

Paul G. Allen School Early Space History

Ed Lazowska

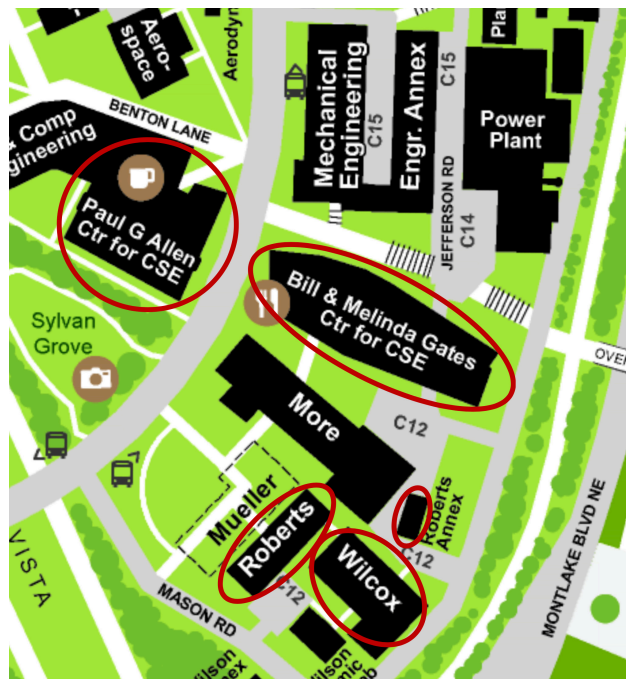
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What is today the University of Washington's Paul G. Allen School of Computer Science & Engineering was established by the University of Washington Board of Regents as the Computer Science Group – an interdisciplinary program authorized to grant graduate degrees and reporting to the Dean of the Graduate School – in March 1967. Jerre Noe was hired from Stanford Research Institute (now SRI International) in 1968 to lead the group (and to lead its growth into a full-fledged academic department with an undergraduate program).

When the Computer Science Group was established, it was allocated a random collection of space:

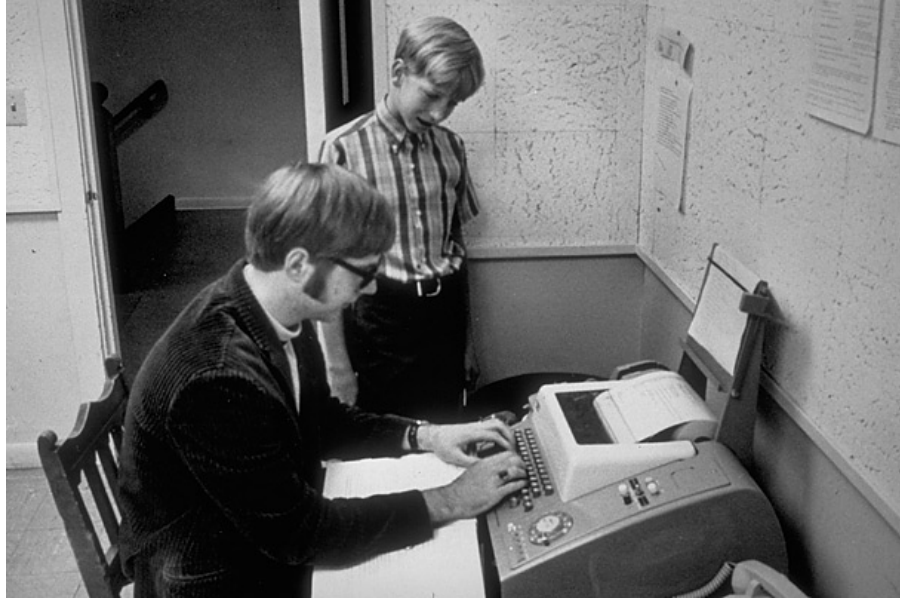
- Administrative offices, as well as the faculty offices of Dekker, Noe, and probably Traub, were on the mezzanine level of Roberts Hall (between the 200 level, which is the level of the main entrance, and the 300 level).
 - Roberts Hall was built in 1921 to house the College of Mines. It was known as Mines Hall until 1947. The basement featured a replica open pit coal mine where the Computer Science Group held its annual fall party welcoming new graduate students – called “The Pit Party” to this day, although no current members of the Allen School ever set foot in the pit.
- Alan Shaw’s office (Shaw was hired away from Cornell in 1971; he retired in 2000) was on the 200 level of Roberts Hall (the main entry level).
- The Computer Science Laboratory – a research computing facility for the Computer Science Group – was located in Roberts Hall Annex (now Wilcox Hall) 039.
 - Wilcox Hall was built in 1964 to house the UW Computer Center, a role it served until 1976 (although it was called Roberts Hall Annex at the time). A Burroughs B5500 was installed there as the main UW computer in 1966.
 - It was natural to locate the Computer Science Laboratory across the hall from the main UW computer room. The research system there at the time was an SDS Sigma-5 with 64K bytes of memory (!) and an attached storage tube graphics display. This is the laboratory used by Paul Allen, Bill Gates and their Lakeside colleagues – a laboratory from which they were banished via Hellmut Golde’s infamous 1971 letter (<http://lazowska.cs.washington.edu/GoldeLtr.pdf>). (The letter had been lost to the ages until Mr. Allen read from it at the dedication of the Paul G. Allen School in 2017 (video at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=10p4UgrUQrS9NeDsX4CGiBN9bAs7snSh1> – relevant segment begins at 17:30).)
- Baer’s office was in a hallway behind 039 – although Baer and Richard Ladner (Ladner was hired as a new Berkeley graduate in 1971; he retired in 2017) subsequently were moved to a now-demolished wooden house south of Roberts.
 - Baer, too, is the author of an infamous letter – a 1970 complaint to the Dean of the Graduate School in which he described his office as “a passageway between two doors, without windows, with a transparent pipe flushing water in front of my desk” (<http://lazowska.cs.washington.edu/history/baer.jpg>).

