Computer Abstinence: Could I Do It—No Computers for Three Weeks?

Instructions for Teachers:

“Disconnected” is a provocative documentary that raises a single, immediate question for adults and high school students who have previewed it: Could I do it? Could I go three weeks without a computer?

Most students will not “live the experiment” of being “disconnected” experienced in this film by these three Carleton students. But the following personal inventory will allow them to predict how they might fare if put to the test. Have your students view the film first, and then ask them to fill out this inventory. Use the results of the inventory as the basis of a class discussion.

However, if some of your students are up to the challenge of living computer-free even a few days, then you’ll have to make some decisions about how that will work for you as their teacher and for the students themselves.

It will be very important to anticipate problems and be clear about the ground rules. You may want to seek the advice of your faculty colleagues and administrators. As “Disconnected” shows us so vividly, computer abstinence spirals outward to effect friends, teachers, family and employers. If you are a high school teacher, you may want to generate a “permission slip” so that parents are as well informed as possible.

The simplest approach to having students turn off their credits as a graded assignment is to assign a daily journal. You will want to be as clear as possible up front about the kinds of questions you expect the students to address in their journals. Sample questions might include: What is the hardest part of going without computers? What activities am I using to fill the time I have recovered from computer use? What are my frustrations of living without computers? Am I tempted to “cheat,” and read my email (just once)?