Fall Education

Clem Florl photo

Students are trained for a variety of computer-related careers at the Computer Learning Center, Paramus.

CLASSROOM COMPUTERS

Technology supports learning

By Holly Bigelow Martin

Whether you plan to study science, liberal arts or secretarial skills, chances are you will encounter computers in your college or vocational school classroom.

"Computers are of the utmost importance," says Rosemary Hilbert, an instructor at the National Education Center Campus in Nutley. "It's almost impossible these days to get an office position without computer skills."

Hilbert's students work on IBM-compatible Samsung personal computers. "In our classes, students spend as much time as they can on the computer," she says. "Everything is geared towards real-world situations. For example, when we are teaching them the Lotus 1-2-3 software, we use budgets, income statements and personnel information in the database exercises. The entire direction of our program is geared toward getting students employed in at least an entry level office position. The more familiar they are with that computer, the better chance they have."

Computers are being used in a wide range of classes at the County College of Morris, Randolph. Biology and chemistry students use computers to test experiments. Physics students use them to gather data and solve textbook problems. In the computer-aided drafting program, students with high-level disabilities learn to draft almost as fast as an

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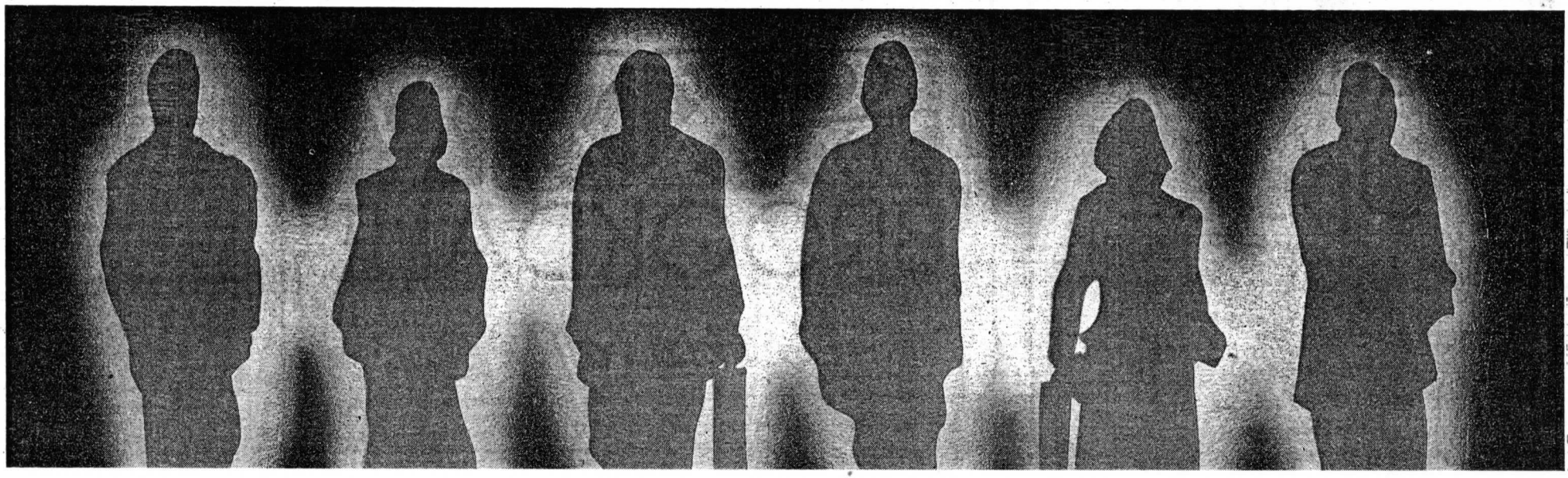

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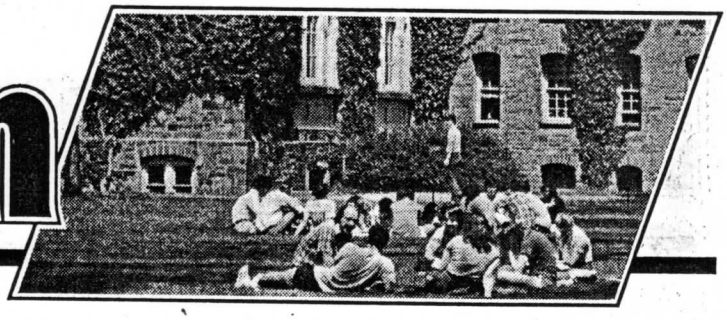

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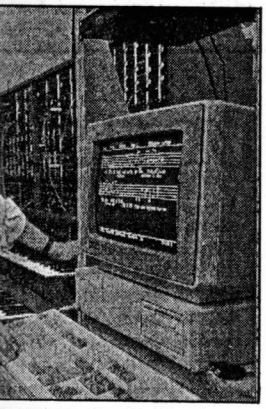

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able-bodied person with the help of a head-movement monitoring device.

According to Joanna Stoskus, associate professor in Computer Information Systems, CCM makes every effort to incorporate practical work experience in the classroom. "Students who take data processing, for example, will use an integrated software package and learn how to set up an accounting spreadsheet," she says.

At Drew University in Madison, all incoming freshmen are issued a Zenith laptop computer, printer and software (the cost is included in the tuition). The computers are connected in a network that allows voice messages and electronic mail to be sent to anyone else on campus. On-line databases give students sitting in their dorm rooms instant access to the library card catalog and other sources of information.

"We're using the technology in support of liberal arts and in support of learning, rather than just learning technology for technology's sake," says Linda Lagle, spokeswoman for the university.

Political science is one department at the school where the computer network has made a big difference. Professor Douglas Simon uses it extensively in a 13-week simulation he teaches on the National Security Council. "I play the role of the President of the United States and I have students assigned to play the National Security Advisor, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other advisors," he says. "We deal with ongoing problems as Washington is dealing with them—there's nothing made up about it."

The network makes the simulation more real. "All the students create an electronic mail distribution list so they can send messages out to everybody else on the council," says Simon. "A lot of the policy position papers and communiques for the press that we draft as part of the simulation are sent out over the network to other members of the council for proofing. We may get into dialog back and forth using the electronic mail. The great advantage is that you can do this at any hour—you don't have to wait around until class meets twice a week."

The computer network has had a positive impact on students. "At the very least, every student that goes through Drew has a fairly extensive hands-on experience using electronic mail, voice mail and word processing," Simon says. "We're having more and more alumni come back and say that they found it a great help going into the job market."

The Computer Learning Center in Paramus focuses on training students for all sorts of computer-related careers. "In our computer information systems program, we teach basic software packages—Lotus, Wordstar, Word Pertect—that are used for accounting systems, letter writing, spreadsheets, sales and marketing," says Graeme Dorras, president of the center. "Our computer operations students learn to operate everything from a small IBM-PC through to one of the largest mainframe computer systems IBM makes." Students also get experience in actually repairing the computers at the school.

One business application the center uses is a hypothetical banking system. "Students enter information into the computer system as if they were logging in the activity for all the checks that were written and received by the bank," Dorras says. "That information is stored in an on-line disk operating system. The name and address of each customer is kept in a separate off-line memory (library tapes), which can be called up when it's needed. That way we're not using computer storage to keep information that's only used once a month when the bill is sent out to the customer."

"Computers aren't going to go away, they're just going to get more advanced and more technical," says Dorras. "Kids graduating from high school today, if they don't have that computer background, will eventually have to go back to school or get trained by their company."

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