PeopleSoft: Usability Issues of the Student Enrolment Services (SES)

Jeff Caird, Ph.D., Professor

Usability Methods

The following evaluation was done as part of a laboratory for Psychology 425, An Introduction to Human Factors Engineering.

Evaluation methods from usability engineering were used to determine difficulties that students had with the Student Enrolment Services (SES) registration system provided by PeopleSoft and the University of Calgary.

Specifically, heuristic evaluation and usability testing were used to identify most problems and prioritize common issues. Most Fortune 500 companies use usability engineering to improve their products and services.
Overall Impressions of PeopleSoft SES

Which interface would you prefer to use to register (only those who have used both systems)?

INFOnet—100%
PeopleSoft—0%

How much more time did you spend to register with PeopleSoft, than INFOnet?
Mean = 1/2 to 1 hour

One student said their brother went to U. of Victoria because he could not use PeopleSoft to register at the U. of Calgary.

SES Usability Problems

1) The back button returns the user to a blank screen and previous screens are lost. The net effect causes the student to go back and forth without sufficient navigation support.
SES Usability Problems

2) Course number search is by catalog number not course number. Students relate to course number and not to catalog number. Using search while registering for classes requires multiple unnecessary steps.

3) Wait listing causes conflicts with other classes that are open. It is possible to be wait listed in laboratory, but not in the class, which is confusing.

4) Registering for each semester must be done separately. Trying to register for both at the same time causes a number of system errors. For instance, viewing another semester such as Winter 2008 comes up as Fall 2007. Full year courses are particularly problematic.
SES Usability Problems

5) Error messages are not sufficiently specific.

6) The “Fix Errors” button returns the student to the main schedule page.

SES Usability Problems

7) Information about why a student can’t register when adding a class or after being denied access to it is insufficient. For instance, “you do not have the prerequisite” would be helpful.

8) To add a class, you can’t just click “add class” while searching, instead the class number has to be written out or remembered (not possible).

9) To “swap” a class, you must drop a conflicting course first and you lose your status in a course. Conflicting labs require a solution from Departments.
SES Usability Problems

10) Payment requires writing everything out. No record of payment is generated. A series of tick boxes is presented to the student to confirm or deny particular expenses, which is confusing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Item Terms</th>
<th>Outstanding Charges (Sec)</th>
<th>Pending Payments</th>
<th>Total Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payment Plan Changes</td>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
<td>116.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment Plan Changes</td>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
<td>116.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment Plan Changes</td>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
<td>116.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Registration</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Grad Tuition</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Health Insurance</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Grad Dental Insurance</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad and RAS</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>125.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Grad Health Insurance</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>405.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees</td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees</td>
<td>Summer 2006</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees</td>
<td>Summer 2006</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Tuition</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Tuition</td>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,240.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Currency used is Canadian Dollars.

11) Old material is not removed. For instance, all previous exam schedules are still available.
12) Poor navigation support (e.g., too many open windows, menus not helpful, left bar not helpful).

13) When an unfixable problem occurs or the SES is too unusable, the student has to go to the Registrar to fix the problem (a.k.a. “Service Stop”). This requires about 15 minutes to 3 hours of time by the student.

More online support is needed that addresses frequently encountered problems.
SES Usability Problems

14) Unhelpful language: What is SACR? “[O]ther academic dropdown” contains many helpful items but is not adequately labeled. Blackboard is called “Learning management systems”

15) The home button does not return the student to the login page or student centre, the latter is preferred.

16) Weekly class schedule does not print well/easily. A print preview or organizational view would be helpful too.

SES Usability Problems

17) Shopping cart metaphor of registering is demeaning.
SES Usability Problems

18) Help button needs to be huge not tiny. The “Help” was not.

Top Five Problems of SES

Students were asked to rank the top five problems with SES that they expect to see fixed the next time that they have to register. Solutions to these problems are suggested previously.

1) The Back Button
2) Searching for Classes
3) The Home Button
4) Resolution of Laboratory Conflicts
5) Registering for BOTH Fall and Winter Terms
University of Calgary students are clearly frustrated and angry by having to use the Student Enrolment System (SES).

The SES registration system should be fixed immediately based on the prioritized input from this usability evaluation.

Ongoing usability testing is also highly recommended and should be written into future PeopleSoft contracts.