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Proposal for Funding a Computer Research Program in Communications

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Dean Willard O. Ash, and

The College of Arts & Sciences Summer Grants Committee

From: W. J. Roach
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The attached "Proposal for Funding a Computer Research Program in Communications" is submitted for consideration for a full time research position this summer.
PROPOSAL FOR FUNDING A COMPUTER RESEARCH PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATIONS

Full-time funding of a release-time position for research this summer is requested for computer "teaching aids" program in communications.

This program consists of a series of interactive units which students on a campus newspaper or studying various communications courses could use to supplement and test their knowledge.

The program, as proposed, would consist of 34 units -- nine in journalism, four in business communications and 21 in public relations.

The first phase, planned for this summer, would include eight journalism units, two business communication units, and four public relations units.

The programs would be placed in the statewide APL computer library for use by any of the 37 colleges or universities in the SUS. A preliminary survey of these colleges has already produced 11 others who are interested in using one or more of the planned units.

Background

The use of the computer to aid in teaching communications has, up to now, been undeveloped. Only three other universities are at present known to have attempted its usage -- none on the scale planned.

One of those which has utilized a similar program is the University of Florida.
I used that program (cai9) last quarter in one of my classes; the program in news style was greeted with enthusiasm by students in the class, in spite of the time spent (as much as four hours) by some students on it.

The UF cai9 program spurred interest in the subject. In corresponding and talking with journalism faculty at Gainesville, I learned that the project there had been developed by a graduate student some time ago and was being phased out because of (a) its length, and (b) no one else had time to revamp it.

The cai9 program is an interactive one which takes a student through a series of fairly elemental steps in grammar, punctuation and other elements of news style.

However, the program did open up the possibilities of developing a more sophisticated and shorter series of units on various elements of communications. These would enable a teacher on the college level to guide a student through the fundamentals by using the computer on an individualized basis, and then enable the faculty member to build on this knowledge in a fuller manner than has heretofore been possible.

More importantly, the programming approach enables a student to enter a journalism or communications program at any quarter and gain needed basic information without having to wait for three quarters, for example, until a basic course is taught.
The UNF Program

During the winter quarter, I discussed with Thomas Woods of UNF and Jerry Frizzell the development possibilities of a series of units such as is presented here. They provided needed background and instruction in the use of the new APL system which is being developed for SUS use.

As a result of this, the first unit of the new program has been completed and is now being "loaded" into the computer. It will be tested on students enrolled in the Newspaper Workshop (COM 417) this quarter. This is being done with a $150 research grant from Dr. Humphries' committee.

The rationale for undertaking this project at this time is of singular importance to UNF. Aside from the prestige of leading the state, as well as the journalistic teaching field, in adapting the computer to the teaching of journalism, it has been a necessity, given the numbers of new students coming into such courses as the Newspaper Workshop.

The computer units enable a teacher to handle more students, to wipe out prerequisites which could hold enrollments back, and enable students to enter and proceed onto journalism writing or communications projects at their own speed and in the depth needed by each individual.

A new student enrolling in the Newspaper Workshop, for example, can now go to
defining the news). This is an interactive one wherein the student learns, discusses and reacts to various needs of society as they relate to the mass media; he is taken, step by step, along a path which takes up and relates some six elements which go towards making up a comprehensive definition of news (something that no known textbook has yet to do in the history of journalism). He then reviews the various "categories" of news, interacting to a series of examples, and finally is tested on his news judgment with a series of questions which give him story examples and ask him to determine whether they are newsworthy or not.

At the end of the unit, he has not only proved that he has learned the elements of news and how to utilize them, but he has also tested himself. In turn, the instructor gains valuable information on the student—he knows how long the student took for the test and how much time he spent on each element; what paths the student took through the course; where he needed help, where he asked for definitions; what questions he answered right, what ones wrong, and what ones with an unanticipated answer. As more students take the same test, the instructor also can measure each against the pattern of the others on each segment as well as the whole or any of its parts. Thus, he knows what he must reinforce — and he also knows something of the student's grasp of the topic and his ability to assimilate new information rapidly.

The Proposed Units
Journalism -- Defining the news (completed)

Gathering the news (Beats, assignments, digging the news out, covering the beat, team reporting, planned news coverage; later segments to be developed on specific beats).

