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ABSTRACT

A collaborative project in a college freshman technical writing class produced multiple benefits to those involved. The project, designed to be an experiential and investigatory writing assignment rather than a perfunctory one, challenged students to identify a campus problem regarding enrollment procedures and to work through the problem-solving steps of investigating the problem, analyzing the data collected, and proposing a workable solution. Students were asked for a progress report, a final report, and an oral presentation for the report to the college enrollment committee. The benefits of the project were that (1) the administrative staff received a report that described a problem in detail and supplied an easily accomplished solution, (2) the university students received help during the next enrollment period, and (3) the writing class members experienced a comprehensive writing exercise rather than fragmented assignments. (A copy of the project description is appended.) (AEA)

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Writing for the World of Work:

An Experiential Project

Michael Hogan

Southeast Missouri State University

A Paper Presented at

The Fourth Annual Workshop on the

Teaching of Technical Writing

Touch of Nature

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

October 17-18, 1980

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Writing for the World of Work:
An Experiential Project

Michael Hogan
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Cape Girardeau, Missouri

In closing his interview in the 1980 October issue of Saturday Review, E. L. Doctorow comments,

I see form as the expression of the specific book. I don't see some sort of general technique that pre-establishes itself. I've written five books and what happens is you know less and less. Each time you realize you don't know what you thought you knew. It's terrifying. The things you know and have accomplished are invisible to you, and all you're aware of are the outer edges of your own capability and the darkness out there. So you always have the sense of yourself as an absolute beginner. I think that's probably the best place you can be if you want to continue: not sitting complacently in the middle of your own light, but off where it's really scary!

His description of the writer's vantage point is, I think, very much characteristic of the position occupied by the teacher of technical writing. Each time I begin a course, the certainty that existed in the course just completed proves a will-o'-the-wisp. And the new course project, with its novice writers, makes me just as much a beginner as are they. For though I may know the forms of technical writing, the content of the writing that we will do, its success, is "invisible." Perhaps, we teachers of technical writing, as much as the writer of fiction, often find ourselves where it is "really scary."

The question is not so much one of what we will teach but how we will teach for the writing content. On the advanced levels, we can depend on many of the students to generate the content of their writing out of their own projects in their major courses or even internships. But on the freshman level, those students are often not well enough involved in their major

courses to be able to generate their own projects. Any writing projects we ask them to do will often reflect what they see in their own texts.

In seeking to avoid writing which might be only perfunctory in topic as well as format, I try to direct my freshman writers to the experiential, the real, investigatory project as the basis for their writing. If the project is large enough, both my job and the students' job will be simplified when they can collaborate in the investigation. Collaboration can allow the students' to exploit their specific strengths and avoid areas where they are weak but others strong or knowledgeable. The experiential project assumes particular importance in view of the role invention plays in the writing process. As Dennis R. Hall explains, "The material, content,³ substance, argument, information (call it what we will) of composition must be generated in order for the functions of disposition and elocution to take place."² Or as one of my colleagues is fond of saying, "You can't write writing." The experiential project helps me to avoid relying only upon rule-governed procedures and formats apply only as they are needed.

I believe that every university campus offers rich resources for collaborative class projects in technical writing. It is the rare student who has no complaints about the administrative and educational systems he is subjected to. What we can do as teachers of writing is to give our students a constructive outlet for voicing their views on problems and needs in the university as they themselves experience them. Through technical writing, students can go beyond mere complaint to constructive suggestions for solutions and detailed procedures for instituting these solutions. I have observed that students find a much more receptive audience when they are able to provide detailed reports rather than briefly lodged complaints. But the ultimate benefit is that students perceive how the subjects for writing, that is for

investigating, exist around them, no matter what kind of organization they find themselves in.

My course in freshman technical writing (Writing for the World of Work) will exemplify many of the abstract points made above.

During the late enrollment for the 1980 spring term, students at our station (course cards for English courses) kept asking what they should do next and where they should go after picking up their cards. We found ourselves no more knowledgeable than the students. Faculty knew only what was required of them at their own tables. Clearly, a problem was manifested: accessibility of information regarding enrollment procedures. Signs for the different stations were often hidden by the crowds and lines of students, and the students ignored the instructions in the enrollment bulletin because of the small print in crowded instructions.

