Elon University's Weekly Student Publication

The Pendulum

Students stress during OnTrack shutdown

Kaitlin Ugolik
News Editor

Last Wednesday, many students lined up inside Alamance to register for classes manually while OnTrack was down for several hours.

Chris Fulkerson, assistant vice president for technology, said he was in a meeting at around 9:20 a.m. when he started getting phone calls that the system was down.

OnTrack, a creation of Datatel, is the university's "Web front end;" basically a way to access information and conduct registration online.

On Wednesday, OnTrack slowed down and stopped twice, once after a reboot, but the rest of Datatel was running fine, according to Fulkerson.
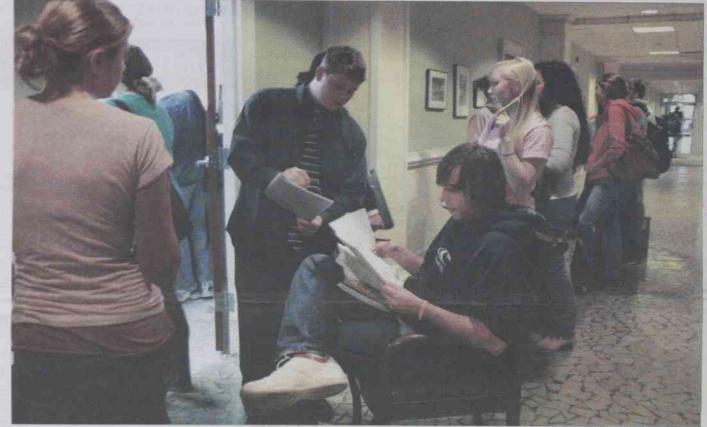
"People want information and an e-mail right away, but I don't know what to tell them sometimes," Fulkerson said. He didn't have enough information to explain the situation until after a 5 p.m. meeting with technology staff members and the Registrar.

"It took a while to get information from the Datatel technicians and our staff," he said.

Some people didn't experience any problems with registration on OnTrack. It was only when more than 100 people logged on that the system, "came to a crawl and stopped," Fulkerson said.

"I've been here for four years and this has never happened," senior Rob Olson said.

Datatel programmers made corrections to the system until 9 p.m., but they could not test the system's capability to handle the number of people that would use the system during registration times.

Trevor Kelly, applications/Web programmer, said he and his colleagues, "basically applied a bunch of tweaks to the system."

They removed all Datatel users from the site at 2:45 p.m. and restarted the database. They also added another "listener," or channel, for the database to "listen" to just OnTrack requests.

"The reason this registration was so much different," Kelly said, "is that Release 18 [the newest version of OnTrack], which we upgraded to in May, has so many more listeners and the only chance to test it was yesterday. Release 18 has a lot of benefits with its architecture, but it took a toll on performance."

Kelly and his colleagues expanded the amount of processes that could run simultaneously on the site from 128 to 512, borrowing the extra processes from Datatel.

"They clamped down on the rest of the university using the system so that students could use more," Fulkerson said.

At 7:30 a.m. Thursday, 150 to 160 people registered in seven minutes, according to Fulkerson, a sign that the system was working correctly.

Friday morning the time display on OnTrack was represented in the wrong time zone. Fulkerson said this did not affect anyone's registration, because the actual time was correct.

Ashley Barnas/ Assistant Photo Editor
Students stand in line Wednesday to manually sign up for classes at the Registrar's Office after OnTrack shut down.

Ask@Elon program, students not asking

Kaitlin Busch
Reporter

Students used to trek across campus late at night, in the cold or rain to Belk Library to ask for help on projects and papers. Now, because of a new program, they can find answers to their questions as easily as they chat with buddies online.

The easiest way for students to get help is to add ask@elon to their Instant Messenger buddy list. Students can ask questions and get answers through an instant message, all without leaving

Photo by/ Photographer
Students who do not go to the library can ask questions online through AIM for answers with the Ask@Elon program.

Davidson eliminates loans

All financing for students in school provided through grants and work-study programs

Whitney Bossie
Reporter

Books, room and board, spending money, meal plans, lab fees and tuition. The life of a college student isn't a cheap one.

Loans can help students finance college, but they can also leave young graduates saddled with debt and anxiety. Currently, college students across the country borrow $53.8 billion every year.

Davidson College, a small liberal arts school located near Charlotte, is trying to alleviate the financial strain of higher education. This year, Davidson completely eliminated student loans from financial aid packages. Students' financial need will be met 100 percent through grants and on-campus employment.

That's no small feat for a school with an all-inclusive yearly tuition of $40,814.

Dan Freeze, a 2004 Davidson alum, said the new initiative will take away some of the stress of the college experience.

"With room and board and books and everything, it's a lot. I was always wondering, 'Where is this money going to come from?'" Freeze said. "I struggled."