Education Life

No Talking In Class

JOHN BRYAN is in the growing ranks of a relatively silent generation of professors. As an assistant professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, Dr. Bryan lets the computer and its software do most of the talking in his class on science writing.

Using a software program called "Daedalus Interchange,' manufactured by the Daedalus Group Inc., in Austin, Tex., he "lectures" his 25 students through a conference window on an I.B.M.-compatible computer. This program splits the computer screen into two windows; a conference window on the top portion of the screen enables students to receive instructions from Dr. Bryan, and a user's editing window on the bottom functions as a notebook for students.

Responses and comments, when completed in the notebook window, are then transferred to the conference window for the rest of the class to read.

The result is increased student concentration and participation, Dr. Bryan said. One of his students, Jeff Leggett, a senior mechanical engineering major, can attest to this. Mr. Leggett said that before taking Dr. Bryan's class he had trouble concentrating because he was so bored by lectures.

Such teaching methods change the traditional role of teacher to that of a facilitator, according to Dimitri Korahis, director of marketing for Group Logic Inc., a software developer in Arlington, Va. Instead of mostly listening passively in class, students now have the opportunity to interact with teachers and receive instant feedback.

The software made by Mr. Korahis's company, called "Aspects," enables students both to communicate through their screens and work simultaneously on the same document from different screens.

At Duke University, Prof. George D. Stetten links his computer-programming class together through a wireless infrared network transceiver the size of a mouse, called Cooperative, manufactured by the Photonics Corporation in San Jose, Calif. This hardware enables him to use "Timbuktu," a software program manufactured by Farallon Computing Inc., in Alameda, Calif. Now his students can not only see the lectures on the big screen in front of the class but can also project their own work onto the screen.

"Programming classes are not as efficient when you have to go home and debug your work alone," said Joseph Cadugan, a freshman at Duke. "With this new system, you get feedback right away."

At the University of Texas, Dr. John Slatin, director of computer utility and research laboratory, said that by 1999 his university, believing that the computer "enhances people's ability to create and disseminate information," plans to teach 85 percent of the undergraduate writing classes through computer networks.

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