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## The Last Page

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## finding technology, losing your fleece

By Gavin O'Brien '04

Gone are the days of waiting in long lines to register for classes, paying expensive phone bills as you catch up with friends and being surprised by the food in the dining halls. Now students can use their personal computers or one of the computer labs around campus for classwork, dining menus, e-mail, registration and other common tasks. What I have noticed, however, is that students and others who use this technology often interact with the resources available to them at Colby in creative and unexpected ways.

Every day around midnight the Digest of General Announcements is sent by e-mail to all Colby students. The intent of this dispatch is to provide information on upcoming events and other campus matters. Any student can send an entry to be included in the digest, which has become host to both the creative and the mundane.

Students lose things—eyeglasses, keys, wallets, cactus-shaped car antenna ornaments and other such common items. For a desperate college student without any credit cards or mementos of his Texas homeland, the Digest of General Announcements is often the last resort. A substantial portion of each issue consists of pleas for the return of misplaced personal items. I am convinced that somewhere on campus there is a student hoarding 50 fleece pullovers.

Toward the end of last school year, the digest provided a medium for much comedy and satire. As the frequency of lost-item postings escalated, so did those from people claiming to look for absurd belongings. "Two weeks ago I lost my mind," someone wrote around the time of final exams. "Though it isn't worth much (around \$10), it has great sentimental value to me."

One well-crafted digest included entries from two students who collaborated to recreate a scene from Greek mythology set in Dana Dining Hall. "Orpheus" wondered if anyone had seen his soul, as it had been stolen from him by a mysterious stranger in the lunch line. A subsequent entry in the digest from "Hermes" advertised the sale of one soul.

As I head off to class in the morning I see that students are not the only members of the Colby community taking advantage of the College's technology resources. The gadgets mounted on many classroom ceilings can be used to project a computer display onto the front of the room. I have seen some professors' otherwise ordinary

lecture notes brought to life through captivating animated computer presentations and would not be at all surprised to see some familiar names among the credits of a future motion picture. This is not to say that the quirks of new technology have been completely mastered. The fluorescent lighting in some classrooms tends to interfere with the signals from the projector's remote control, forcing professors to turn the lights on and off several times during their lectures as they struggle to understand why the device refuses to cooperate.

I make a stop at the computer lab to print a paper for my next class. The labs around campus usually provide plenty of computer access and printing for any student who wishes to use them. There are, however, those who take advantage of the fact that use of computer lab printers is free whereas one pays to use photocopiers. While I'm glad students are applying those practical principles of microeconomics, it can be frustrating when I go to print immediately after someone else has just queued up 10 copies of her 40-page thesis.

When overworked, the printers themselves can demand creativity from their users. On a few occasions, seemingly whenever a due date is imminent, I am cursed with the dreaded paper jam. The printer tries to be helpful, flashing various instructional messages on its LCD display screen: Duplex jammed. Open back cover . . . twist widget 52 degrees . . . perform ritual de-jamming dance . . . close back cover . . . count to 20 and repeat. After a little jostling, prodding and shuffling about on my part, someone else comes along who manages to fix the problem instantaneously. The printer jumps back to life and begins spitting out all the documents people have unsuccessfully attempted to print in the last

few hours. Printers these days are very advanced and have an amazing electronic storage capacity. I do get my one-page research proposal—eventually.

Returning to my dorm room, I sit down to take a break from classes and paper writing. Colby's high-speed Internet connection is useful even at the end of the day as procrastinating students search for entertainment and diversions. Through my computer's "instant messaging" software, for example, I can keep in touch with friends all over the country. It's an effective way to communicate for a variety of circumstances. "How are you doing?" I type to one person whom I frequently chat with. "Just fine," my roommate replies, looking over from his desk. "Why do you ask?"

*Gavin O'Brien, a sophomore from West Rutland, Vt., is an anthropology major and the features editor of The Colby Echo. When information technology doesn't make him crazy, his campus job (working for Colby magazine) does.*

