Penn Course Alert Plus

All features of Penn Course Alert and so much more!

* Trade courses – Once advanced registration, the courses in high demand are usually filled up and people end up not getting the courses which they really wanted. However, at the same time, you are willing to give up a course to take another one which someone else is willing to give up for the course you have. But how do these two meet? PENN COURSE ALERT PLUS! With our unique feature of trading courses, you can actually find people who are willing to give up one of the courses you want and take one of the courses you’re looking to give up. All the pains of writing FB posts which no one even reads nowadays and ultimately not finding someone who can trade courses with you are now gone with Penn Course Alert Plus. If you think about it, it’s just like Tinder but for courses :)
* Preserve and share notes – Tired of losing important lecture notes and finding it a tedious task to share them with friends? Penn Course Alert Plus solves this problem with ease and finesse. Now, you can -
  + Convert handwritten notes to PDFs with our state-of-the-art software.
  + Save and store notes for each course on our cloud for easy access, anywhere, anytime
  + Share those notes with people who need them via our website

Having ever-accessible, ready-to-share, formalized notes all in one place truly makes Penn Course Alert one of a kind.

* But, we thought why stop here? Let’s make PCAP the one-stop education destination for all students! PCAP also offers students the option of selling their textbooks on our website. Just mention the condition of the book, the asking price and your contact information and see the buy offers from underclassmen pouring in! This helps in satisfying needs of both sides – sellers are able to sell their books in an organized, timely manner and buyers are able to get the books at a much cheaper cost as compared to the market price!

All in all, PCAP proves to be a one-stop educational-needs destination for all students, making course selection, course trading, making organized notes, saving notes, sharing notes, buying and selling textbooks as easy as pie!

As incoming freshmen at Penn, our first impression of Penn was from the various student Facebook groups, like CS@Penn or Class of 2023. Amidst announcements of the variety of initiatives that Penn students were involved in, however, we noticed one specific type of post over the summer: course registration, ie. "Does anyone have CIS240? I'd be willing to trade any of my courses for that. Dm me!" At this time, many people who could not get into the classes they wanted used Penn Course Alert, an app that would send them a notification whenever a spot opened up. Still, this tool has the most basic functionality

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To improve students' course searching process, we replicated the basic features of Penn Course Alert and targeted two new features: course schedule uploads and course trading. Our web app sends a course availability notification via email and optionally, text. On top of that, students can upload a course schedule as an iCalendar, which they would export from Penn In Touch, the site where students select courses. This enables Penn Course Alert Plus to check if an available course fits in the student's schedule before sending a notification. Additionally, we have coded the groundwork on the back end to support course trades in the future: when one student requests a course that another student wants to swap out, our emailing service would set up a time for them to simultaneously drop and re-enroll in their classes at designated time. This feature would become the new interface for the disorganized Facebook posts that we observed this summer.

We built the front end of Penn Course Alert Plus with HTML, CSS, and Bootstrap, and the back end in Nodejs. Student information is stored and accessed from a Google database. All in all, having access to the Penn open data API was critical to our project; we used it to get information about course codes, meeting times, and more. Working with Penn's API was a new experience for some of us, who had not created API endpoints or parsed JSONs before. Additionally, a major challenge for us was to write the email and texting services, since no one in the team began knowing how to do it. We read many docs, took apart some boilerplate projects, and went through a lot of trial and error to get our code to work. On the flip side, the payoff was not only satisfying, but actually crucial to the ability of our app to help Penn students.

We hope that with Penn Course Alerts Plus, students who want to switch out their courses--all Penn students, really, since no one gets their preferred schedule after advanced registration--will have an additional and reliable option to do so. What have we achieved and what will we achieve? Less Facebook posts and less frustration.

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