Computers of the Computer Initiative

An Online Exhibit

Drew University was the first liberal arts college to issue their students a computer, starting in 1984. Here is a glimpse into the history of the Computer Initiative at Drew.

Year 1, The Epson QX-10

The QX-10 was the first computer issued to students as part of Drew's Computer Initiative. I received mine when I transferred into Drew in January of 1985. Our class was the experiment. Computers were set up in the dorms so when students arrived everything was ready and waiting in their rooms. Commuters, such as myself, picked up their computers and set them up at home. Since we didn't get printers, we still relied heavily on the computer center or dorm labs for print services. The first planning mistake... one printer per room.

The idea of every student having a computer was still very novel. Very few schools were doing this and the prior year, Drew had made its announcement making it the first Liberal Arts college to do so. CPM was a major operating system, DOS was run on our Titan cards, IBM-PCs were for the wealthy, and Macs were on the drawing board. Computers were boxes with just the basics for software. Email was unheard of by most people. Computers were the future and we were there.

Our word processor was a package called Valdocs. This package was a walking time bomb. If you stuck with the early version it worked just fine, but everyone knew what the mysterious error 17 was. The people at the computer center could fix it, but few others could. Each new version of Valdocs was free and Drew was a BETA site. This meant that each new version solved an old problem and gave you two new ones to replace it. A valuable lesson was being learned... while computers were changing how we wrote our papers, the dog wasn't the only thing that could eat your homework.

It was off to a rough start, but it was definitely worth pursuing. Due to a contractual problem, the QX-10's reign on campus would be a short one. That summer, all QX-10s were recalled and replaced with the QX-16 so we could run GW-Basic as promised. PeachCalc was ours to keep, and most people who did so just used it as a doorknob.

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