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Laboratory for Computer Science

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MEMO TO: LCS Faculty

FROM: P. Jessel *PJ*

SUBJECT: Laboratory Facilities for LCS

DATE: 23 November 1976

Several weeks ago I met with Herb Hughes and Dave Clark and Ken Progran of CSR to discuss our collective needs for a laboratory technician. Out of this discussion emerged a concensus of opinion that technical services should be a total laboratory function rather than the responsibility of individual groups. There are several reasons for this:

1. Laboratory needs of individual groups vary over the life of the project. At various times a group may require fairly extensive technical support and at other times this requirement may be close to nil. This highly varying requirement makes it difficult for a group to acquire the services of a technician since such employment would carry with it the responsibility of a long time commitment. On the other hand the requirements of LCS might reasonably be expected to show considerably less variance.
2. In evaluating our own group's needs and that of CSR it became evident that each of us needed approximately 1/2 to 1/4 of a technician. If technical services were provided as a laboratory function, than this allocation of time to various groups could be handled in a much smoother way.

3. The availability of a central LCS technical services center would encourage the development of projects that might otherwise be rejected because of the level of support required.
4. A laboratory wide technician might also help us reduce the ever increasing cost of maintenance. Given the current talk about providing each faculty member with a personal computer and given the already extensive use of terminals it is reasonable to believe that we might do some level of maintenance internally. Given the availability of a laboratory wide technician it now becomes feasible to send this man to "DEC-school" in order to learn, for example, how to maintain VT52s. This approach would not only guarantee that a portion of the technician's time would be covered by such maintenance work, it would also provide us with better control over our own equipment and would free us from being at the mercy of DEC.

Some discussion centered on the allocation of the technician's time to various projects and how this would be budgeted. It appears that probably the best administration would be the establishment of a standing committee, composed of major users, to administer this technical services center. At the beginning of every year, at the time the budgets are prepared, each group could specify its expected use of technical services and provide the necessary support. The work would be allocated between the various groups on a first-come first-serve basis. Should any critical deadlines occur, I'm sure that these could be resolved by the standing committee or by the technician himself.

Finally, a word about the location of these facilities. Our laboratory is currently renting the basement and utilizing it primarily for dead storage. This location I feel would be ideal for a small machine and electrical shop. I understand from Herb Hughes there are no significant health or fire laws that would restrict this kind of use.

I feel that this proposal probably offers the only way for LCS to obtain a reasonable laboratory facility. It cannot be done on a group basis because the work and support available in each individual group does not justify it. By sharing it among all the groups of LCS I think the facility can become a reality.

I would appreciate your comments on this proposal. In particular, I would appreciate some hard estimates on your expected use of such a technical services center, both for this coming year (1977) and over the long term. I would appreciate this information by February 15, since it is our goal to have such a facility established by April 1.