Planner

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Need:

From observation and personal experience it seems evident that the current tools available to aid students in course selection do not do enough to ease the process. These difficulties arise in scheduling classes for a particular term and also for developing an overall plan of courses to take to complete various major and institute requirements.

Description:

The project has multiple goals that likely will be accomplished in a stepwise fashion. Firstly, a student is currently able to enter a set of classes that he/she would like to take in a given semester and the set of possible non-conflicting schedules are displayed with the student able to go through the possibilities to find the optimal schedule (the algorithm used could also be adapted by the registrar to give students schedules with minimal conflicts instead of making masses of students switch recitations at the beginning of the term). This takes out most of the guess work that other tools such as Picker (picker.mit.edu) have inherent in them. Along the same line of thought I have already implemented multiple features that will allow students to have more complicated schedules generated for them, although the user interface (UI) is not currently implemented and ideas are being user tested. For example, a student can ask the program to find the schedules that have 6.824 or 6.035 and also have a HASS class in course 11. Aside from the power of being able to quickly construct schedules for the current semester another goal for Planner is to be able to help students plan which classes to take on a multiple semester basis, accounting for classes that are only offered in particular semesters and years as well as major and institute requirements.

Impact:

The impact of Planner will likely be a diminishing of student frustration with, and time committed to, the process of scheduling classes and allow students the opportunity to take classes that they may have missed out on otherwise (for example not realizing a class is only offered in the spring or every other year). The classes students take and the times that they have those classes are a major part of their experience at MIT, and Planner's goal is to make setting those classes up as easy as possible.

Scale Up:

The prototype currently has most of the functionality for selecting classes for a given semester already implemented. Therefore, most of what needs to be done is UI testing and development as well as adding additional features. As for long term planning, much of the work still needs to be done in terms of selecting the correct amount of information to give students to allow maximal flexibility and usability. Once the major components are in place I think it will be important to try and integrate Planner with some of MIT's other systems that keep track of student course information to make the experience of pre-registering and registering for classes, as well as keeping track of major requirements as easy as possible. Most importantly, as with any product, it will be important for the product to develop over time and be receptive to user input so that Planner stays both relevant and optimal for the task.

Team: For now the team is just me, Adin Schmahmann. I am a sophomore majoring in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, as well as Physics. When I see a problem that I know I can fix I like to try and fix it, especially when it can be fixed with some fairly simple software. I've worked at a medical device company acquired by Hologic, multiple labs around MIT and have had leadership experience as a camp counselor. Throughout my time working at these institutions I have always managed to end up designing tools or teaching instructions in order to fix some of the inefficiencies that we deal with regularly, of course doing my best to be sensitive when the system being replaced has become ingrained in the institution. I am looking forward to this project coming through to fruition and I hope you are too.

License:

GNU General Public License (GPL)

Prototype:

Available at adin.xvm.mit.edu/planner/index.aspx

Software requirements:

The website is known to run properly with browsers that have up to date CSS3 implementation, such as Chrome, Firefox, or Safari. Additionally, the website is best used on screens with resolutions above 1024x768 (ie: a modern desktop, laptop and many netbook, monitors).