The Montclarion » Blog Archive » Want to Print? Get in Line

by Gerald Flores and Ratanjot Rekhi

A line of 20 students wraps around the fifth floor computer lab of University Hall. Three minutes pass; some students stand rigidly and clutch the straps of their backpacks with both hands. Five minutes; other students start to lean against the clear glass walls of the computer lab and peer in at students using computers. Seven minutes; the line inches three steps forward as each student’s face wears a grimace.

Watch video of students expressing their concerns about the shortage of printers on campus.

“My freakin’ class starts at 10,” says Iman Coachman, 20, a business major to her friend while four people stand in front of them in line. The clock above the elevator doors reads 9:53 a.m.

Coachman folds her arms across her chest and begins to tap her right foot. Her jaw stiffens and her eyes become fixed on the clock.

“Get to class on time or show up late with the hand-outs we were supposed print out?” Coachman asks her friend. “We’ll probably get points off for being late or be totally unprepared for the lesson, so either way we’re screwed.”

Coachman takes a deep breath; she signals to her friend by raising her eyebrows and both students start to move their feet toward the fifth-floor stairway.

There are five computing labs with printers open to students on the Montclair State University campus, totaling 10 free printers accessible for use. With more than 18,000 students at Montclair State University, the current student to printer ratio is 1,817 to 1, the highest of five area colleges within a 16-mile radius of campus.

“There are approximately 30 computers per dedicated printer,” said Stacia A. Zelik, director of technical support at MSU. “Also considering the push to go green and save the planet by not printing everything, [I think the amount of printers in the labs are enough.]”

Zelik is in charge of how many printers are used in the computing labs and also what printer make and models are used. She was unaware that the MSU student to printer ratio was higher than those of Kean University, Ramapo College, William Paterson University and New Jersey City University.

The University Hall Information Commons, UN5007 and UN5008, has three printers in one technology lab and one other printer in the other. At peak hours, which Information Technology employees say is 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday through Thursdays, the wait for a computer can be up to 30 minutes.

On Wednesday, Dec. 2nd during the time of 11:10 a.m., the wait to get to a computer at the University Hall Information Commons was 23 minutes. The time it took to print out two one-page documents was an additional eight minutes.

“Students get impatient, it’s understandable because everyone gets worried about being late to class,” said Tiffany Johnson, a student employee at the Office of Information and Technology as she waved people into the computer lab. “Sometimes, it can get really ugly.”

Mailyn Ventura, 21, a senior biology major has dealt with this problem firsthand. Ventura said, “My stuff printed out and then someone took it. I printed it out again and then it still wasn’t there.”

Ventura was printing at the Surf N’ Print lab, a three-printer computer lab located on the first floor of the Student Center. Students are timed by a system that permits them to use a computer and print documents for 10 minutes.

Ventura continued, “I got kicked off of the computer by my third try at printing, so I had to wait in line to get onto another computer again. It was so annoying and such a waste of time.” Ventura says her ordeal took nearly 30 minutes.
This computer lab was formerly maintained by the IT department but is now run and staffed by the student center. Marsha Campbell-Young, associate director of student center programming, oversees the Surf’N’Print lab and was also unaware that MSU had the highest student to printer ratio out of the closest five public colleges schools.

“I think that has more to do with the number of students enrolled than the amount of computers,” Campbell-Young said. MSU enrollment has risen significantly, going from 15,637 in 2004 to currently being over 18,000.

On Monday, Dec. 7 during the time of 9:47 a.m., the wait to get a computer at the Surf’N’Print lab was 14 minutes. Additional time to print out a 13-page document was three minutes.

A computer lab that used to be open for all student computer needs, during the Spring 09 semester, on the second floor of the library has been transformed into the student information multimedia lab for color printing only.

Nathaly Salazar, OIT employee, explains, “This lab always existed, it just used to be in the basement of the library. They just moved it up here, so more people know about it and put new software on the computers.”

The library handles the printing in the multimedia lab, including the cost to print one page. One color page costs 30 cents to print while one black and white page costs 10 cents. Salazar said, “The work you do here is graphic related, scanning or color related.”

