Spam not good eatin’ on GT mail accounts

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

“Bigger penXs with the NEW pill,” read the latest of many similar emails in the mailbox of one Tech student. Despite popular pressure for large penile size in men, however, the recipient chose to ignore that particular email.

It also probably helped that the recipient’s name was Jennifer.

In this day and age of prolific internet advertising, finding one’s mailbox full of junk email promoting everything from low mortgage rates to enlarging body parts-the aptly-named “spam”-is an almost daily occurrence.

But while spam isn’t unusual on a Hotmail or Yahoo account, it’s becoming more common in many Tech students’ mailboxes, and that trend has officials at the Office of Information Technology (OIT) concerned.

The amount of junk mail that students get varies, however. Some students, like Jennifer Gaines, a second-year Chemistry major, do not get any. “I just never use that email for anything,” she said. “The only people that email me are my [on that account] parents.”

Scott Kim, a third-year Electrical Engineering major, said that he gets “probably two or three [junk mails] a day.” He said that the relatively small amount of spam he does get is probably due to a fellow student accidentally using his email. “It’s happened to me before,” he said, “where I’ve gotten emails intended for other people.”

On the other hand, Abhishek Shah, a second-year Chemical Engineering major, estimated that “if I get about 35-40 emails a day, at least 25-30 would be spam.”

John Bryson, OIT Department Manager for a servers support group, noted, “We don’t have good statistics on the amount of spamming, since there are many email servers on campus.”

But OIT is aware that it is a growing problem, and in response, they have been developing out a number of anti-spam procedures and technologies.

“We have turned on authenticated SMTP on some of the larger e-mail servers and turned off open relaying of email,” Bryson said, “so [that a] would-be spammer must have a valid Georgia Tech e-mail account to...send out spam.”

OIT also maintains a block list of some of the internet’s biggest spam servers and responds to viruses that use spam to propagate (the recent myDoom virus is an example).

The Information Technology Architecture Committee (ITAC), a group within OIT that includes a subcommittee focused on anti-spam technology, has also considered making use of a special hardware appliance that may be dropped into the Tech network at the campus borders.
This device, according to Bryson, “has some technology for either tagging stuff as probably being spam, or it has technology for dropping it or refiling it,” depending on how the user sets his spam rules on his email client.

Another option is programming the Institute’s servers to filter out any incoming mail whose contents the filter interprets as spam. However, there is always the danger of accidentally blocking legitimate email, which is a growing concern as email has become a more commonplace conduit of business at Tech.

For example, at the Georgia Tech Research Institute, OIT was asked to remove its anti-spam software from the GTRI servers after it accidentally blocked a legitimate e-mail from a remote client.

Many spammers also search the internet for servers that are on open relay or open proxy, a configuration that allows spammers to “bounce” their emails off of those remote servers, giving them valid-looking “from” addresses that make them hazardous to block.

"[It’s] actually a legitimate server, maybe at another school,” Bryson said. “It’s just that they’re misconfigured, and so they’re sending out spam.”

On the flip side, some campus researchers investigating spam and the techniques and processes of spammers insist on receiving their e-mail unfiltered.

“We’ve got people who may...be completely happy if they never saw another spam message ever again to people who want to receive all that traffic as part of what they’re interested in,” said Mark Sanders, Director of Development Information Services at OIT and Chair of ITAC’s anti-spam committee.

“So how do you develop systems to accommodate both needs? That’s where we go to our Tech people to come up with...answers,” Sanders said.

OIT’s battle against spam is further complicated as spammers, themselves professional technicians, scramble to overcome the latest advancements in anti-spam technology.

“You can search for the word ‘Viagra’ [in the subject line].” Bryson said, “but what if they put V-I-A and then an HTML tag and then G-R-A, and so when it displays, it displays ‘Viagra’ to the user, but a filter...does not see [it]?”

“They’re getting pretty clever now with inserting images into the messages,” added John Douglass, an OIT Systems Support Specialist.

“And whenever it pulls that image, it pulls it from a remote location, which confirms your email address. Now they’re starting to...insert random words, and they’ll put it in white so you can’t see it, and then they’ll put their message, and that gets around some of the standard detections.”

“The problem is likely to go back and forth a bit, before we see any real resolution,” Bryson said.

In the meantime, OIT has a number of suggestions for students, faculty, and other campus mail users. Though Tech’s secure servers make it difficult to install popular spam clients like SpamPal, many of the latest email clients—such as Outlook, Eudora and Mozilla Thunderbird—come with built-in spam filters, and can be configured to recognize potential spam and move it to a separate folder or block it altogether.
OIT also recommends, among other things, keeping one’s email address out of public domains, such as websites, public newsgroups and chat rooms, since these are some of the most common sites for spammers to obtain legitimate email addresses.

In fact, any member of Tech with a computer account is at risk, since a spammer would need only to write a script to interact with the online Georgia Tech Directory off of the main webpage.

If the spammer then sends spam to these addresses, according to Jason Belford, an OIT Systems Support Specialist, “and then the user [clicks] the ‘remove’ button, the spammer has now validated that email address. He can now turn around and sell that email address as valid to other spammers. Companies wishing to spam a large audience are willing to pay big bucks for legitimate email addresses.”