Obviously, the subject for investigation is best generated by the students themselves, but we can sometimes facilitate the process by pointing up problems. This process can suggest other areas that students might be interested in. In future courses I shall endeavor to sound out the students regarding problems they encounter on campus. As a result of this project, I see that school manuals, instructions, and regulations all furnish sources for writing projects.

Discussion of the enrollment problem led quite naturally to the first assignment: students demonstrated their understanding of the problem and the project by assuming the role of a manager in writing a memo to a staff member (the class members themselves). In the memo, they requested that the problem be defined, suggested areas for and the manner of investigation, and asked for both a progress report and a final report to be submitted by

specified dates. The dates established a time commitment for the project.

This memo prompted further class discussion of the project pertaining to sources of information and methods of reporting the information. This discussion itself led to the very important consideration of problem solving techniques. Thus, while examining the principles of problem solving, we simultaneously examined the class project and outlined the procedures of investigation, specifying our problem and exploring avenues for its resolution. Each student then worked up an outline of the project, programming the plan of attack as guide for the entire semester.

Together, we determined that the sources of information would include:

- 1) the enrollment bulletin,
- 2) the student advising personnel
- 3) the enrollment committee, and
- 4) students throughout the campus.

These sources suggested the following assignments:

- 1) a memo report analyzing the format of the instructions in the enrollment bulletin, as well as the accuracy of its data,
- 2) discussion of interviewing techniques and memo reports on the results of the interviews with the advising personnel and the enrollment committee members, and
- 3) a questionnaire distributed to students at random, pertaining to late registration.

The bulletin instructions themselves suggested a solution to reduce confusion in enrollment: a flow chart illustrating enrollment procedures (the students' movement through time and space). By designing the flow chart before conducting the interviews and the survey, the students could efficiently collect evaluations on both the existing procedures and our proposed solution.

As with the previous tasks, we found that this solution generated its own writing requirements. We had to investigate flow charting techniques and apply them in devising an elegant chart based on the enrollment instructions and variant practices discovered through the interviews. The important

point here is that our investigation itself generated the forms of writing so that the forms were means -- not ends.

Obviously, not every student could conduct an interview because of the limited number of interviewees, but there were enough other duties so that each student could select a task which she felt comfortable with or had expertise in. Some students distributed the questionnaire about campus, the results of which other class members then tabulated. The data generated by all the tasks were reported to the class by memos, all of which we duplicated so that all class members could build a data file.

As our data increased, we faced a new requirement: analyzing the data collected. In order to control the material, the students had to analyze, classify, compare, contrast, and finally assimilate the material. The arguments and the structure for the final report began to come into focus as the students shared their analyses in class. They discovered that they did not all interpret the data in similar ways, but through class discussion, they were able to develop classification schemes for the raw data such as points of disagreement between interviewees, suggested modifications of the enrollment procedures, modifications for the flow chart we had devised, and points of agreement which could be used to build a persuasive argument in the final report to gain acceptance of our solution. This analysis led to the construction of charts in which the students categorized the data, enumerated the separate comments, and checked off how many of the interviewees had mentioned that point. In this manner, the students were able to see just how strongly each point was regarded by their sources. The significance of this activity is that developmental techniques for argument in the report grew out of the data rather than being artificially derived from models and haphazardly imposed in the writing.

At this point, both the students and I were ready to take stock of what we had accomplished according to our initial plan of attack (the problem solving outline) and to determine what remained to be done before we could begin the rough draft of the final report. This analysis prepared them for the progress report. At this stage we were able to tie up loose ends, pressuring a few procrastinating students to complete their tasks.

Discussion of the final report allowed me to emphasize the format in terms of the audience who would receive it. Here the students were able to see that format is not an end but a means for persuading particular members of the audience. Never before had it been so easy to discuss structural components and their function in relation to rhetorical purpose.

