

Kerry Varga, student manager of UCSD Dial In

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Kerry Varga is just a junior at the University of California, San Diego, but she is full of helpful information. And she is more than willing to share it.

Need to know when to pick avocados? Whether to fight a speeding ticket? Gimmicks to help you quit smoking? Or how about some hints to improve your personality? Give Carrie a call.

This year more than 120,000 people in San Diego will do just that. Varga, with a little help from some fellow students, will supply them with information on everything from backaches to bankruptcy to botulism.

Varga is student manager of the UC San Diego Dial Information Center, also known as DIAL INFO. Consisting of more than 1,000 informational tapes, this student managed and operated center has become the largest full service tape information library in California.

DIAL INFO was started in January of 1978 as a campus information center designed to provide students with uniform and accurate answers to repeatedly asked questions, such as what's for dinner at the cafeteria or when does the library close. Soon the service was expanded to include medical, legal, physical fitness, entertainment and home and garden information.

The public was also invited to use the service and last year DIAL INFO fielded 83,627 telephone calls. This year the total is projected between 120,000 and 150,000. The phone lines are open a total of 76 hours a week, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

DIAL INFO publishes a variety of brochures which list topics and corresponding numbers. Callers simply give the DIAL INFO operator a tape number and it is played on one of 15 tape decks.

"Manning the center is a one person at a time operation," explained Varga, who helps supervise five other student workers during the year. "I do the scheduling, monthly tallies, monthly billings, man the center and coordinate the updating of the tapes."

The tapes are both recorded and played in the DIAL INFO studio, a room the size of a walk-in closet. But the voice you hear will not be Varga's.

"I don't like the sound of my voice on a tape recording. I get one of the other students to voice them," said the 20-year-old urban planning major.

Jerry Shannon, UC San Diego Telecommunications operations manager who helps oversee the program, likes the tapes to be direct and to the point.

"We have a policy that we don't like the tapes over two minutes," said Shannon, who spent 25 years in the Marine Corps before coming to UC San Diego in 1976. "I don't care how interesting a tape is, people don't want to listen to a recording any longer than that."

Funding for DIAL INFO comes from a variety of private and governmental grants. One of the ways the program has become self-sufficient is by marketing dial access tapes to outside agencies, such as the Grossmont School District, and then manning the phone lines.

"School districts are having severe budget problems, and that is why they are coming to us," explained Shannon. "Dial access is the most inexpensive way to disseminate information."

DIAL INFO plans to continue growing and expanding. Many tapes are being translated into Spanish. New tapes are being added while old tapes are constantly being upgraded. The library could soon be expanded to a targeted 2,000 tapes but student interests are still top priority.

"One of the goals I would like to see accomplished is the start of a living catalog," said Varga. "This would feature the voice of the professor describing the course he will be teaching next quarter. Students can listen and decide if this is the type of class they want to take."

Varga feels the managerial skills she is acquiring on the job will help with her career goal of becoming a city planner. In the meantime she is learning a lot of useful information.

To receive a brochure of topics or listen to a tape, phone DIAL INFO at 452-4636 (452-INFO).

(August 12, 1981) For more information contact: Henry J. DeVries, 452-3120

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