

# Computer May Aid Registration . . .

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cents per student.

Washington State has improved their program during the past five years so as to not only provide balanced sections, good utilization of classroom space, free time requests, but also to satisfy 70 per cent of all section (time and professor) requests. The cost has been reduced to thirty cents per student.

But Washington State was not without its problems. Clyde Simpson, Washington State registrar says "after four years of computer registration I can detect an undercurrent of anti-computer sectioning." Students feel they have the right to get into those lines and fight.

The resistance, besides being in the minds of the students, shows up in the percentage of courses added or dropped after the computer registration.

What does the computer do? Before registration ever begins it finds a place in its memory for every course, lab, and discussion session offered. After marking the course and perhaps the section they desire, the student returns the job to computers which must begin taking re-

quests and matching them with its memory of available space.

The machine will backtrack to find non-conflicting sections until every possible solution is tried if necessary. Free time requests are honored and as a final touch, lunch hour conflicts are checked.

The computer program can do what students have been fighting to do in a matter of one or two seconds. In that amount of time it has made up to 5,000 decisions for the student. For the entire student body this amounts to nearly fifty million course decisions.

It helps solve the problems of 113 freshmen waiting four hours to get into a 9:30 English composition class of 35 spaces while the 4:30 class remains absolutely empty. The computer could satisfy 31 per cent of these people and the others would find themselves in sections throughout the day.

When Purdue adopted class sectioning, they found only eight per cent of their sections closed at the end of registration compared to a previous 30 per cent.

Here, at the University, the two people

registration are Carlson and Clifford most directly concerned with computer Constance, registrar and past member of the Computer Registration Advisory Committee.

Constance admits "as far as scheduling students into classes is concerned, there is nothing that can do it as fast—with certain reservations about desirability—as the computer. And that really is the basic target we are shooting for now."

In part Constance sees the problem of registration to now exist in the departments. In his own words, "That's where the lines are. This is partly no fault of the departments. Partly the kids who are scheduled, say, to sign up for a PE activity at 11:30, if they haven't any place else they have to go at 10:30, they are going to line up over there—wait an hour. This looks like an inefficient line, but actually it is just the students' preference. The situation in the departments is not nearly as bad as it looks sometimes."

Many students would argue that this is the problem and quietly add that a three hour wait is necessary for many PE

courses.

Ironically the registrar states that "whenever we make comparisons between methods of registration, it will not be basically on the costs, it will be on efficiency."

There is, however, truth in this statement. Poorly planned computer sectioning programs can cause as many problems as they solve.

Constance has been concerned with the fact that students have not been given the opportunity to choose sections under most programs, resulting in a large number of adds and drops which, in effect, could negate the advantages gained.

Programs are now being written which do give the student that opportunity. Even the add-drop problem has been adapted to the computer.

The objection which cannot be overcome is the increased costs incurred as the registration process is drawn out. Computers can only handle data economically in large runs. Getting students to make firm choices is the problem to which Constance does not see a solution.

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