

OCC students to register by touch-tone



Charles Kurzer, OCC registrar, uses only a class schedule and touch-tone telephone to demonstrate how the college's new voice re-

sponse registration system will work in the winter semester.

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

Let your fingers do the registering. That will be possible for 80 percent of students returning to Oakland Community College for the winter semester.

"All they need is a touch-tone telephone. They can call from home or work, or from a pay phone. They could even call from a mobile phone in a car or boat," Charles W. Kurzer said.

As OCC's registrar, Kurzer is in charge of getting 28,000 students into 200,000 credit hours of courses. It's a highly visible service, one that generations of collegians often have cursed.

With the new technology, OCC students in January 1989 will be able to register by telephone in five minutes at any time during a 24-hour day. Currently, they must travel to one of the five OCC campus locations, park and go inside to register during specified hours.

THE BOARD of trustees recently accepted the low bid of Computer Communications Specialists Inc. of Norcross, Ga., to provide a voice automation system for a bit more than \$71,000.

"I'm disappointed that it can't be billed (by telephone) to a credit card," trustee Norma Ross said.

Kurzer replied that OCC doesn't have the data base — yet — to bill tuition to a credit card, but that could come later.

"There will be people who will not

want to use this. We will work with them," Kurzer said.

IN HIS office, Kurzer provided a script as to how telephone registration will work:

The student calls a number listed in the course catalog. Twenty-four response units are available to take 24 calls simultaneously. The responses are tape recordings.

"Welcome," the recorded OCC voice says. "Please enter your student identification number followed by a # sign."

With that information, the computer replies. "Your name is . . . Enter your first course selection followed by a # sign."

The student punches the telephone numbers indicating the department, number and campus — for example, BIO 153, O.R. 054.

"You have just registered for Biology 153, Section 054, on the Orchard Ridge Campus. Next?" the recorded voice answers. The student continues registering until done.

IF THERE is a problem, the voice says, "I'm sorry, that section is filled. Please enter an alternate section number." Or: "Would you like to hear a list of other open sections that match your schedule?"

Suppose the student has limited money for tuition. At any point, he or she can punch in a number listed in the class schedule to get a total bill for tuition and fees. Many students set themselves a budget and keep registering until their resources are used up, Kurzer said.

Besides saving travel time, telephone registration has other advantages to the student.

"Students will have more time to think through the 'perfect' schedule," Kurzer said.

"And studies elsewhere have shown this will reduce the drop-add work 40 percent." Drop-add is the period after classes start when students drop one class and/or add another.

FOR OCC, the benefits also are great, the registrar said:

- The student retention rate is increased. Among community colleges, dropouts are a perplexing problem because college officials never know if the departed student happily achieved his or her goals or was frustrated by the complexities of the system.

- Students tend to take more credit hours, leading to efficiencies of scale for the college.

- Drop-add work is reduced.
- No longer does a clerical staff have to be put together for a few days of intense work.

VOICE RESPONSE registration grew out of technology used in the banking industry, said Dorothy Hopkin, OCC vice chancellor for information systems.

In Utah, Brigham Young University pioneered voice response registration in 1984. Now it is in wide use across the country.

Nancy Honaman, former registrar of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., studied the response, to telephone registration and found an "overwhelming" degree of satisfaction, Hopkin said.

House votes 'Big 4' control of bus system

Control over public transportation in Detroit and three suburban counties would be handed over to the region's four most powerful elected officials, under a bill approved by the state House of Representatives.

The House voted 78-20 last week to replace the current 15-member Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority board with a four-member commission made up of Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara, Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and Macomb County board chairman Mark Steenbergh.

It's essentially the same bill drafted two years ago by Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Union Lake. That bill was passed in the Senate but died in House committee.

THE BILL was vigorously opposed by lawmakers from four counties — Washtenaw, Livingston, St. Clair and Monroe.

They are currently represented by two members of the SEMTA board, which sets policy for the seven-county region.

"The outlying counties, who are the most successful today in providing transportation, . . . will have no voice," on the new commission, complained Rep. James Docherty, D-Port Huron.

"All we've asked for is one representative for the four out-counties," said Rep. Jerry Bartnik, D-Temperance.

AMONG AREA lawmakers, only Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton, opposed the measure. Rep. Justine Barna, D-Westland, did not vote.

Kosteva agreed with Docherty and Bartnik that removing the four small counties meant "they no longer would have a voice in transportation policy."

Kosteva added, "I've always been a strong advocate of a single, regional transportation authority. This reorganization would put that further and further away, by encouraging each entity to set up its own transportation system."

"I didn't love the bill, but I voted for it," said Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield.

"It may give increased help for our senior citizens. I'm not positive

that will happen, but nothing much is happening now."

THE BILL's sponsor was Rep. Curtis Hertel, D-Detroit, chairman of the House Transportation Committee. He said the current SEMTA board has been unable to effectively deal with the region's transportation problems.