A printing card must be purchased from the library in order to use this lab. It costs $1.00 to buy a card and 50 cents of that goes to printing. Students can then refill the card as many times as they want.

To compensate for the lab that used to have lines curving around the wall to the silent study section, the university started a laptop loan program in the library.

In the laptop loan program, MSU students borrow a laptop for up to three hours.

Students are able to print in the library by taking the borrowed laptop to any library floor or Café Diem, and print documents to the library’s front counter. Students are not permitted to print from their own laptop because of network connections.

On Tuesday Dec. 1 at 2:20 p.m. the wait time for a laptop was 45 minutes. Additional time to print a four-page document was five minutes. It also takes up to two hours to charge the laptops.

“The other day, three or four people would just yell or get extremely upset because we have no laptops,” said Arthur Elwell, library OIT technician. “They saw me giving laptops to other people and they would accuse me of not giving laptops to them in particular. I have nothing against them. I just didn’t have any laptops to give out.”

Compared to the top four New Jersey public colleges in the immediate area, MSU comes up short as far as printers are concerned. Kean University, which has an enrollment of 13,050 undergraduate and graduate students, has 10 technology labs with printers open to all students. Kean’s student to printer ratio is 1305:1, compared to MSU’s 1817:1.

“In one of the buildings (Hennings Hall) that building alone has seven computer labs. They’re in classrooms, but students have access to it and can print all they want. They’re also building a new science and technology building across the street, which is definitely going to have printing labs,” said Shanice Rimes, 21, junior at Kean University.

Kean University also has printing labs in their dorms, including the New Upperclassmen Dorm and Dougall Hall, so students have the convenience of not leaving their own residence halls.

Jeanine Stroh could not be reached for comment. Zelik says that each department is responsible for their own computers and the IT department is only responsible for computers and printers in the public computing labs.

William Paterson University has eight available printers for its 10,265 students, making its student to printer ratio 1,250:1. Free printers access is available at the William Paterson University library, atrium, science hall, Ben Shaun Art Center, and Valley Road. In addition, William Paterson does not charge students a technology fee for printing services.
Montclair State University charges a technology fee of $146.25 in addition to tuition every semester. New Jersey City University charges a $216 technology fee every semester but has a student to printer ratio of 852:1. Zelik says that the average cost for a printer used within the IT department at MSU is $4,500.

Ramapo College has nine printing labs on campus for its 5,702 students. With a total of 11 printers, Ramapo College’s student to printer rate is 518:1.

Bill Johnston, applications development manager at Ramapo College said, “There’s usually one printer to each lab and there’s no maximum page limit. We try to have a printer for every 20 computers.”

Some students have come up with their own solution to the printing problem at MSU. Buying a personal printer is a way to beat lines in the computer labs as well as have easy access to printing documents.

“I’m so over the printing here. I bought my own printer and don’t even bother printing on campus,” said Kirsy Smith, sophomore Spanish major.

Although the MSU IT department has not provided any solutions to the shortage of printers, the Surf’N’Print lab has already begun to address issues brought up by students in the student center.

“We’ve already purchased a fourth printer for the Surf’N’Print lab. One of our staff suggested that we do so because of the high volume of use that we get there,” Campbell-Young said.

The fourth printer for the Surf’n’Print lab will be installed during the winter break. Campbell-Young says she hopes it will alleviate traffic during the lab’s peak times, which are the final weeks of the semester.

Johnston shared his advice on what MSU could do about the current printer situation. Out of all five of the area public schools, Ramapo had the lowest student to printer ratio.

“I’m not familiar with all the details at Montclair, but I think the simple solution would be to either lower their enrollment or get more printers,” Johnston said. “It might not even be a case of actually purchasing more printers, but taking a printer that hardly gets used from a department office of classroom and moving it to where it’s better needed.”

Iman Coachman bolts down the stairway of University Hall, as if she were in a race against the ticking clock that was above the fifth floor elevator doors. The sound of her black rubber flats reverberates throughout the stairwell

“This isn’t the first time this happened to me,” Coachman says, catching her breath. “And I know I’m not the only one.”