Using the memo reports, the flow chart, and the analytical charts illustrating the raw data, each student then wrote a rough draft of the final report. These reports were read by all students, who noted the strengths and weaknesses of each. We analyzed why certain papers or sections in the reports were successful. Then they rewrote their papers, attempting to improve their first draft by incorporating what they had noted as successful in each other's papers. Again, they shared this draft in class and selected the two most successful papers. One student was given the responsibility of drawing up a final draft incorporating the best points of these papers. This process illustrated the value of making the writing a shared activity rather than an individual effort, subject to the limitations of the lone writer. After all, even professional writers have the advantage of an editor.

The final activity involved working up the oral presentation for the report. In class discussion, we developed the content and format of the oral report. In this way, the entire class shared in constructing the oral report,

not just the individual who met with the enrollment committee.

The benefits of the project were threefold.

The administrative staff received a report which described a problem in detail and supplied an easily accomplished solution -- a flow chart which could be inexpensively reproduced and handed out on the day of late enrollment. In addition, immediately after hearing the oral report and receiving the formal report, staff members sent letters to the class expressing appreciation for their work and accepting the flow chart as a solution for what had long been a problem.

The university students received a simplified document during enrollment, illustrating their activities in what had always been a confusing and frustrating day.

And the class members experienced a comprehensive writing exercise rather than fragmented assignments. Because they had a goal, they perceived the formats in a functional relation to rhetorical purpose.

Such an activity allowed the students to develop such an identity that they developed a class logo. They had pride in what they did.

As for me, during the project I was able to move momentarily away from Doctorow's terrifying dark, where all we know for sure is "the outer edges of our own capability." At the project's end, I and the students knew what we had accomplished. But now I am in a new semester--last term is already invisible--we are in a new project, "off where it's really scary."

References

¹Hilary Mills, "Creators on Creating: E.L. Doctorow," Saturday Review (October 1980), p. 48.

²Dennis R. Hall, "The Role of Invention in Technical Writing," The Technical Writing Teacher, IV (Fall 1976), 15.



SOUTHEAST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

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English Department

May 8, 1980

To: Enrollment Committee Members
Advising Center Staff

The freshman English classes, Writing for the World of Work, have been working on a project for the past few months to design a flow chart to supplement the enrollment procedure.

Enclosed is a report of our work and a copy of our proposed flow chart. Also included are the results of a survey we conducted of a limited number of the student body about their feelings regarding the present enrollment procedures and about our project.

We are submitting this report to you so that you will consider our idea on simplifying the enrollment procedures. We think this supplement will help everyone involved with enrollment.

Please do consider using our idea.

Sincerely,

Class members,
Writing for the World
of Work (WWW)

A Proposed Flow Chart for Undergraduate Enrollment

A Project Prepared by
the
Writing for the World of Work Class



Southeast Missouri State University

Submitted to:

The Enrollment Committee
The Academic Advising Staff

Monday, May 5, 1980

Approved by Michael Hogan
Associate Professor of English

DISTRIBUTION

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Alton Bray - Registrar
Sheila Caskey - Dean of Graduate Students
Robert Harper - Assistant Registrar
Kevin Kettler - Student Representative
Don Krueger - Manager of Data Processing
Cleo Mabrey - Director of Student Teaching
James Molvie - Student Representative
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Thomas Risch - Dean of Students
Fred Snider - Chair of Psychology Department

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to illustrate the Regular Undergraduate Enrollment process and to point out problems with the printed instructions found in the Bulletin. The Writing for the World of Work classes (WWW) determined that the best way to illustrate the enrollment process would be a flow chart (see Appendix B, p. 6) which would help students to better envision and more fully understand this process of movement through time and space. As Debbie Mitchell, an Advising Center adviser, commented, "A visual aid is the best method for teaching people."

Problems

Both the written instructions and the Regular Enrollment process are confusing to the enrolling students. The instructions in the Bulletin for Regular Enrollment do not always coincide with present enrollment procedures. Dr. Risch, Dean of Students, mentioned that some instructions in the enrollment Bulletin are vague or incorrect. Even with improved instructions students would still have difficulty completing the enrollment process since it is a long and time-consuming process.

