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Students' service responds to scheduling woes

By: Caitlin Mahon / Correspondent

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Frustrated with the current registration system since his first year at the University in 2004, Steve Fernholz began developing software to allow students to register for classes with ease last April.

As a result, the Web site RUClassMate.com is now available for students to purchase to help make scheduling classes a breeze.

A Biomedical Engineering major graduating a semester early, Fernholz developed the system from scratch with the help of his brother, Massachusetts Institute of Technology student David Fernholz, and high school friend and University of Pennsylvania student, Brian Quimby.

"The development of an application like this is a team effort from start to finish," Quimby said. "Both Steve and I have strong backgrounds in computers. Building the service was simply a matter of applying our knowledge to a real world problem. We didn't like how inefficient and difficult Webreg was either."

Development lasted five months and the goal of the three developers was to have a version available for fall 2007 registration.

"We had some early adopters of the application then, and we're seeing the increased interest now with spring registration," Quimby said.

Fernholz began advertising the program with flyers on campus and through Facebook, and 175 students have purchased the system for the cost of \$7.99, Fernholz said.

"So far, I've received a positive response and a lot of interest from students," Fernholz said.

Although the site has generated interest, some students feel the site is not all that great.

"The site is a little confusing and kind of comes off as 'unsafe,' but I feel that if the creator of the site along with Rutgers pair up and tweak it a little this would help out students so much," said Maggie Nelson, Douglass College junior.

She said the idea of this kind of site is amazing, and she would be willing to pay \$7.99 the service.

The cost of the service is a small price to pay with the convenience it offers, and there are plans to reimburse students who purchased the program in the future if the University decides to pick up the program as a replacement of Webreg, Fernholz said.

With the features RUClassMate.com offers, such as automatic registration, scheduling combinations and options, a visual schedule with maps for each class, and all University courses imbedded within the service, Fernholz said, he hopes the University registrar will get on board with this service within the next year.

An appealing feature offered for users is an automatic timer, which would schedule your classes at a specific time or once a seat in a class opens, Fernholz said.

"We basically asked ourselves, 'what would make registering for classes really easy?'" Quimby said. "Once we've created a perfect schedule, we realized automatic registration was the icing on the cake. Also, if you could get into closed sections as soon as they opened up, it would save a great deal of headaches and trouble."

But not all students agree.

"The timer to schedule you for a course once it opens up is ridiculous," said Patrick Moloney, Rutgers College junior. "There are going to be a lot of people doing that if Rutgers picks it up. I've never heard of it and I wouldn't purchase it."

Moloney also said Webreg is fine and the automatic sign up would not make a difference because there will be people going for the same classes.

A similar version of RUClassMate.com for University deans will go into production if the registrar does decide to put up this program, enabling deans a degree of ease with scheduling for students, Fernholz said.

We are currently making plans for improving the service for the future, as well as expanding to other schools, Fernholz said.

"We'd like to make it so eventually you can select requirements, like a mandatory language or science, and it will fill in classes for you that meet your other criteria," Quimby said. "We're also working on converting the application into a Web based service, so students won't need to download anything. This is still a bit far down the road, but it's definitely the path we're going to take."

The cost for developing this service was negligible since we already had the software tools needed to design the application, Quimby said.

"All we really had to do was front the money for the hosting services and a domain," Quimby said. "Each of us worked on the project when we had the time."

RUClassMate.com is now available for students for the spring 2008 semester, and production of a similar service is under construction for MIT and UPenn, Fernholz said.

"ClassMate was created because some students got tired of an old, hard-to-use system," Quimby said. "Anytime you think something can be improved, create a solution and go

for it!"

Despite efforts by creators, some students feel the Web site is not safe.

"I personally would feel safer knowing that my schedule is in the hands of Rutgers and not students who designed a new site," Nelson said. "We as users don't know who these people are or what they're doing with the site."

She also said although she feels that the creator's intentions are good, creating schedules via RUClassMate.com is not safe.

"But with things you hear on the news about Facebook and Myspace stalking I think that creating my schedule via this site and not knowing who is able to access my information just kind of freaks my out a little," she said.

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