

Tech-Savvy Echo Boomers Change Campus Life

By Jennifer Wake

Know how to text-message or ever chat on Facebook? If so, consider yourself tech-savvy.

If you have done these things simultaneously, however, while listening to your iPod and uploading digital photos to MySpace, you are likely part of Generation Y, also known as "Echo Boomers," born in the 1980s and early 1990s. They are the quintessential "multitaskers" who are now filling college dorm rooms and changing the way colleges teach.

Saint Mary's is keeping pace with the demands of these students by offering podcast lectures, online chatrooms, course-specific websites, and adding equipment such as robotic-mounted telescopes that give real-time video feed to astronomy labs. The college president, Brother Ronald Gallagher, has a blog and people can download his speeches. Students can even IM (instant message) a research librarian.

"Young people take to this technology like fish to water," said Saint Mary's Events Technology Manager Rob Limon. Since coming to Saint Mary's last October, Limon has helped students develop podcasts and blogs of their experiences during travel courses, outfitted students with digital cameras and Macs, and trained them how to use Final Cut Pro to produce videos that can be viewed online. He has also worked with students and faculty, using his media production equipment, to create innovative films and commercials to enhance course work.

"[Students] wanted to share with the community their efforts to rebuild the Bayou in January. Creating a video blog addressed their needs, so our SMC Technology department developed a media communication plan and trained the students in a digital media classroom, set up their blogger and YouTube accounts, and they were just off to the races," Limon said. "The whole concept of social networking through the Internet is really inspiring to me; you can really communicate to [students] in a different way that's relevant to them."

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, three out of four teenagers have gone online, and 93% of those ages 15 to 17 are computer users, spending the majority of time emailing, instant messaging and gaming. Researchers note that the lives of these Echo Boomers have been shaped by the Internet and the constant flood of new technologies available to them.

Limon works with faculty to find new ways to incorporate technology into the teaching environment. An Oakland resident who worked in Oakland

schools for 15 years before coming to Saint Mary's, Limon also occasionally conducts workshops at K-12 schools with high risk students, incorporating technology into the mix to re-energize students about learning.

"You can really reach out to those students who aren't achieving in the standard academic sense," he said. "You'll see 'at risk' students hammering on keyboards, doing text messaging. They want it, they use it, they are fully expressive with it. We just need to find a way to leverage it."

Last month, Limon was approached by the college to help promote De La Salle Week, in honor of the college founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Once again, Limon found his thoughts jumping "out of the box."

"How do you teach youth? Communicate through Hip-Hop," he said. Utilizing the cutting-edge technology of YouTube, Limon helped three students coordinate and produce a Lasallian-themed rap song, "Mind Cultivation," and put it online (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=kEX-Acpzac74>).

It was a huge success. "[Students] have linked up the rap song to their MySpace pages," he said.

Since the Saint Mary's residence halls on campus are equipped with high-speed data connections to the Internet, a lot of students use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, send automated party announcements, and expand their network of friends, reaching hundreds. They can also access web-based technologies from asynchronous threaded discussion to web-based simulations and real-time web-based conferencing, all from their rooms.

The Hybrid MBA Program uses these technologies to reduce the amount of physical class time while maintaining a strong sense of continuous engagement. The MBA program gives students video iPods and uses real simple syndication (RSS); lectures can be uploaded directly from iTunes University.

"Anytime you plug in or turn on your computer or iTunes, it automatically downloads in the latest upload of the lecture," said Limon. "One of the professors said given the time constraints of the lecture, she'll do enhanced units on certain subjects [online], which allows her to present a new take or a couple of different takes so it enhances her normal lecture." For now, the struggle is finding ways to access new technologies while working within the confines of a sometimes slower-moving institution. "It's a bit of Wild West out there right now," said Limon.



SMC student Stephanie Olano multi-tasks regularly with iPod, phone, and computer. Photo by Jennifer Wake

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