Scope

The objective of the WWW class project is to illustrate the present instructions for Regular Undergraduate Enrollment, not to change them. Our proposed flow chart is based on the 1980 Spring Bulletin Schedule of Classes. The WWW classes interviewed University Administrators and the Advising Center staff members. We also conducted a limited survey (see Appendix A, p.5) of the student body to obtain their views about the flow chart, the enrollment instructions, and the use of the flow chart as an aid in the enrollment process.

DISCUSSION

Present Enrollment Procedures

For the student, two processes form the present enrollment: reading the written instructions and enrolling.

Printed Instructions

The printed instructions in the Bulletin direct the student through enrollment in the University Center. Through these instructions, the Enrollment Committee has attempted to supply the student with enough information to reduce the confusion of the enrollment process.

Enrollment Process

Taking place on the day prior to the first day of classes, enrollment is basically centralized on the third and fourth floors of the University Center. Signs direct the students through enrollment. If they have any problems during the enrollment process, monitors and instructors are present to direct and assist the students.

Problems in Regular Enrollment

Despite the aid of monitors, signs, and instructors, problems do exist in the enrollment process.

Printed Instructions

Through our interviews, survey, and observations, we have discovered problems in the existing system. The printed instructions are often confusing since they do not always coincide with the actual enrollment process. Dr. Risch, Dean of Students, stated, the instructions are often vague or incorrect. For example, although the printed instructions direct the student to the Ball Room to pick up the permit-to-enroll card, this card is now located at a different station. Another problem with the instructions has been that they were printed too small, being difficult to read and causing students to lose their places when following them. However, in the 1980 Fall Bulletin the print has been enlarged, an improvement that should be continued.

Enrollment Process

Students also encounter problems in the enrollment process. Of all the students surveyed, 57% of them did not read the instructions. Of this number, 33.3% did not even know the instructions existed. As a result, many students go through the enrollment process completely unaware of what to do. Many of those who do read the instructions do not understand them. The process for them is therefore confusing, consisting of many long lines and forgotten procedures. Another problem identified by Mr. Bray is that too many students go through enrollment with only a minimum number of monitors, instructors, and advisers to

assist and direct them. For many students, enrollment is a confusing, exhausting and time-consuming process, creating a negative impression of our University.

Recommendations

Our proposed flow chart exhibits those recommendations made by the staff we interviewed, rectifying discrepancies between the written instructions and the actual enrollment process.

Some of the administrators and advisers made suggestions to the WWW classes that could not easily be incorporated. These suggestions include supplementing the flow chart with photographs of the different stations, and changing the flow chart to a "floor diagram flow chart." These procedures, the WWW classes determined, would be too expensive, too time-consuming, and too complicated. In addition, Mrs. Gragg explained that only one sheet should be given to the students because if students were given three or four they would become confused and not see the importance of each paper.

Other feasible recommendations which can be implemented by the Enrollment Committee consist of

- 1) rewording the printed instructions to make them more clear and concise, and
- 2) handing out the flow chart to all the people involved with the enrollment process and all faculty and staff members.

The WWW classes feel that these recommendations are useful, but they can not implement them themselves. Therefore, we recommend that the Enrollment Committee implement them.

CONCLUSION

Findings

The WWW classes through interviews with the Academic Advising Center advisers and University Administrators, and a limited survey of 341 students, found that a majority approved of the flow chart. From the survey we discovered that 57% of the students did not read the instructions, the major reason being that they were too time-consuming. Out of the 43% that did read them, 50% understood them. But 60% of the students not understanding them explained that they were too confusing. The majority of those students who neither read nor understood the instructions enrolled by following the lines of students. The most positive response to the flow chart is that 88.6% of the students surveyed would use the flow chart for the enrollment process.

