Athena has often failed to meet deadlines. The IBM PC/XT was to be a shelf within which Athena's workstations would be built. High-speed on-processors and high-resolution graphics boards would be to the liking of the older IBM PCs. These plans fell through because of problems with the co-processor card. As ideas were then proposed to network the IBM PCs with IBM 4341 mainframes. The 4341s would have acted as file servers and network managers. IBM's role in Athena had to be rethought, over the summer of 1984, when it was decided that Athena would not be receiving the IBM 4341 mainframes the project had intended to use. The IBM 4341 mainframes were cancelled for a variety of reasons. Foremost, Athena was not able to support the machines. Supporting these machines requires a fairly trained group to operate and maintain the computers' hardware and software, Athena was already severely understaffed. Additionally, single 4341 mainframes would have required more floor space than Athena had available for entire clusters. But when Athena cited technical problems as reasons for scrapping the 4341s.

The Use of PCs

Although Athena is using 61 IBM PC/XTs in the clusters, the XTs are running terminal-emulation programs that make them functionally equivalent to Heathkit M110 terminals. By this time, most of the software Athena had to use was available on the M110s. The Heathkit terminals are more rugged than most terminals. In addition, students may use the PCs floppy disk drive to augment their file storage limit by storing data on removable floppy disks. This ability is important in light of the restrictive limits on file space in the new Student Center cluster (see Jan 22, 1985 story in accompanying Athena calendar). Currently, two floppy disks will hold more information than the standard Student Center account.

The remaining PC/XTs Athena received are from independent computer companies, and are not in place in the clusters. Some laboratories use the PCs as data acquisition devices. Other PCs are being used to run special stand-alone programs such as the Athena IDEs and the Department of Architecture.

The complete disposition of the project's 150 IBM PC/XTs has yet to be determined.

Athena's Failures

Although Athena has accomplished remarkable feats, it has fallen behind its original schedule. The current system bears only partial resemblance to its 1983 forecast. Athena announced in the summer of 1981 that by January 1985 between five and eight IBM clusters consisting of over 300 IBM Personal Computers would be available for campus use. Athena also planned to give accounts to every undergraduate student. Part of the reason behind the equipment shortfall is that Athena's two major suppliers: IBM. According to sources both inside and outside of the project, Athen