



By Keith Srakonic, AP

E-MAIL CALL: Josh Knauer, a senior at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, keeps in touch with his family by computer e-mail.

But some users say they miss the personal touch

Zapping quick and cheap messages across computer networks has become the communication method of choice for many college students, but they're divided over whether e-mail lacks that "human touch."

Anthony Vigil, a 20-year-old junior at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, uses e-mail to keep in touch with his high school friends because it's cheaper than long-distance calls. Yet, "I prefer phones because it seems more personal."

A growing number of colleges are providing free or inexpensive access to the Internet for their students, says John Gehl, editor and publisher of *EDUCOM Review*. EDUCOM is a consortium of more than 600 colleges and universities interested in keeping up with the latest computer technology.

Gehl says, "It's virtually unthinkable now to have a learning situation without access through the Internet. It's part of the business of running an educational institution today."

Most schools include computer use in student fees, so students who take advantage of the systems have unlimited use.

"It's like the library — you don't pay by the book," Gehl says.

Juergen Dingel, a 28-year-old grad student at Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, sends e-mail to his German girlfriend through his school-based Internet account. He says, "It's university-owned, so you can use it free."

But Dingel's girlfriend was hesitant to use the technology, worrying that it wouldn't be as confidential as a phone call.

"I had some talking to do to convince her it's safe and sound," he says. "As long as you haven't tried it, it's hard to realize how good it really is. It's another dimension — it adds something that wasn't there, that you can't get by letter."

Lori Schneider, a 22-year-old University of Minnesota law student, disagrees, though she's an avid e-mail user.

"E-mail is more to send people quick messages, or something that would take three days to arrive by mail," she says. "I still like getting letters in the mail, so I still write them. It's good to have something tangible to hang on to."

— Karla Price

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