Stores department has Texas computer first

Chalk up a first for Texas A&M's computer facilities.

The University Supply Store now is operating its purchasing, billing and accounting with an on-line, remote terminal data processing system.

Purchasing and Stores Director Wesley E. Donaldson reports the on-line system is the first in Texas and one of a small number in the country.

He said A&M first placed its interdepartmental billing, perpetual inventory and re-order report functions on the computer in 1963. Inventory was one of the first computer applications for business and institutions.

But instant computer information is possible only with on-line, remote terminals.

Donaldson said the new system provides three major advantages over the previous batch control system: A priced sales slip at the time of transaction, more accurate billing and inventory records and more timely procurement reports.

The Texas State Board of Control is interested in A&M's system for possible applications to their operations, Donaldson said.

Prior to 1963 all billing was manually produced and there was neither a perpetual inventory nor a re-order system. Donaldson said the inventory investment exceeded annual sales.

With the introduction of the off-line, batch processing system inventory turnover jumped to two and one-half times a year. The system worked fairly well, Donaldson said, during a period when the sales volume tripled in seven years.

On-line facilities began operation Sept. 1.

Fiscal Office personnel wrote a detailed set of accounting instructions, IBM aided with a program outline and the Data Processing Center wrote the program, Donaldson explained.

Computer science graduate students aided in the program development.

Donaldson said the stores program can be integrated with a university-wide on-line accounting system in the future.

Although several departments have on-line capabilities, stores is the first department using the on-line system for accounting. All others are for permanent records or reference information.

Stores uses the IBM 1033 printer, IBM 2740 teleprocessing console and IBM 1031 transmitter in its operations to the IBM 360/65 computer at the Data Processing Center. All terminal equipment is located next to the store counter.

A pre-punched data card for each inventory item is located in the bin where the item is stored. Each department has a pre-punched plastic badge with a count and order numbers.

Store clerks manually print quantity on the data card, only writing required.

In a typical transaction, a badge and a punched data card for each supply item is placed in the transmitter for each transaction. When transaction completed the sales slit is automatically and removed from the console by the operator, customer gets a sales copy.

All divisions of the campus son said approximately 40 cent of the sales volume from physical plant purchases.