Hertel said the board is unresponsive to the needs of the people because its members are appointed rather than elected.

"Obviously, when you look at the history of SEMTA, the system down there hasn't worked," Hertel said.

He said the public will be able to put pressure on Young, Murphy, McNamara and Steenbergh to force politicians to improve the tri-county area's bus system.

The so-called Big Four initiated the legislation.

In an appearance before the House Transportation Committee, they argued the new setup would make it easier for SEMTA to lobby for state and federal funding and consider possible tax increases to add buses, light rail and possibly a future Detroit-area subway.

UNDER THE proposed SEMTA reorganization, each of the four leaders would have one vote on a Regional Transit Coordinating Council. But all policy decisions would require a unanimous vote of the RTCC.

SEMTA operations, meanwhile, would be split into two parts. Detroit buses would be controlled by the city, and the suburbs would remain in what is now SEMTA.

The counties of Monroe, Livingston, Washtenaw and St. Clair, which now account for only about 2 percent of the system's ridership, would be allowed to stay in SEMTA, contract for bus service or withdraw completely from the seven-county compact established by the Legislature in 1977.

Despite pledges from the Big Four that they will not reduce bus service or cut off the flow of federal funds to outlying counties, officials in the area said they remain skeptical because the promises are not included in the legislation.

"All you need is one change in elected office and the whole deal is out," Bartnik said.

State to track birth defect kids

The state Department of Public Health will be responsible for locating children with birth defects and referring them for appropriate treatment under a bill approved by the Michigan Legislature and sent to the governor's desk.

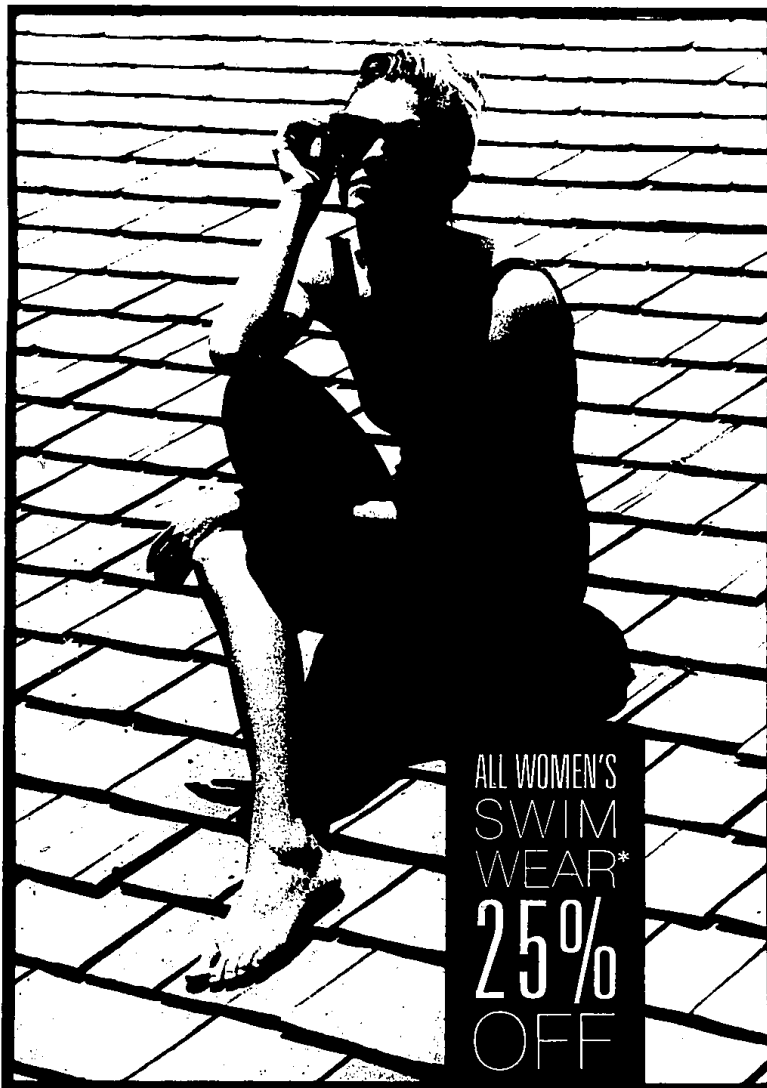
State Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, sponsor of House Bill 4707, said the tracking system would lead to prompt referrals of children and families to vital diagnostic and treatment services.

Public health officials estimate 5 percent of babies are born with major birth defects.

"Early intervention is so valuable in these cases. An effective system that identifies, tracks and follows up on children could make a dramatic difference in thousands of lives," Honigman said.

"For example, a tracking system would allow health and social service agencies to be aware when a child was born with defects linked to a mother's alcohol or drug use," he added.

The legislation, if signed by Gov. James J. Blanchard, would take effect immediately.



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