6.0IX—An experiment in learning: 15 take part in programmed course

By Alan Pollack

Can a course programmed in a technical field succeed? This, according to Prof. Alan V. Oppenheim, is the question that occurred to Prof. Thomas S. Huang and has lain a little over a year ago. Their attempt to answer it led to the creation of 6.0IX, the unofficial name for a new experimental section of 6.01, the introductory electrical engineering course.

However, before 6.0IX could be solved, Prof. Oppenheim and Huang would have to solve their main problem: They were not sure just what they meant by programmed instruction. In its most common form, programmed instruction is a method of self-teaching in which the student learns by working through a set of problems arranged in a systematic order. After working a problem, or frame, the student checks his answer against the one provided. If he is correct, he proceeds to the next stage; if not, he is directed to a section of printed text which he must study to reach the misunderstood concept.

Supplement regular course

Prof. Oppenheim and Huang, took this idea and revised it to fit their own specifications. "The programmed exercises," explain Prof. Oppenheim and Huang, serve only as a supplement to the regular 6.01 program. They are designed neither to replace the lecture nor the personal contact situation. What they do replace is the reduced manpower its inherent money-saving feature. "On the contrary," insisted Prof. Oppenheim, "this time is far in the future for the present the programmed instruction section of 6.01 will remain purely an experimental.

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