UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Prentice Computer Centre

NEWSLETTER

authorization: Director of the Centre

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2   SYSTEM RELIABILITY - MARCH

System reliability during March was not up to the standard we like
to achieve and users may be interested in some comment. Overall,
during the month, we lost 5 hours 46 minutes of the 460 hours
available to users, representing a downtime of 1.25%.   There were
30 crashes during the month representing 1.3 crashes per day and an
average time to recover of 11 minutes.

In the early part of the month, we had a transient problem with one
of our CPU's.   This was finally traced to a kinked and broken conductor
in a flexiprint cable.

Unfortunately, there is another transient problem of memory parity
errors related to the fixed head disk controller and data channel.
Such occasional memory parity errors may cause the system to crash
and they are very difficult to trace.   The matter is still being
investigated.

3   SYSTEM AVAILABILITY ON SUNDAYS

As foreshadowed earlier in the year, it is proposed to introduce a
9 a.m. to 5 p.m. shift on Sundays, commencing 8 May. The following
conditions will apply:

(a)   Terminal rates will be .25 of normal rates;

(b)   Batch work will be run at the priority nominated;

(c)   All receipt and dispatch will be handled at the basement
      window but only output printed on that day will be available;

(d)   No programming consulting service will be available.

In order to provide this service at little additional cost, we have
transferred our third shift of operations on a Friday night to
Sunday to provide a useful base load and to reduce the cost of
operator overhead.   Thus operations on a Friday night will cease
at 11 p.m.   It will not be possible to staff the grount floor
batch station at the Hawken Building on Sundays.   No output will
be available, therefore, from runs up until 11 p.m. on Friday until
8 a.m. on the following Monday.

4   MONECS - BASIC LANGUAGE

The running of the MONECS student programming system appears to be
settling into a routine operation.   As an additional service,
MONECS has been extended to include the BASIC programming language.
Initially, this will be available at the Commerce Precinct Station
only.   BASIC Optical marked sense cards are available from the
Prentice Computer Centre, Hawken Building at a cost of $7.50 per
1000 cards (pending review).   Introductory BASIC manuals are
available costing $4.00 each.

A limited subset of COBOL is also available under the overall MONECS
system but is not planned for release at this stage.   However, anyone
with enquiries concerning this COBOL system is encouraged to contact
Mr. J. Noad on extension 6391 or Mr. B. Claire on extension 6021.
If there is sufficient interest in the COBOL system, arrangements
will be made to have appropriate marked sense cards printed.

Note to Supervisors of MONECS users:
      Operations staff report that numerous card reader faults
      occur due to over-used marked sense cards, especially *JOB
      and *END JOB cards.   Whilst the need for thrift during the
      current economic climate is appreciated, it is recommended
      that sufficient marked sense cards be made available to
      reduce this problem.

5   NEW REMOTE BATCH SOFTWARE

A maintenance release of software running the precinct stations is
now operational.   This removes some of the more urgent problems
and paves the way for further work to remove the incompatibilities
between remote and central batch.   The changes of most importance
to users are:

(a)   No longer are cards lost when transmission errors occur.

(b)   Files with lines of 132 characters and longer are correctly
       spaced.

(c)   Overprinting is possible (e.g. for EVAL output) at the Commerce
       and Hawken stations.   The printers at Griffith and Medical
       School are not able to overprint.

(d)   The name in the header and trailer page name band may include
       spaces.

(e)   MIDITRAN processing has been removed.   All image mode cards
       must be read at the central site.

6   A NOTE ON SPSS

Two of the more powerful and convenient facilities of the Statistical
Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) are its data selection
(SELECT IF cards) and conditional transformation (IF cards)
capabilities.

Experience has shown, however, of all the problems users have with
these features, the following two are the most common:

Firstly, the case selection cards;   if there are several SELECT IF
cards, then the cases selected for processing are those that satisfy
ANY (not all) of the selection criteria.   For example, the sequence

          SELECT IF   (CCD EQ 5)

          SELECT IF   (STATAREA EQ 10)

will select those cases which have either a value of 5 for the
variable CCD or a value of 10 for STATAREA.   If the intention is
to select cases that satisfy both conditions simultaneously then use -

          SELECT IF   (CCD EQ 5 AND STATAREA EQ 10)

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Secondly, the abbreviations permitted in specifying the relational conditions in both IF and SELECT IF cards can be deceptive. For instance,

        IF   (SEX EQ 'M' AND AGEGRP EQ 3 OR 4)STATUS=1

sets the variable STATUS to 1 if either SEX equals 'M' and AGEGRP equals 3 or AGEGRP equals 4.   Thus a case which has a value 'F' for SEX but 4 for AGEGRP will have STATUS set to 1.

The common error here is to assume that the condition on SEX 'sticks' to both conditions on AGEGRP.

Obviously the possibilities for confusion over results in runs which make extensive use of both these facilities is great.   Thus careful reading of the relevant sections of chapter 8 of the manual is desirable.

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