

CAROLINA NEWS

# Office of the Registrar plans to improve Web capabilities for registration, student use

BY CHARLES PRASHAW  
SENIOR WRITER

The Office of the Registrar has seen the future, and the future is the Internet.

New to this semester's registration, which was held April 10 to 21, was an on-line help desk manned by personnel from the registrar's office.

The help desk works like America Online's Instant Messenger program — students can talk directly to people from the registrar's office.

Personnel can answer students' questions or send links to Web pages that have the information students are seeking.

The help desk received an average of 15 questions a day during registration, Registrar Barbara Blaney said.

Besides implementing the help desk, Blaney said the registrar's office has a couple of other projects on the drawing board.

Among these projects are plans to program the VIP and Argo Web sites to recognize double majors as well as minors that require certain classes. Currently, the Web sites recognize only a student's major.

Another of Blaney's main concerns is that the Argo Web site isn't updated in real time. Because of this, students can't tell if classes are full until they try to register online.

Other future plans include:

- A way to request official transcripts over the Internet.
- A means for professors to gain access to the names, e-mails, addresses and telephone numbers of upcoming students.
- Some cosmetic work on Web page designs.

Blaney said that eventually, the Office of the Registrar also hopes to implement a university-wide Blackboard program on the Argo and VIP Web sites.

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**Derek Johnson**  
media arts freshman

Blackboard, an Internet program used by some professors to communicate with students, is already being used for a few classes.

However, Blaney said the university plans to expand the program to encompass many USC programs.

Blaney said she has focused on improving Internet registration because a majority of students prefer registering that way.

About 90 percent of USC students register over the Internet, she said.

Blaney said some of the Internet projects haven't yet been completed because the registrar's office, like any other department, has to compete with many other programs for funding.

Media arts freshman Derek Johnson said: "I didn't have any problems with the [VIP Web site], and most of the classes I wanted, I got."

"Registering online is easy, but I wish there was some way to combine the two Web sites where you actually register and the classes are listed," he said.

Blaney said only minor problems were reported with the VIP and Argo Web sites during registration, including a period of several hours April 14 when the system went down because of human error.

# Attempts for the unionization of higher education produce struggle

BY DAVID WARSH  
COLLEGE PRESS EXCHANGE

The drive to unionize higher education is coming to a boil. The United Auto Workers last week called a day long strike at eight campuses in California despite ongoing contract negotiations. And on Tuesday, an election at New York University will determine whether the UAW will represent graduate assistants there.

It will be the first-ever union election at a private university — and perhaps the starting gun for many more organizing attempts.

Union representation of graduate students has become common enough at public universities in the United States. It exists in at least 10 state systems, including California, New York and Massachusetts — but state statutes considerably limit the scope of collective bargaining.

The NYU election is the first to proceed under federal law, which could insert the UAW as a third party into every potential issue of academic judgement that exists between students and their professors — from grades to assignments to recommendations.

Whatever happens next, the NYU episode will be a big testing point for the U.S. system of higher education.

The basic facts are simple. NYU is a big, prosperous second- or third-tier research university, organized into 13 schools. Of NYU's 35,000 students, about 16,000 are undergraduates, another 16,000

are seeking masters and professional degrees, and about 3,000 are Ph.D. candidates.

About 1,600 graduate students serve as graduate assistants, helping faculty members teach, grade papers and perform research. They receive cash (up to \$20,000 a year), free tuition (worth \$20,000), and a discount at the university book store. If they are headed for a Ph.D. (about half of them are), they typically spend two years taking courses, then must pass a qualifying exam and spend three or more years to write a dissertation.

The nub of the matter is this: Are they students? Or employees?

The university says assistantships are a vital part of students' training, for teaching and doing research are what the doctorate is about (though of course increasing numbers of Ph.D.'s go into industry or government work.) Thus a research assistant becomes a better researcher by doing research for her or his professor; a teaching assistant learns to teach by teaching.

The students, at least those who organized the affiliation campaign, see it differently. They view themselves as cogs in a system, a captive pool of cheap labor, easily exploited and neglected. They want smaller workloads, bigger stipends, paid health care and subsidized housing.

The UAW agrees — and has quickly sought to link the graduate student election to attempts to force NYU to use

union labor in the construction of a new dorm, as well as to negotiate a new contract for the university's clerical workers. Lisa Jessup, the UAW organizer for student elections, told a rally the other day, "They need to understand the word 'rat.' They're not a 'private university in the public service.' They're a rat corporation in the service of scabs."

The regional director of the National Labor Relations Board sided with the students who petitioned for an election. Reversing 25 years of precedent, Daniel Silverman ruled earlier this month that NYU students in fact were employees and therefore entitled to vote on whether to join the Autoworkers. He cited an NLRB decision last year that permitted interns and residents at the Boston Medical Center to organize.

NYU quickly appealed the case. For one thing, the university argued, the precedent was ill-applied. Boston Medical house staff spend 80 percent of their time caring for patients and just 20 percent in lectures, conferences and classes, whereas NYU assistants spend just 15 percent of their time on their assistantships and 85 percent on their own work.

There is little doubt that graduate students have been ill-treated in recent years. The Yale "grade strike" in 1995 — when undergraduates' grades were withheld — established that. The group at Yale never sought an election, and since then a cornucopia of benefits has been made available to all graduate

students, not just paid assistants.

Meanwhile, unionization has proceeded steadily in the public universities, where state laws ordinarily stop short of granting academic unions the same sweeping powers to bargain they would enjoy under federal law. When UAW representation was won last year in California after 16 years of trying, some 10,000 graduate assistants on eight campuses were added to the union rolls. That brought union membership to 30,000 of the estimated 100,000 graduate assistants nationwide.

It is possible to imagine all sorts of unforeseen consequences if the unionization of private universities proceeds — or if it doesn't. For instance, students suddenly classified as employees could find their tuition benefits subject to taxation, which is not the case so long as it is described as financial aid. Then again, universities could dispense with graduate assistants altogether, preferring to hire out-of-work graduate students and post-docs as "adjunct faculty" instead, thereby dramatically restructuring the Ph.D.

There are larger ramifications. Eight years of labor-friendly appointments by the Clinton administration have made a difference in the way labor laws are administered. There is the prospect of more change if Al Gore is elected president. The man behind the attempt to organize the universities is John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO.

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