

# The New York Times

## Tech-Savvy Baruch College Students Seek an Edge in Registration

By [ARIEL KAMINER](#) - February 4, 2013

Wall Street companies use [high-speed trading](#) software to generate billions of dollars in profits. Fans of performers devise their own programs to help their favorite stars win online popularity contests.

So some [Baruch College](#) students tried using a similar method to gain an edge in signing up online for a new semester's classes. But instead of getting seats in the most popular courses, they got themselves in a bit of trouble. And so did the next few students who tried it. And the next.

In all, 19 Baruch students were told by the dean of students' office to stop what they were doing, immediately. The customized computer script they were using to automatically log into the college's course-registration system and check — and check and check and check — for openings in sought-after courses was creating so much digital traffic that it threatened to crash the computer system for the entire [City University of New York](#), of which Baruch College is part, said Arthur Downing, the school's chief information officer.

By the time technicians first notified Mr. Downing that there might be a problem, two student accounts had already queried the online registration system almost a million times. He said he wrote back, tongue in cheek, "Gee, they make me so proud."

Baruch officials declined to name the students.

Dr. Ben Corpus, the dean of students, sent out an e-mail last week warning of a "serious violation" of the City University's policies on computer use, which among other things forbid activities that could interfere with the system or other people's ability to use it. Reached by phone, he said that the school had not yet settled on a penalty for those students who were involved, but he emphasized that none of them had shown any malicious intent.

No one was trying to steal other students' private information or to corrupt the computer system. In fact, he said, they were not even trying to hide their actions, having signed in under their own names.

"From the students' perspective, it was really news to them that what they'd done was a violation of our computer-user policy," Mr. Downing said.

He added, "Because they didn't see that what they were doing was nefarious, I think there was a little bit of pride in the fact that they came up with it."

They were not alone. Liz Campbell, 21, an operations-management student, said news of the efforts made her feel good about her college. “You want to go where there are a lot of smart students, and they kind of outsmarted everybody,” she said.

Joe DeSimone, 23, an industrial- and organizational-psychology student, took that sentiment further. “They’re basically being penalized for being smart,” he said. “They should be rewarded.”

Even administrators could not entirely condemn the students’ resourcefulness at figuring out how to adapt a real-world strategy to their own goals. “We don’t want to see this harm their careers,” Dr. Corpus said. “If they can help us while they’re here, that would be very beneficial.”

Nate Schweber contributed reporting.