

PRELIMINARY REPORT

The study committee (C) charged with investigating the issues of (9) Computer Usage by Students and (10) Increased Use of the Computer in Programs and Courses here makes its preliminary report for May 1, 1983. The report is preliminary because the committee has not had opportunity to study 1) the returns from the Faculty Self-Study questionnaire; 2) the returns from the Student Self-Study survey; or 3) replies to letters of inquiry to other institutions concerning computer usage.

The Committee has made every effort to collaborate with the Computer Committee of the Self-Study, and plans to incorporate its findings in our final report.

The Committee sees its function as 1) collecting and reporting information on the availability of computer instruction and on research uses of the computer on this campus, and 2) offering policy recommendations.

Preliminary findings are noted below. These are drawn from the departmental reports submitted for the self-study, and from a report on recent usage of the computer laboratory housed in the Library. All findings are subject to complete revision on receipt of further data, anticipated shortly.

1. Current computer usage by students -- general extent;

Students have made appreciable use of the Library Computer Lab. We assume this usage is by students who have little other academic access to computers and are expanding their familiarity on their own initiative. 129 students have borrowed computers from the Library Computer Lab, 567 borrowed guides, 2140 borrowed game software, and 628 more studious ones borrowed non-game software during the first semester. Student usage is limited, perhaps severely in some programs such as B.A., by shortages of equipment and computer availability.

2. Computer proficiency of students:

The student survey should provide statistical evidence on the current state.

Responses to inquiries made to other institutions should provide information on their practices and give some indication of appropriate standards.

Self-study data from departments indicate no concern about this by user departments. They anticipate, given adequate facilities, to train students to a proficiency level applicable to that particular discipline. 15 departments/units mentioned they were so engaged. Requests for more equipment indicate expanding needs. The Library Computer Lab has handled part of this function. The faculty was used for 170 hours, by 22 different courses, during fall 1982.

The Committee now has no particular recommendations to make about requests for more equipment. No department has recommended that students be required to purchase their own terminals. The equipment shopping lists are substantial. It is not clear to us if sharing is practical in some areas. We here await more input, particularly from experts on the Self-study committee.

Overall, departments are probably the best judges of the need for certain proficiency levels of students. Departments should be strongly encouraged to require such an appropriate proficiency level. To assist in this they should have professional consultants available for the faculty involved.

3. Current and future computer usage in course instruction:

Student reaction to this will be gauged from responses on student questionnaires.

The Self-study survey of the faculty will determine current software applications utilized by the faculty, and also need.

Six departments report they currently employ computer-assisted instruction. Departmental reports do not indicate any special problems with this, other than the general one of equipment availability.

The Committee notes that computer-assisted instruction is not feasible for many departments; but it is certainly possible that some departments for which it is feasible are not aware of available packages. We hope the self-study report might be used to inform departments of availability and applications. Perhaps some professional advisors skilled in such applications could confer with various departments on a regular basis, advising them on how various packages might apply to their instructional programs.

4. Computer usage by students in research:

The student survey should indicate whether students have particular concerns about this, apart from those expressed by departments. Because this is directed and supervised by faculty, it is not a separate student problem, but one mainly of adequate facilities.

5. General concerns which have emerged:

Demands for more equipment are universal. Evaluating these is largely beyond the scope of this committee's abilities. Concerns that the mainframe will be employed principally for administration needs--registration--are voiced by departments, who don't want to fall further behind in capabilities.