

# Hey, that computer really IS just a toy!

## Hearsay & Heresy

By J.J. Wylie  
Staff Opinion Writer

Does your computer really make you more productive? The answer that comes to the tip of most tongues is an unqualified "yes". After all, computers are the foundation of the Information Age, the backbone of the High-Tech Global Economy that everyone touts as the gateway to an idyllic future. But I would bet that more computer-time is spent playing games and surfing the net than is spent doing anything really productive.

Computers are like hammers; they're just as good at being used unproductively as they are at building something great.

I've got friends who talk a lot about specs: about how much and what kind of RAM they've got, about the megahertz ratings of

their processors, the size of their screens, and the capacity of their storage. They make fun of me when I tell them my personal computer is almost three years old and is a Macintosh. Yet, when I ask them what the latest piece of software that they have purchased is, they almost invariably answer with the name of a game. I'm sure you've got the same type of friends. Ask and see what their answers are. I'll bet they involve really cool graphics.

And I'm just as guilty. As a writer (or at least as someone who pretends to be a writer), I spend a lot of time at home staring at my computer screen. And, like Hemingway's "white elephant" of a blank page, a blank computer screen is a daunting thing. The best

way to deal with such a menace is to create words. Alas, however, sometimes words fail me. This is when having some fast, bright, and loud computer game just a mouse-click away is dangerous. Sadly, I've ended many a writing session by blasting away at pixelated bad guys. Just to get more writing done, I've had to wipe all the games off my hard-drive. Such is the allure of digital fun that I've got to go cold-turkey.

But I'm just taking a cheap shot, right? I mean, computers must actually be making us more productive if we've all got so much time to spend playing games, right? Well, this may be true, but let me relate another downside to the computer revolution before you dismiss my argument.

The office where I work is full of computers. And the people in charge of the place are constantly monitoring the flow of assets and liabilities in the hopes of maximizing the bottom line. They're managers; that's their job. But the ease

with which computers can take a large pile of data and put it into a manageable shape has led to what I call "spreadsheet-mania" amongst my bosses. They are constantly asking me to create arrays of numbers in the hopes that the comparison will somehow yield a vision of the future, like some digital crystal-ball.

Trending out sales and expense charts is one thing, but I fail to see how comparing daily high-temperatures with the average sale-amount-per-customer is any more a reliable indicator of how well we'll do next quarter than reading Tarot cards is. Beyond a certain point, it's all statistical voodoo. I guess it's lucky for me that I get paid by the hour and not by the relative usefulness of the information I'm instructed to crunch.

Jeff Madrick, the author of a book called *The End of Affluence*, was recently interviewed by the e-zine "Salon", and he argues that, far from speeding the rate of productivity-growth in the U.S.,

computers may actually be slowing it down because "you can't computerize creativity." Madrick asserts that, before computers, information itself was inherently valuable and just possessing it was a virtual assurance of success. Now, however, computers have "so levelled the playing field" in terms of the possession of information that "talent will be at a premium, just as it was in the pre-industrial revolution past, when individual artisans ruled the economic roost." Madrick predicts that the Information Age will turn the global economy into "a high-technology version of a crafts economy, based on worker skills, thinking, and inventiveness, rather than on the muscle of large-scale factories and distribution networks."

In other words, like the old cliché about penis size, it isn't what size computer you've got, but how you use it. So I guess, in terms of genitalia and P.C.'s, I'm not out of the game just yet.

Letter to the Editor

I have often wondered what President Harter and Provost Ferraro mean when they say UNLV is a premier urban university. What does that mean anyway? List the definition of this please!

This university has a long way to go if this administration sacrifices education for other "important issues" on the agenda. First, the communications school was moved to Urban Affairs which meant the school gets less