Interviewing techniques

Writing (Elements of a news story, the lead, story structure, straight news stories, features, suspended interest stories).

Style (Objectivity, interpretation, advocacy, the "New Journalism").

Feature writing

Editing (Copy editing principles, symbols, editing for grammar, editing for sense, rewriting).

Headlines (Purpose, typography, unit count, style do's and don'ts of headline writing).

Communications -- The Communications Model

Cases for Business Communications (COM 674)

The Staff Report

The Problem-Solution Method

Public Relations -- Cases

Public relations definitions

Public opinion

Fact finding

The publics in public relations

Planning and programming

Techniques

Internal relations

Community relations
Public Relations --
(continued)

Customer and consumer relations
Financial relations
Press relations
Public relations in emergencies
Surveys and survey techniques
Organizing for public relations
Public relations for government
Public relations for education
Public relations for small business
Public relations for corporations
The public relations agency/consultant
Evaluating public relations

As to the public relations units, it is planned to request funding for these at a later time -- through proper channels -- from the Foundation for Public Relations Research.

Use in the SUS

In February of this year, following discussions with Messrs. Woods and Frizzell, the member institutions in the State University System were queried by the writer as to their interest in using such courses as described. (Query letter, survey form, and actual replies are available for inspection at any time.)

As a result of the letter, interest in using all or parts of the units has been expressed by my counterparts at the following colleges or universities:
1. University of Florida.
2. University of Florida -- The Independent Alligator
3. Florida Technological University.
4. University of South Florida.
5. Miami-Dade Community College.
6. Florida Junior College.
7. Polk Community College.
11. Tallahassee Junior College.
12. Edison Junior College.

Further follow-up will be done with others once the first unit has been tested here.

Of the schools replying, interest has been indicated in units, as follows:

1. Defining the news 7
2. Gathering the news 7
3. Newspaper style 6
4. Copy editing and headlines 7
5. News story construction 8
6. Advertising for campus publications 4
7. Public relations cases 3
8. Advanced news story construction 9

(The first seven units above were the only ones indicated in the February query.)
Capabilities

An obvious question is: "What does a communications teacher know about using a computer?"

In addition to utilizing the ca19 course last quarter and working with Messrs. Woods and Frizzell on the first unit of the proposed sequence of courses, the writer prepared and carried out an extensive "Delphi" questionnaire project last year at the University of Georgia. A significant part of this project involved the coding and programming of the material for computer; the completed research project included significant amounts of information on a wide series of communications questions along with a massive series of correlations and tests of hypotheses through chi-square tests, t-tests, analysis of variance, other correlation tests and calculations.

The project gave me needed insight into the use and potential of the computer. In addition, I have had the opportunity through professional experience to learn the use of the computer in the newspaper field as well as the new cathode ray tube (CRT) display units, which relate somewhat to the concepts being proposed herein.

Finally, the familiarity of the writer with the field professionally and as a teacher should be noted -- more than 25 years in the field, including 12 years of college-university level teaching, as well as extensive experience as a practicing journalist, experience which is documented in my vita.
Conclusion...Summary

Full-time funding for this research project this summer is therefore requested as a means of aiding the budding communications program at the university, to assist in developing the Business Communications curriculum, and to provide greatly-needed aid in teaching and operating the campus newspaper, "The Halyard."

The results of the project will be a series (Phase I) of communications units placed in the "public library" sector of the SUS computer at Gainesville and available to any and all college or university units within the system as an aid in teaching communications or in producing a campus newspaper.

In a time of "crunch" when it comes to teaching positions, such a program is of extreme value. It cannot, of course, replace teaching, nor can it replace the teacher. It is simply what it is planned to be -- a teaching aid, a new one, an interactive one, and one with amazing potential for the instructor.

Looking further ahead, the program can provide the college with prestige in this field; already, there are glimmers of interest on the part of journals in the field, as well as professional societies seeking program material for their annual meetings. The program also draws upon material prepared and being prepared for the textbook under development by the writer.
Finally, it should be noted that, in addition to funding of such a position, necessary computer time and space will be needed beyond that already allocated, but this apparently will be available.

April 1, 1974

- W. J. Roach