

THE REENA FOUNDATION
PRESENTS

CAREER DAY

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1989
3:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M.

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TORONTO, ONTARIO M6A 1V4
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Students de-enrolled, VR-ES drop option temporarily stopped

by Susan Vanstone

The office of the registrar has temporarily discontinued the drop option of the Voice Response-Enrolment System (VR-ES).

Approximately 70 students complained they were dropped from courses by transactions they say they did not make. As a result, use of VR-ES for fall/winter 1990-91 is tentative, and students must now withdraw from courses manually through the appropriate department.

A memorandum from registrar Lynda Burton to members of the administration of Atkinson college and the faculties of arts, education and fine arts states "... the capability to use the VR-ES to drop both full and half-courses in the fall/winter 1989 session will be discontinued ... [due to] concern regarding a rash of recently reported VR drop transactions which the students concerned — who are active in these courses—assert they have not initiated themselves. Until such time as we have a satisfactory explanation for these occurrences, and have taken appropriate action(s), the drop feature on VR-ES will remain disabled for fall/winter 1989."

Manager of student records Susan Salusbury said the unexplained course withdrawals began in late September, with the last reported incident occurring October 23. Students informed the registrar's office and student programmes office about discrepancies between courses they knew they were enrolled in and those listed by VR-ES or registration information forms (RIF) mailed in mid-October.

"The withdrawals are random and all over the map," explained publications coordinator Lorie McRae. "It's not like half the intro psychology course was dropped."

Both Salusbury and McRae said an investigation over the next couple of weeks should determine the cause of the false transactions, but would not go into further detail about the investigation. Salusbury said the situation "could not have been foreseen." The results of the investigation will be submitted to the vice-presidents committee, who will decide if VR-ES will be used for fall/winter 1990-91 enrolment, and what possible changes will be made to the system.

McRae and Salusbury said the most probable cause is an individual obtaining access to student information and maliciously dropping students out of courses. Both noted that there could be no personal gain by this because the unexplained withdrawals continued after the final date to add full-year courses by VR-ES (September 22), and the deadline to enrol with permission of the course director (October 20).

Also, access to the student records database by computer would be difficult because it requires passwords, and has no menu to prompt a hacker.

McRae and Salusbury added that a technical problem is improbable, but they are not ruling out anything. They said VR-ES wasn't released for public consumption until every aspect of the system was tested "inside and out," and no similar problems existed when VR-ES was used for winter/summer 1989 enrolment. Furthermore, any "bug" would have surfaced before September, and no similar default has occurred at the more than 100 North American post-secondary institutions using a similar enrolment system.

McRae and Salusbury said the problem could have been caused by those who were given students' numbers and birthdates to enrol for them over the summer or mistakes by students, but "students are now more sophisticated about the system," according to Salusbury.

Students who were falsely withdrawn from courses are being re-enrolled without financial penalty, and given a "pseudo-birthdate" to use for VR-ES.

Students can still list courses or add winter term courses through the system. McRae and Salusbury suggested all students using VR-ES list their courses, and if there is a discrepancy, go to the office of student programmes of the appropriate faculty. Student programmes will be doing a RIF mailing to those students whom VR-ES transaction records show dropped courses between the last RIF mailing and October 23.

McRae and Salusbury said the unexplained withdrawals are not numerically significant enough to reduce government funding of York.

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