Summary

On the basis of the information gathered through the interviews and the survey, the WWW classes determined that a flow chart effectively clarified the Undergraduate Enrollment instructions, making the enrollment process more efficient and more enjoyable. Therefore, we ask that the Enrollment Committee adopt our proposed flow chart, distributing it to students on the day of enrollment.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire and Results	5
Appendix B: Proposed Flow Chart.	6

STUDENT SURVEY

1. Have you ever completed regular enrollment (the day before classes start)?
52% YES 48% NO
2. When you enrolled, did you read the instructions, as given in Example A?
43% YES 57% NO If NO, why did you not read them?
 a. 33.3% Did not know they were in the enrollment Bulletin
 b. 17.5% Print too small
 c. 37.3% too time-consuming
 d. 11.9% other _____
3. If you read the instructions, did you understand them?
50.5% YES 49.5% NO If NO, why did you not understand them?
 a. 34.3% too long
 b. 59.7% too confusing
 c. 6% other _____
4. If you did not understand the instructions, how did you get through enrollment?
 a. 36.5% followed the lines of students
 b. 22.7% went with a friend
 c. 31% relied on enrollment monitors
 d. 9% other _____
5. If you relied on enrollment monitors, did they answer your questions correctly?
62.3% YES 37.7% NO
6. Do you feel that a flow chart, such as Example B would help you to enroll more efficiently?
85.3% YES 14.7% NO If YES, how should it be made available to the students?
 a. 14.3% printed in the Bulletin
 b. 23.8% handed out at the door on registration day
 c. 61.9% both
7. If you had the flow chart, would you use it?
88.6% YES 11.4% NO
8. If you do not like the flow chart, why not?
 a. 37% difficult to understand or follow
 b. 45.7% no more helpful than the instructions
 c. 17.3% other _____
9. What is your class status?
 a. 29.9% freshman
 b. 26.1% sophomore
 c. 19.9% junior
 d. 24.1% senior

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0141181.g002

1. Those who choose to complete the process on the dates prior to regular enrolment should go to the Learning Service in Kent Library and the call entrance of the library.

3. In addition to presenting up testimony, each person will be asked to verify or correct information on a standard directory card and have the ID card updated.

June 16

For All Students Who Did NOT Register in Advance --

Picture also isn't for fillers, not all 'sorts.

- 21 There is no permit-to-employ time for you, resident of. Pray in the
22:2000

- A PHYSICAL EDUCATION ACTIVITY COURSE (SPORTS) IS INCLUDED IN (AIRM STUDENT'S) PROGRAM. ALL THE REQUIREMENTS HAS BEEN COMPLETED.

3. Pass the General Information card to each individual department involved in your list of subjects. (Department course and stations are located in the area designated.) The department officer will give you a course card, if available, and write the course and section number, title, etc., in the appropriate section of your yellow General Information card.

2. When you have all your course tests, exams, your schedule of classes in chronological order, in one schedule section of your white General Information card. Be sure to write your ID card number in year born section. Put your social security number in the upper left hand corner of the white General Information card (on the streetcode side). PLEASE WRITE TO BE SURE THAT YOU ARE RECORDING THE CORRECT SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER. This is your identification number.

- IF YOU ARE COMPLETING DEGREE REQUIREMENTS IN MAR. 25K INF CASUALTY FOR A SENIOR CARD, the graduation fee is \$25 for one degree and \$10 for each additional degree. Subject to transfer without notice. The deadline for payment of the graduation fee for the Spring 1980 Semester graduation is March 23, 1980.

- b. Any student not having a permanent ID card is to have one made in the University Center, Main level.

3. Go to the National Reader in Kent Library to have your ID card relicited and obtain your books. You must have your yellow General Information card, fee receipt, and either your ID card or temporary ID card with you or you cannot obtain your textbooks.

NOTE: Your fee receipts, ID card, and yellow General Information card are valuable and may be needed later. It will be to your advantage to have them available for future use.

An additional charge of \$15 for late enrollment is effective January 15.

DATE PROGRAM CHANGED: December 10-14, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Students who advance register have the option of making a program change prior to their advisor appointment. These program changes can be made by appointment (appointment slots will be distributed at the Program Location, Office of Program Council) or by appointment will be made by phone on February 10-12, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. During the period of early program changes, Adviser's Center Personnel will be assisting program change costs for all students. Although, a request for a change of section does not require the adviser's signature, other changes (courses dropped or added) may necessitate a signature from the adviser. IT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR AN UNDERCLASSMAN TO BE DEFERRED TO THEIR ADVISOR FOR THE APPROVED RATION THAN BE APPROVED BY THE ADVISOR CENTER PERSONNEL.

