

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR DAILY NEWS

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In the News Today

Arctic invasive species research taking student into uncharted waters

Attendees are lining up to get into queueing conference

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Lancer men to host Ohio State in pre-season basketball play

UWindsor athlete claims double gold at Canada Summer Games

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Alumni golf tournament boosts scholarships

Computer workshop to focus on protecting data

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ATTENDEES ARE LINING UP TO GET INTO QUEUEING CONFERENCE

You're at the store, have a cart full of groceries and a letter to post. As you gaze at the long line of people waiting at the checkout, you have a decision to make—would it be faster to join the queue and mail your letter after, or to mail your letter first in hopes the line grows shorter?

According to a research project by a UWindsor undergraduate student, it depends.

Samantha Molinaro, set to enter her final year of the concurrent program in mathematics and education, will present her findings at CanQueue 2009, the annual Canadian National Queueing Conference, which begins today at the University of Windsor. Experts from across Canada will discuss the field of queueing theory—the mathematical study of waiting in line.

Molinaro calls her summer research project, funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), an "amazing job."

"Queueing theory is very applied; it relates to people's actual lives," she says. "This is the first time I can explain my math work to my parents."

The choice of whether to join the queue or finish another task first depends on four variables:

- the service rate, or how efficiently the cashier moves customers through the checkout;
- the number of people already waiting in line;
- the arrival rate, or how quickly people are joining the line; and
- how long it takes to complete the other task.

"If the mailbox is on the far side of the store, you could come back and find the cashier had finished waiting on other customers, so your walk wasted time," Molinaro says. "People have to make these decisions every day. It's so surprising to them that there is math behind it."

Her advisor Myron Hlynka, a professor of mathematics and statistics, will chair the CanQueue conference. He says this is the first time Windsor has hosted.

"One of the things Windsor will do differently is attract more of our American colleagues," he says.

This year's conference participants will come from Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois,

as well as Canada. Their research areas go beyond mathematics and statistics to include computer science, management science, and industrial engineering.

Keynote speaker Chris Simpson, medical director of the cardiac programs at the Kingston General and Hotel Dieu hospitals and an assistant professor at Queen's University, will discuss wait times in the health care system. Dr. Hlynka says it is an issue of pressing public interest.

"Ontario in particular has had major difficulties in trying to reduce wait times in medical care," he says. "Most of the work to address this problem will have to mean adding facilities, but governments are hoping some of those times can be lowered by trying different strategies of accommodating patients."

CanQueue 2009 will run August 27 and 28 in the Odette Building. Learn more on the conference Web site.

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