April 20, 1984

Writing Lab
PAR 3
(512) 471-8682

TO: Members of the FEPC
FROM: David A. McMurrey, Writing Lab
SUBJ: Proposal for IBM PC-XT's

I am writing to seek help in getting microcomputers for the Writing Lab.
The recent availability of the IMB PC-XT's marks a great opportunity for
the Writing Lab to expand its ability to assist students and its range
of instructional offering and to develop instructional materials of its
own.

Equipment Needs

This proposal requests up to 10 IBM PC-XT's, a supply of diskettes, a
small budget with which to purchase currently available instructional
software in composition, and a printer. Because the Lab assists ten or
more students at peak hours, the PC-XT's would be used heavily.

Use of the IBM PC-XT's

The computers will be used almost entirely for instruction and for devel-
opment of materials and programs that will be used for instruction.

1. Students will used the PC-XT's for testing and tutorial work in
    a wide range of composition skills: essay skills, invention
    strategies, rhetorical concepts, revising and editing, paragraph
    structure, sentence problems and structure, spelling, and
    vocabulary. (See the attached table of contents.)

2. Students will also use the computers to go through the stages in
    the process of writing a paper: there will be programs for
    brainstorming, outlining, roughdrafting, revising and editing,
    proofreading, and documenting essays.

3. Members of the Writing Lab staff will use the computers to
    develop the instructional materials listed above that cannot be
    purchased.

4. When the computers are not being used in the ways listed above,
    they can be used for wordprocessing by members of the Department.

Rationale

Part of the rationale for using the IBM PC-XT's has to do with the use of computerized instruction in composition in general:

1. The computers will enable us to streamline our diagnostic testing, test analysis, diagnostic score reporting, and recordkeeping.

2. The computers will make our tutorial materials much more effective than they are in their current state.

3. The computers can be programmed to offer instruction that is different and potentially more effective than our printed materials.

4. The computers will enable the Lab to assist more students more effectively.

The other part of the rationale for the machines has to do with the use of microcomputers. Although the Lab is now equipped with three terminals connected to the DEC-20, the advantages offered by microcomputers argue against merely adding more terminals (at the cost of just under $1000 a terminal):

5. Micros eliminate the problems of daily or monthly charges for use or storage and the long wait to log in on busy days that are associated with mainframe computers.

6. Micros offer more features that can be used for instruction than do the mainframes currently at our disposal.

7. The little instructional software in composition that is now available and the new software that will be appearing in the future will be primarily for micros, not for mainframes.

8. The instructional materials that we develop in the Lab will be more accessible to others interested in CAI composition than they would be if they were written on mainframe. We would be able to exchange materials with other labs more easily.

Staff and Development Time

Because of the lack of CAI composition materials in general and because of the lack of effective CAI composition materials at the right level for our students, the Writing Lab staff will need to develop a good portion of its own instructional programs for the computer. To create these materials, the Lab does not need special or additional staff other than one or two additional assistant instructors experienced in classroom teaching. For two years now, the Lab has had as part of its staff one and occasionally two graduate students fully capable of computer programming for us. Staff members are able to develop materials during their regular lab hours when they are not working directly with students. For example, this semester the staff has written and entered nearly a hundred 15-20 item grammar tests, even though the project was low priority and handled by only a few staff members.

With a large CAI project underway, however, it would be wise to have 2 to 3 staff members devoting most of their lab hours to programming, writing, and entering materials.

Other Related Uses of the Computers

These uses of computers in composition instruction in the Writing Lab can be integrated with another one in the Department: for some time now, instructors of advanced composition courses (E325M) have expressed interest in teaching their courses in part with wordprocessors. Properly publicized, the course would draw many students.

To conduct such a course, 20 to 25 additional machines, a central instructor's terminal, and additional printers would be needed. The ideal space for this equipment would be Parlin 1, next door to the Writing Lab. With a doorway adjoining the two rooms, a lab staff member could schedule and coordinate the various uses of the computers and act as consultant for students just learning to use the computers. Combining the Lab's use of the IBM PC-XT's with that of composition classes will assure maximum use of the machines and reduce the total number needed.

Programs for Essays and Paragraphs

   The Essay
   Paragraphing Skills
   Editing and Revising

Programs for the Sentence Level

   Sentence Structure
   Sentence Combining
   Grammar and Usage
   ESL-Sentence Problems
   Spelling
   Proofreading

Programs for Specific Courses

   Skills in Technical Writing
   Skills in Literary Analysis
   Word-Processing Skills