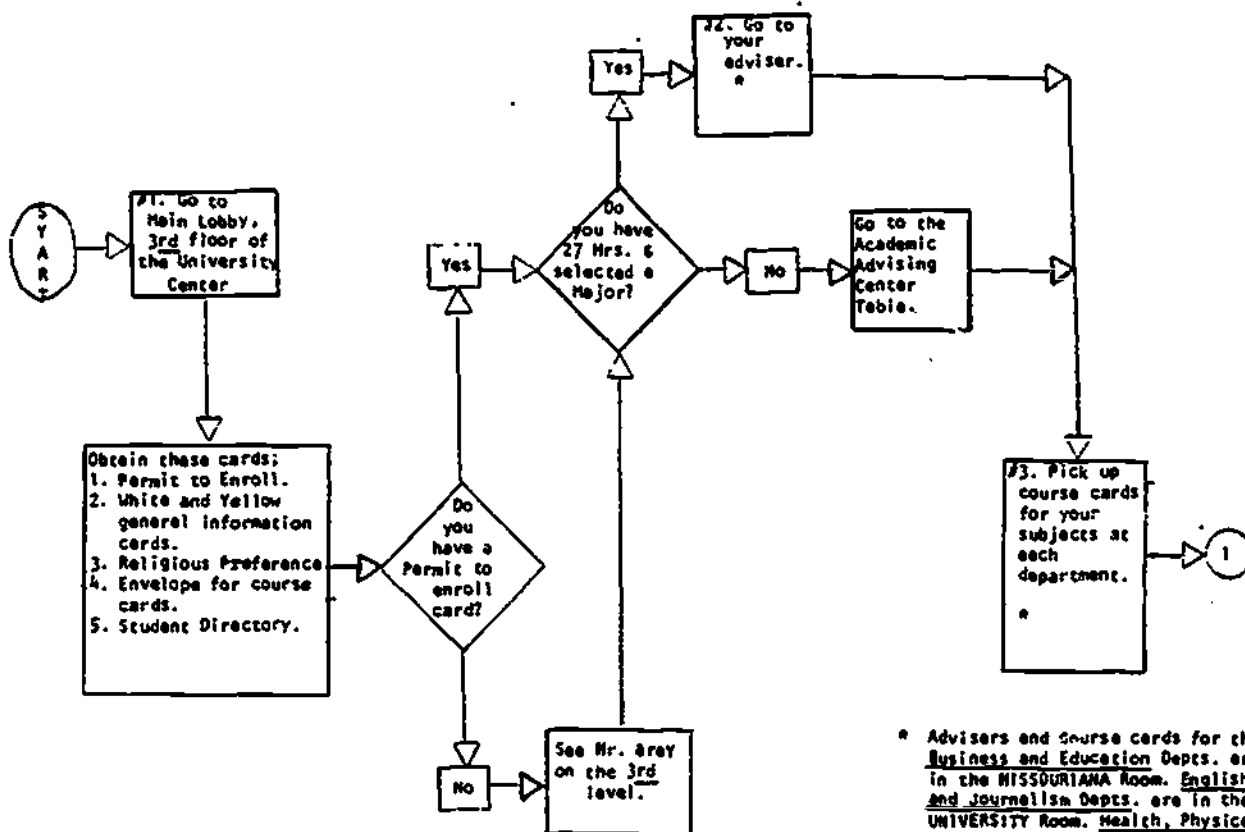
IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT STUDENTS MAY MAKE PROGRAM CHANGES ONLY ONCE DURING THE EARLY PROGRAM CHANGE PERIOD.

AFCCA RECORDING CHART--January 15, 1955 a.m.