- Graduate students were housed in three locations: the now-demolished wooden house south of Roberts, the “Pit” in the basement of Roberts, and the “Yellow Sub” – a “temporary” structure that is still in use a half century later, recently housing the general contractor’s administrative offices during the construction of the Bill & Melinda Gates Center for Computer Science & Engineering. This structure is now referred to as “Roberts Annex” for no discernable reason (not to be confused with the “Roberts Hall Annex” noted above).



Bill Gates and Paul Allen used other computers on campus, and also at Computer Center Corporation (C³), a timesharing startup that was formed mostly by former UW students and employees and that boasted a then-very-advanced DEC PDP-10. C³ was located west of UW on Roosevelt Ave., at a site now occupied by Augusta Apartments, originally developed by Paul Allen’s Vulcan real estate operation (<https://www.bozzuto.com/apartments-for-rent/wa/seattle/augusta-apartments>).

Bill and Paul accessed these computers on-site, and also in some cases remotely using an ASR-33 Teletype terminal acquired by the Lakeside Mothers Club – site of several famous photographs of the high schoolers.



The Computer Science Group became the Department of Computer Science in 1974, and enrolled its first Bachelors students and moved to Sieg Hall in 1975. It became the Department of Computer Science & Engineering in 1989, moved to the Paul G. Allen Center of Computer Science & Engineering in 2003, became the Paul G. Allen School of Computer Science & Engineering in 2017, and added the Bill & Melinda Gates Center for Computer Science & Engineering in 2019.

The Allen Center and the Gates Center each was designed by Seattle's LMN Architects, each provided roughly 72,000 assignable square feet of space, and each was largely funded through individual and corporate philanthropy. In the case of the Allen Center, we had grown to the point where Sieg Hall, which had housed us since 1975, was providing only 30% of the space per FTE of our peers, and in particular we were crippled by a lack of laboratory space, as the field was becoming far more laboratory-intensive – the Allen Center addressed these needs. The Gates Center complemented the Allen Center: among its key components, beyond additional labs and offices, were vastly improved facilities for our burgeoning undergraduate program, a large number of spaces for small-group interaction, and (perhaps unique among Computer Science facilities at the time) a wet lab to support work in molecular information systems and other activities at the interface between computing and biology.

