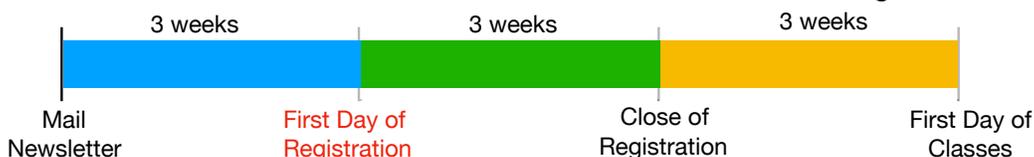


Thoughts on the Evolution of the Registration Process

Until a few years ago, the “first day of registration” was 3 weeks after the newsletter was mailed. Registration closed 3 weeks later. Classes began 3 weeks after that. 9 weeks after the newsletter was mailed, an 8-week term began.



For years, a few registered **early**, many registered on the **first day**, others continued to register throughout the **registration period**, and there were always a few **late** registrations.

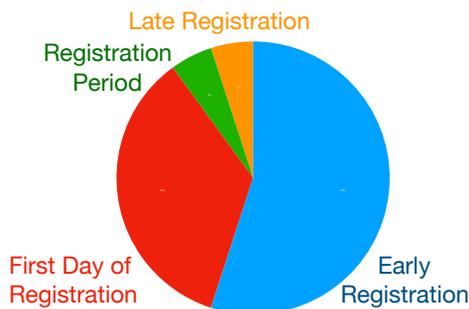


Even in those years, **three weeks after the newsletter was sent, random selection was used to admit people to a few oversubscribed courses.**

By 5 years ago, most of our members realized that to get into the popular courses, one must register early. Quite suddenly, **90% or more of registrations** were submitted **on** or **before** “the first day of registration.”

At the same time, total enrollment increased.

There had been no change in the way CVEC handled registrations, but oversubscriptions grew.



Recognizing the new realities, we decided we didn’t need 9 weeks before the start of classes; and we redefined the “registration period” to coincide with the three-week period after the newsletter, during which nearly all members sent in their registrations.



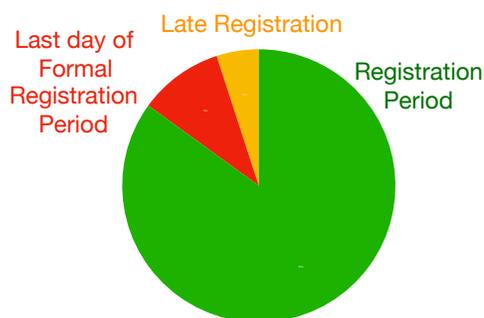
What stayed the same?

90% (or more) of registrations arrive in the 3 weeks after the newsletter is distributed, and oversubscribed courses are filled by random selection at that time.

What changed?

The day three weeks after distribution of the newsletter (formerly “the first day of registration”) is now called “the last day of the formal registration period.”

Many people share the perception that we made a change that created oversubscriptions. It ain’t so. Our members learned how the system worked, and adjusted accordingly.



Term after term over the past five years, I talked and listened to dozens of people who were not admitted to a chosen course. Most members, though disappointed, appreciate that the current system fairly “spreads the pain.” I know that changes to the registration process will be considered as time goes by. That is for the Board to decide. Before I leave I want to say, “Be careful.”

The November 10, 2000, CVEC newsletter reported, “The courses about China and Italy both had a waiting list long enough to fill another class.” That was nearly 18 years ago! A decision was made early in CVEC history, to treat all registrations received by a given date about three 3 weeks from the distribution of the newsletter as if they arrived at the same time. On that date, if demand exceeded supply, random selection was used to fill the course.

Random selection gives no member an advantage over other members. Every alternative to our current registration process that I have heard sacrifices that broad equality of opportunity. But people are uncomfortable when they feel they have no control, and in random selection people have no control.

I want to address the simplest alternative - “first-come, first-served” - a familiar but arbitrary system. Some suggest speed of registration can determine who is most “worthy” of admission to a course, or serve as a proxy for motivation. I believe all our members are equally worthy. And there are plenty of highly motivated registrations delayed by mobility-impairment or “the digital divide;” and plenty of serendipitous early registrations. Based on input from the Board, random selection was tweaked to avoid turning away first-time students (so their first experience of CVEC is not rejection). We prevent people who take three or more courses from getting into multiple oversubscribed courses. Neither of those policies would be compatible with a first-to-register process.

Demand, competition for space, disappointment of those not able to get into a course - those things would not decrease with first-come, first-served. It would give some people an advantage, some a sense of control. Just as our members adjusted the timing of their registrations in the past, the bulk of our registrations not affected by mobility impairment or the digital divide would migrate to the days or hours after the courses appear online. (I once received a check with a request for a fall course in early June, many weeks before classes were announced in the newsletter. There could be more of that - maybe requiring a new arbitrary “start date” and “registrations received on or before that date....”)

We don't presume to admit members by merit, to judge who is most worthy. Our forbears devised a system that treats all members equally. I urge caution in making changes.