What's up? Students crowded around the main Library foyer, one looking over the shoulder of another, as if there was a super sale going on. The atmosphere was vibrant with expectancy and there was a lot of excitement as students streamed into the Library. That was the scene at the commencement of term when the Library assumed its new image. The attraction? The new Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) terminals of course!

OPAC is one of the five modules of our new URICA Library system of information service. Through any of the twelve public access terminals conveniently located in the Library, staff and students can gain access to the wealth of library information. Indeed, our long time companion — the good old faithful Card Catalogue — which had served our needs since the inception of the Polytechnic, has been unceremoniously swept out of sight. The removal of these little neat rows of steel cabinets containing many a catalogue’s labour of love marked a milestone in the Library’s development. This reflected the confidence we had, not only in the data conversion but also the effectiveness of our Library system.

OPAC Features
OPAC provides the users with a new learning experience. They are now able to sink into any one of the comfortable interactive chairs for this novelty in the Library.

The system is result-oriented, responding to the users’ queries in the shortest possible time. The enquiries can be made through the Title, Author, Subject or Keyword approach. Apart from the standard cross references, a thesaurus of related terms, synonyms, homonyms and plural/singular forms can also be internally set up in OPAC to guide users.

ON-LINE REAL TIME is the keyword of the service where the user has online access to the database and at the same time all data is instantaneously updated. The result — a ‘dynamic’ database which provides ‘up-to-the-minute’ information on the Library’s holdings, inclusive of the latest acquisitions received or on order. OPAC provides more than just bibliographic information. Relevant data on reservations, loan transaction due dates, reservation and other information which previously were accessible only through requests can now be displayed on the terminal screens with just a few simple commands.

The management information system feature has also been put to use. This has assisted the Library in making decisions on user demand for specific types of materials, thereby enabling collection development to proceed in tandem with users’ needs.

Our record of statistics showed that in the month of July alone, there were 37,250 title searches, 12,959 author searches and 14,236 subject searches. Reservation of books has also reached an all-time high. OPAC has certainly drawn more users to the Catalogue and has helped books find their users!

Future Developments
The scope of the Library as an information provider will be greatly enhanced with the campus network soon to be implemented. This will make the Library’s database accessible through the network computers from any academic departments on campus. The Library will also be linked up with the Singapore National Library. (Continued on back page)

What Others Say...
* The important thing about information technology is its efficiency and effectiveness and the resultant productivity that comes from its implementation. OPAC is information technology itself. The accuracy and speed with which information is found is really remarkable. The fact that it cuts down retrieval time and time wasted on looking for information means that I can be more productive. The system allows me access to a lot more information than I thought available. There’s so much more cross-referencing going on right before your eyes. It’s so much more interactive, and gives an accurate impression of the Library’s resources. I found titles I didn’t know existed in the Library. It’s marvellous! I could just sit at the terminal for hours,” said Mr. Geoff Wilson, Head of the Educational Technology Centre.

On the question of the impact of the new system on the teaching and learning environment, Mr. Wilson has this to say — “It’s a boon to researchers. The timing is also right. We’re moving into the era of high tech and that means we need to keep abreast and get hold of information really fast. I’m now only waiting for the network link-up that will give me access from my own desk. Perhaps all this information could also be made available on our Bulletin Board.”

Joe Chua, President of the Students Union, has this to say of OPAC—“It is fast, user friendly and has certainly attracted many students to use the Catalogue, which the Card Catalogue has not been able to achieve. I hope that with easy access to information, my learning can be more effective.”

This new library system has enabled the Library to contribute significantly to the quality of teaching and learning in the Polytechnic. More important, it has stimulated staff and students to effectively exploit the resources of the Library.