

Educationally Speaking  
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### “Technomads”

I consider myself handy with a computer. I tend to spend most of my time at this desk writing and doing projects; that’s why I have to invest in a comfy desk chair. To give you an idea of how much time I spend at my computer just reading, writing and sorting emails, I received over 795 emails last month and I sent over 475 emails. Before I left my job at the museum, my coworker Kathy told me psychologists were noticing some people were obsessively checking their email to the point it was unhealthy. I don’t think I go as far as having an unhealthy obsession with emails or technology – but I usually make sure I check my emails before I go to bed and as soon as I get up in the morning.

Even with that said, don’t think I spend all my waking minutes staring at a computer screen. I watch TV screens a lot too. Moreover, with all of my time spent with technology, I wasn’t born with a silver mouse in my hand. I was having a discussion with some other students as we waited for a class to start last week about when we first used a computer and then the internet. Most everyone had used a computer for the first time when they were in the first grade. One person hadn’t used one until he was in third grade. I used a computer when I was in the first grade in a program called “Writing to Read”. I thought it was stupid since we never wrote anything and we didn’t do all that much reading either. I remember going to the lab and seeing an ugly looking box that I was sure didn’t do much of anything but hold papers to the desk. I never realized (at the time) those computers were just installed as Bradie Shrum’s first computer lab. I picked up the process of typing slowly over many years since we only spent half an hour a week in the lab. I can still remember the computer program I used – it would flash a picture of something on the screen and we would then have to type in what it was. I can recall telling Mrs. Catlett the picture of the fence and the picture of the grass were the same. I felt like I was fighting the good fight for my classmates.

Despite having started with a computer in first grade, I didn’t use the internet until the fourth grade. I never used the net for research purposes until middle school and I never used the net for my own personal enjoyment until high school. My friends generally said they first used the internet around the fifth grade. The schools we came from were well-to-do and had an average number of students. That leaves to me believe it’s possible for many people my age that come from mal-funded and extremely small schools might not have used a computer until their middle school years. I met one person who never used the internet until he was in eighth grade. Many students still don’t have some sort of internet access from their home either.

I have two professors, Durwin Talon and Mary Ellen Reed that use the term “Technopeasant” frequently to describe people in their generation – roughly anyone who never used a computer until they were too old to care. They say we (as in teenagers) are

the best and the brightest in the field. That may be true in the case of the work force, but what about the kids starting to elementary school this year? They will surely be much more fluent than even those people in my age group that don't study technology daily (except me – I have a goal to someday visit every known website). That's why I'd much rather consider people in my age group to be "Technomads"; people that wander with technology and aren't afraid to explore it but generally see it as something of a newly discovered nuisance.

Newsweek says "Indiana University is red hot – especially in IT" ("IT" is an abbreviation for "integrated technology"). IUPUI ranks as IU's most technologically advanced school delivering thousands of computers to its students and being one of only a handful of schools in the nation to offer a school of Informatics (Informatics is the study of information and how it interacts with humans). I can walk practically anywhere on campus and access the internet wirelessly without having to sit in a library or classroom. Computers are spread across the campus in classrooms, hallways and even under stairways. I've managed to wander from typing "fence" and "lawn" to using software and computers that cost thousands of dollars and I spend much more than half an hour a week online. I'm one heck of a nomad, if I do say so myself. Feel free to clog my inbox with another email – [justin@justinharter.com](mailto:justin@justinharter.com).