Machine Behind YSU

By D. Brian Mangan

YSU's newly installed IBM 360 computer could be called a veritable master of all trades, or almost all anyway. The computer makes out the student's grades, bills, cumulative point average and registration.

It also keeps track of Honor and Dean's List students, accounts and transcripts, and it will soon begin computing the University payroll.

With the new IBM 360 are its programmers: Don Downey, left, and Ted Montgomery.

In fact, there is very little that is not done by IBM machines in the University now, and most of this work is done by the giant 360, the "Machine Behind the University."

The entire IBM Department is made up of several older computors, of different types plus the new 360. The smaller, older machines do much of the routine work of alphabetizing and printing the student enrollment sheets. As Mrs. Kathrine Elenz, department supervisor says, "It would be a waste to use 360 computer time for these simple tasks which the old machines can do."

Acquired in 1950

The first of these older machines was acquired in 1950 when the University first automated its record department. At that time there were only some 4,000 students attending and the paper work had become intolerable.

Mrs. Elenz stated that she couldn't even imagine how many man-hours would be necessary to complete the work the IBM machines do today with the number of students tripled.

The IBM Department's full-time staff of seven people is kept busy at all times with the job of programming the machines. The real rush on the department, though, is during registration and grades time. One of the problems is that these periods are so close together, sometimes causing a delay about which many students have complained.

Students Not A Number

Regarding the danger of the student becoming "a number" Mrs. Elenz said that the computer did not even use the student numbers to a great extent.

She feels that a computer is simply a better method of doing a scientific job, in this case keeping the University records straight, much as a car is a better means of transportation than a horse and buggy.
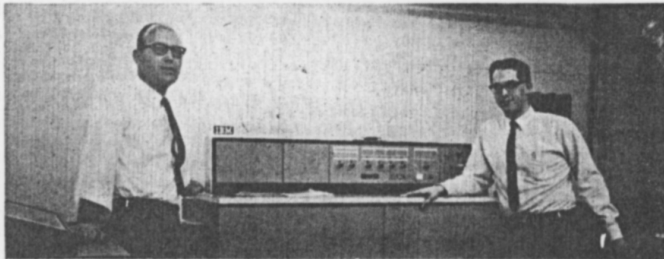
The 360 Computer would be a tool rather than some strange overpowering entity which secretly rules the students' lives.

A striking contrast impressed me while I was sitting waiting to speak to Mrs. Elenz, who is especially busy right now. I stood for ten minutes watching a girl sharpening several dozen pencils. One after another she would insert them in the sharpener and turn the crank to give them a fine point.

There, among the buzzing and whirling of "electronic brains" which sorted cards by the thousands stood a girl tediously sharpening pencils . . . pencils which would be used to mark the slug sheets that are fed into the "Machine Behind the University."

She was the girl behind the pencils. behind the machine behind the University.