

'Computerized Society' Establishes Toehold at UA with 'The Big Brain'

For those of you who thought the Last Frontier was a last refuge from computerized society, it's too late.

The big brain has established a beachhead in Interior Alaska.

The brain is a \$500,000 computer and it's so big that it almost fills a basement room of the Duckering Building on the University of Alaska campus.

In fact, the brain isn't really in a room at all—the room is inside of it.

The brain is the hub of the university's steadily-expanding Computer Center, which plays a key role in meeting the data-processing needs of the university's large research establishment.

The big brain also is being used increasingly in other areas. For example, even while you're out hunting, the brain has your number on a computer card.

This year, according to Edward Gauss, director of the center, moose and sheep harvest statistics are being processed for the state's Department of Fish and Game.

Also, the Computer Center played an important part this fall in providing university class registration rolls immediately after the close of registration.

In past years, faculty members had to wait a week or more to find out who had signed up for their courses.

This year, preliminary class rolls were coming off the computer's printer three hours after the initial registration period had ended.

A beneficial side effect of having the big brain on campus is on-the-job training program it provides for Alaskan youths, Gauss says.

Computer center operators also serve as faculty members, teaching courses in computer technology. Promising students from the classes are chosen to fill part-time jobs in the center. The jobs often lead to

high-paying positions. For example, UA sophomore Don Walker worked in the center for a year, then landed a \$1,000-a-month summer job as a computer programmer with a large aircraft corporation.

The big brain comes in several large sections, all connected by miles of cables

and wires running through walls, a ceiling and floors.

Computer personnel use a new artificial language, Cobol and Fortran, to "talk" to the computer and "ask" it to process data.

To many people, Gauss admits, the center seems like something out of science fiction—a strange world of flashing red and green lights, whirling tape reels and the constant hum of high-voltage power.

To the university, however, the center is all fact and one fact, Gauss notes, seems quite clear: the big brain's beachhead in Alaska is no temporary phenomenon—the computer has become a fixture on the Last Frontier.