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On campus, there's a letter in the e-mail

By Karla Price
USA TODAY

Parents still want to keep tabs on their children, whether they're 13 or 23.

And they're willing to experiment with the newest methods of communication, as Josh Knauer, a 21-year-old senior at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, found out.

When Knauer wants to reach one of his relatives, telephoning from school is the last thing on his mind.

Instead, he taps out messages on his computer keyboard.

"We talk on the phone every once in a while, but we usually e-mail each other," says Knauer. "Sometimes it's a lot easier to jot out a quick note. It definitely saves money on long distance."

Knauer used to dash off comments only to his brother and sister, one in Seattle, the other in Washington, D.C. Now his parents — wedded to phone calls and letters in the past — are getting in on the act. "They felt left out and they wanted to be a part of our communication," he says.

Josh's father, Leonard Knauer, of Martinsville, N.J., bought a modem for his home computer a few weeks ago.

"All three of our children are using e-mail and we figured we'd better get on-line if we want to keep in touch with them," he says. "We've been scrambling to get the lingo down. Fortunately, we have three experts to help."

As computers and computer training become fixtures on college campuses, more students are using the technology as a quick and inexpensive way to keep in touch with family in lieu of the traditional letter home.

"We do find that families are using on-line services to communicate as opposed to the tradi-

tional telephone," says Pam McGraw of America Online.

But some students say they find sending messages to fellow college students — or family members with access to college campuses — much easier than sending them to parents.

One reason: While e-mail is usually inexpensive for students — unlimited access to the Internet is often part of student fees — home users have to pay a fee, often based on amount of use.

"When you have a modem at home, you're paying for it," says Jena Baker, 23, a University of Michigan at Ann Arbor graduate student. Although her parents have a computer, she speaks with them over the phone.

Baker estimates she sends 10 messages a day to cousins and friends at colleges across the USA. "We can e-mail each other as much as we want. I use e-mail every single day when I'm in Ann Arbor." She adds, laughing, "I'm thinking about acquiring permanent student status so I can keep it."

Katherine Moore, a 17-year-old junior at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, feels fortunate that her father, Terry Moore, is able to access her e-mail messages at his workplace.

"My major is civil engineering. I'm always going to be around computers, so I think it's going to be easier this way," she says.

While e-mail is hailed for its convenience, even some of its most fervent users believe computer communications will never replace the emotion of hearing a voice.

"There are things you can express through verbal communication that you can lose through e-mail," says Baker.

Adds Leonard Knauer, "Verbal communication is important. We'll never let go of that."