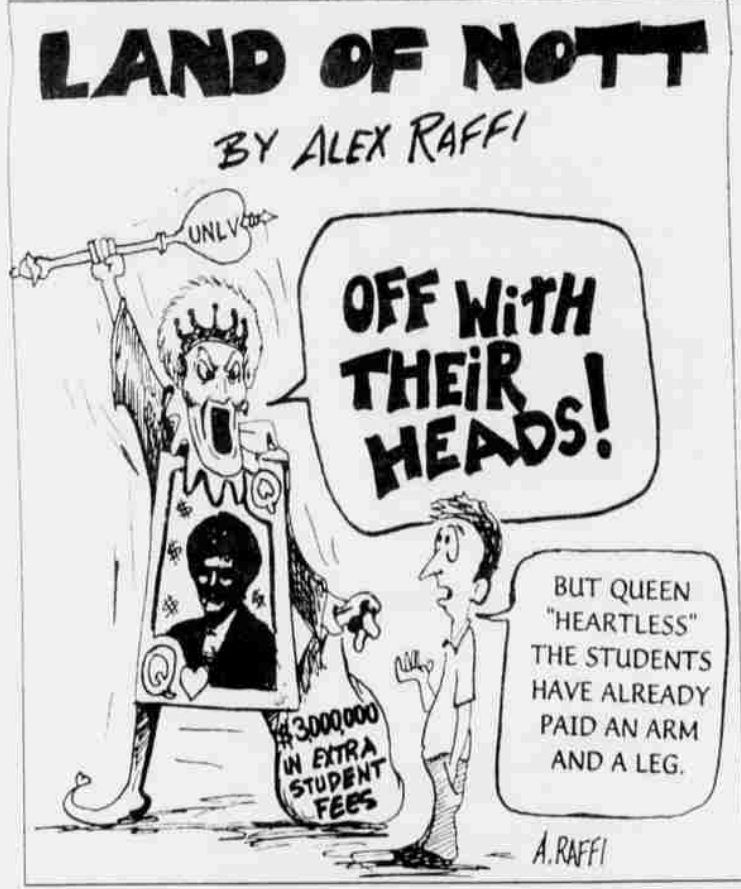
money. It must share with other disciplines like Social Work and Criminal Justice. It does not get the funding it needs to run a strong Communications School like other prominent universities like Texas A&M and University of Southern California. Second, the debate program gets terminated essentially to help fund an athletic program which has losing teams, except for basketball. The debate has been awesome consistently

year after year for UNLV and was doing the best ever right now. Third, some professors are retiring and some are going on sabbatical, but some are being forced to leave. The communications program at UNLV had one female professor with tenure in 1991 and only one more has tenure since 1991. I feel this is discrimination and gender bias. I do not think this university wants to be associated with this type of policy decisions. The majority of male professors have tenure, but the female professors do not. I think the quality of the program has suffered since President Harter has been here and the policies must be re-evaluated very soon.

There must be a close in the gender gap because this sends a very poor message that this is acceptable at UNLV. The debate program being terminated sends the message UNLV would rather fund more money for athletics rather than a successful educational program. The outcome of moving the Communications School under Urban Affairs is not yet determined, but when students are asking "What is Urban Affairs?," than you might evaluate the transition. I feel this does not make the college respectable or put the university in a positive light. It does not make education a premium or make this school a student focused one which Carol Harter claims she

wants to achieve. The end result rather will be good professors leaving and a poor program with no resources for the quality education the students at UNLV need. Finally, I must make a comment on graduation. I have 2 classes left to graduate, but will not be able to graduate until May because UNLV has no graduation ceremonies in December. This stinks and must change. I hope Carol Harter reads this because it inconveniences the students to graduate and then come back 5 months later to walk the stage. I know I am not alone and school regents must act on this immediately.

Jason Roth  
Sr./Communications



**STUDENTS:** This administration has kept none of its promises to students

Someday UNLV will have a campus plan that will guide our actions. Someday UNLV will have an open budgeting system that will force decisions on how we spend our money into the public eye. Someday UNLV will realize that hiring a few women and people of color does little to resolve the issues of race and gender that face our campus without frank and open discussion of those issues. And someday UNLV will realize that we will never be what we want to be without respect, trust and communication among our entire community: administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni and the people of Nevada.

I have spent a good deal of time trying to get this administra-

tion to live up to its promises. They promised open, participatory management. They promised to tear down the little fiefdoms that make administration at UNLV so ineffective at serving students. They promised to reward teaching and not make research the only basis for faculty evaluation. They promised to reach out into our community and build vital partnerships. Those promises remain unfulfilled.

It is my hope that the students of UNLV will join me in demanding an explanation of how their fees are being spent, why they have no input into priorities, and why action on critical issues (such as the plan to move the registrar and admissions to the student services building) is so long in coming

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