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News

Your Newest Buddy: Shuttleboybot

Alum who wrote 'Shuttleboy' program for retrieving route schedules makes it easier to catch the next shuttle

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As of Sunday, David J. Malan '99 has given students a new excuse to use AOL Instant Messenger (AIM).

In addition to chatting with friends and checking away messages, students can now find shuttle times by instant messaging the screenname "shuttleboybot."

Shuttleboybot's profile reads: "Think of me as a buddy who allows you to check quickly the schedules of Harvard University's shuttles. Anytime you want to chat, just say 'hi'. I'll ask you where you'd like to catch a shuttle and where you'd like to deshuttle. I'll then tell you the next few shuttles for that route!"

Patrick G. Quinn, a sophomore in Pforzheimer, said that since he is always on AIM, it is easy for him to check shuttle times.

"You don't have to go to the website," Quinn said. "This saves me valuable seconds."

Malan also developed the original Shuttleboy, a Unix program on fas.harvard.edu, in 1998. This program allows users to access full route information.

Malan wrote in an e-mail that he conceived of the idea after taking Computer Science 50: "Introduction to Computer Science" and Computer Science 51: "Introduction to Computer Science II".

"He [Shuttleboy] was actually the successor to "Menuboy", who was a Unix program I wrote for my roommates so that they could check the day's dining hall menus," Malan wrote.

Before Shuttleboy, Kevin Davis '98 had written a shuttle "script" for Quad residents. Malan expanded on that idea, including all possible stops and allowing students to view their favorite routes.

"I usually just call," said Erika M. M. Campisano '08. "I haven't used it yet, but I will now."

ShuttleGirl, the website many students visited before Harvard University bought it and turned it into ShuttleTime, was created in 2000 by two Pforzheimer House roommates, Anthony Delvecchio '01 and Jason R. P. Karamchandani '02.

Malan, who stopped managing Shuttleboy after his graduation, helped Delvecchio and Karamchandani to create ShuttleGirl.

Malan put his CS50 skills into practice again to create Shuttleboybot.

"A friend of mine and one of CS50's head TFs, Kelly Heffner, introduced me last week to CS50's bot on AIM

(screen name cs50bot),” Malan said.

“It struck me as such a neat way to retrieve information quickly that I decided to make Shuttleboy accessible via AIM as well.”

Since its creation late last week, shuttleboybot has been hailed 300 times. The ShuttleTime website has received 11,000 hits over the course of the year.

Although most students have not heard of Shuttleboybot, those who have say they are pleasantly surprised.

“I heard about it from a friend and I thought it was kind of funny,” said Lina Jun '08. “I just tried it last night and it really is very useful.”

Despite Shuttleboybot’s helpful responses to requests for the shuttle schedule, he has not been as responsive to more personal AIMS.

“It’s nice that people have tried to strike up conversations with him [Shuttleboybot], but he’s really just designed to report shuttle schedules,” Malan wrote. “He does appreciate, though, whoever said “I love you” to him recently.”

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