Cause showed a continuation of a trend in which PACs focus their money on incumbents, in theory because most incumbents traditionally win re-election and thus will still be in a position to influence legislation in which the PACs are interested.

State coalition seeks to block Bork appointment

The Nebraska Civil Liberties Union has established a coalition to oppose the appointment of Robert H. Bork as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Executive Director John G. Taylor said. The coalition will take on Nebraska's role in the national campaign by the American Civil Liberties Union to block the appointment.

"We plan to present Judge Bork through his own words," ACLU Executive Director Ira Glasser said in a statement. "Those words reveal what America would be like if his views prevail."

Prosecutor asks for 8 years in prison for pilot

MOSCOW — The prosecutor accused Mathias Rust of taking an ego trip when he hedge-hopped his small plane to Red Square, and demanded Thursday that the West German teen-ager be sentenced to eight years in a labor camp.

Vladimir Andreyev said the pilot's goal in his daring flight to the Kremlin on May 28 was "cheap popularity" rather than a discussion with Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev about peace and disarmament, as Rust has claimed.

Gulf attacks claim 1st fatalities

MANAMA, Bahrain — Another convoy of U.S. warships and Kuwaiti tankers steamed south Thursday through the Persian Gulf, where two supply ship crewmen became the first fatalities of renewed tanker attacks by Iran and Iraq.

Iraq said its warplanes raided a tanker, and shipping sources said Iranian speedboat-borne fighters attacked

a Japanese tanker and an Italian motorship.

Fire from Iraqi warplanes or Iranian speedboats have hit at least 20 ships registered in nine different nations since Saturday, said gulf-based shipping sources. They say the number at least doubles the average for a month in 1986.

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