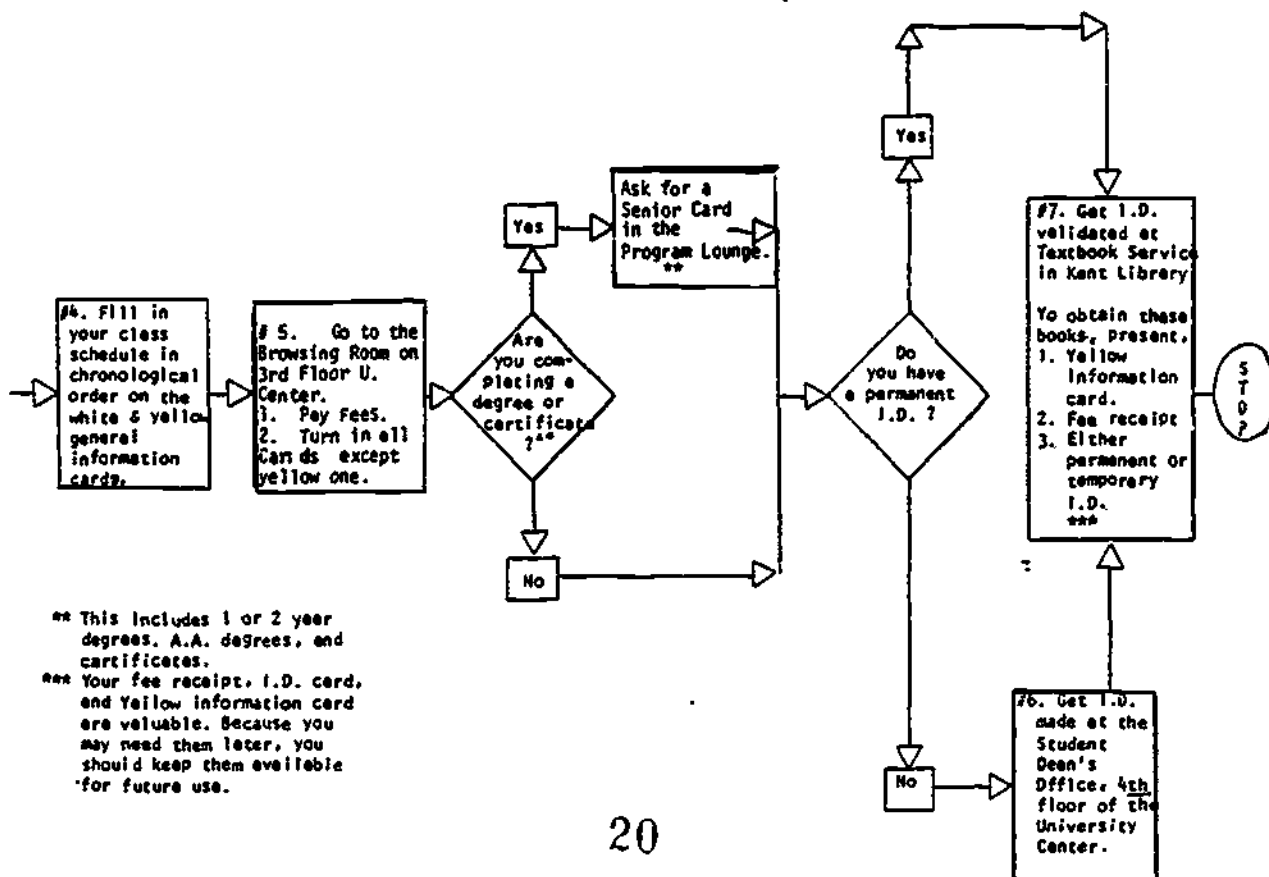
Students who need to make a program change but are unable to do so by December 18 should complete the process on Tuesday afternoon, January 15 from 1 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. according to the steps outlined below.

The location for program changes is the Ballroom, University Center.

UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT DAY:



* Advisers and course cards for the Business and Education Depts. are in the MISSOURIANA Room. English and Journalism Depts. are in the UNIVERSITY Room. Health, Physical Education and Recreation Depts. are in the RIVERBOY Room.



** This includes 1 or 2 year degrees, A.A. degrees, and certificates.
*** Your fee receipt, I.D. card, and Yellow information card are valuable. Because you may need them later, you should keep them available for future use.