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Stop refreshing, start waiting

Minerva adds new function to course registration

Jessica Shapiro

Posted: 1/9/07

Students may soon get relief from the mad dash to check Minerva and sign up for courses in the first weeks back to school. After effectively shutting down CourseAlerts.ca, a private Web site set up to do the same thing last year, McGill is expanding a waiting list feature on the course registration system in an attempt to streamline registration and relieve system slowdowns from the huge number of students logging on to register.

The feature was activated for the arts and science faculties in December, and current allows students in biology, art history, religion, psychology and political science to let Minerva keep their place in line, instead of hoping for a lucky break during the add/drop period. Waitlists are generally capped at 15 places.

The system sends waitlisted students email notices to let them know of their progress. When a spot in the desired course opens up, an update is emailed and the student is given a limited amount of time to log on and grab the spot.

The deadline varies from 24 hours to two weeks after the spot becomes available. If students miss the opportunity they are automatically removed from the waitlist and the place is offered to the next student on the list. The grace period is generous during the summer months and then gradually reduced once school begins.

Associate Registrar Anna Walsh, who helped fine tune and implement the waitlist system, said that the project began as a response to popular demand and that the system will improve Minerva's efficiency.

"I know from talking anecdotally to students," said Walsh, "that sometimes when they are really desperate, they will log on many times in a day to get into a course. Once they've got themselves on a waitlist, they won't need to do that so that should help performance time."

Curtis Dollis, U2 Political Science, said that he is unhappy with the current system and the amount of time required to keep trying to get into a course.

"I find it extremely frustrating that I have to go back and check the course availability all the time," Dollis said. "The fact of the matter is, I can't check every five minutes. If a space opens up and someone else checks right before I get to a computer, then I'm out of luck. If there was a waitlist for all courses I would definitely use it."

Walsh, who reported no bugs in the system thus far, said that the system has been working successfully.

Véronique Bélanger, associate dean of the Faculty of Law, has had experience with the waitlist system for a full semester. She said that the system has been beneficial towards students and the faculty

administration in two major ways.

"It helps to ensure that students aren't spending time 'course-swapping' with each other, and relieves the anxiety to check Minerva on a constant basis," Bélanger said. "The other great advantage to the system is that it allows us to determine the precise need for a particular course, whether 3 or 15 additional spaces are required."

Walsh said that there were no plans to add waitlists to every course at McGill, but added that by next fall most departments would be able to enable the feature for their courses.

-Additional reporting by Kayvon Afshari

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