In light of all this, ITAC is currently investigating anti-spam efforts at both the campus and departmental level, “One, in terms of what we can and cannot do...and two, based off of that information, coming up with some guidelines or recommendations for either best practices or...processes and procedures,” Sanders said. The committee will issue a final report in mid-March.

But, as information technology specialists emphasize repeatedly, no solution is guaranteed to be 100% effective.

“If there was a magic bullet, we wouldn’t have spam on the internet right now,” Bryson said.

“Everyone would buy the magic bullet and implement it and that would be that. That doesn’t mean there’s no hope. There’re as many solutions as there are vendors out there trying to sell you something.”

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Spam Dos and Don’ts

**DO...**

Use spam filtering that is available in your email client

Use BCC: instead of CC: in emails

Be a good net citizen by using servers that have authenticated SMTP

Minimize postings to newsgroups, or use less public newsgroups such as the Tech internal news servers

**DON’T...**

Include your email address anywhere on any web site

Answer spam

Sign guestbooks

Sign up for free stuff on the Web

Sign up for distribution lists that you don’t need

Click on executable attachments that could be viruses

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How Spammers Get Addresses
When you browse some web sites
When you submit your email address in a web form somewhere
When you post to a USENET newsgroup using your email address
When someone with whom you maintain contact has their address book
“harvested” with spyware or a virus
From mailing lists
From professional public directories
From scanning websites with webspiders
From professionally directories
From IRC and chat rooms
By buying lists from others
By guessing likely addresses in various domains
By simple brute-force guessing: a recent virus was adding common names to .
gatech.edu.
Six degrees of separation gives new spin to making friends

Sites like Friendster gain popularity with internet-savvy Tech students as ways to network, meet new people

By Marcela Musgrove
Contributing Writer

The confirmation was waiting in my email box: “Jan is now your friend.”

Never mind that I’ve known Jan for 10 years, though I hadn’t actually seen him in six. That little email made this seem like an event.

If this train of thought doesn’t sound familiar, then you might not be acquainted with a growing number of what are best called “social networking” sites, including Friendster (www.friendster.com), Myspace (www.myspace.com), Tribe (www.tribe.net) and Google-created Orkut (www.orkut.com), the newest addition to an ever-growing list.

The idea behind these sites is nothing new. Sixdegrees.com was created in the late ‘90s on the theory that one person is connected to any other person in the world by less than six degrees—for example, your friend has a friend whose coworker was roommates with Kevin Bacon’s sister in college.

While SixDegrees never took off, the latest generation of social networking sites has merged the “friend of a friend” concept with techniques from matchmaking sites and online community bulletin boards, drawing the attention of the media, venture capitalists and academics centers from all over.

Friendster is probably the best-known, open to anyone who wants to sign up. The first step is to fill out a profile with the basic information about you, including gender, age, location and hometown. The user must also specify his or her relationship status, as well as interest in looking for people: is that person open for dating or serious relationship, or is just looking for friends or activity partners?

The beauty of networking sites like Friendster is that through the six-degrees idea, your “personal network”—people who are friends of your friends of your friends—can grow exponentially. A user who has just a few well-connected friends may still be linked to several thousand people in his personal network.

This is good news for people who use Friendster as a way to meet other people—or at least browse around to see what kind of people are linked to them through their personal network.

In addition, there a section that allows the user to list as many interests and favorites as he cares to. This allows Friendster to suggest members of your personal network who may share the same interests as you.

If you listed rock-climbing, for example, as one of your interests, a hyperlink
is created on your profile to give you a link to everyone in your network that also listed it as an interest. If you’re interested in meeting potential dates via Friendster, you can also search for people by geographical area, age and relationship status.

Of course, these sites wouldn’t be complete without pictures. Friendster allows users to upload several photos of yourself so that people who come across your profile will know what you look like.

“I met a girl from Agnes Scott through Friendster. She contacted me to say that I was cute,” said Eoin Grosch, a third-year Industrial Engineering major.

In this respect, Friendster may also have some advantages to random online matchmaking sites when it comes to meeting people. “I feel somewhat safer on Friendster than I would if I were meeting that person on a chat room, because I trust my friend’s judgment of character when it comes to choosing friends,” said Marian Alicia, a second-year Architecture major.

On the other hand, Friendster is also ideal for online stalkers. “I periodically get requests from people to add them as friends,” said Tullio. “I figure it helps them out in some way if they are trying to look popular or meet people through me, so I will add them, or let them add me.”

Though most of his immediate friends are part of the computer science community, Tullio remains wary. “It branches out quickly into all kinds of freaky people,” he said.

Some people use Friendster more as a way to keep in touch with old friends.

“Through Friendster I’ve met immediate friends of my friends locally and other people from the friends network nationally. I don’t really use it to keep up with my friends, since I see them every day, but it has been an open door to meet people all over,” Alicia said.

“I wasn’t really using it to meet people, more to connect with friends who don’t live close to Atlanta,” said Resident Life Coordinator Brett Hulst, who has used Friendster for almost a year. “I have found people I went to high school with in other cities and peers who work in student affairs who I have met at conferences.”

Smitha Prasad, a fifth-year Science, Technology and Culture major, has mixed opinions. “I think I just joined Friendster because a lot of my friends did and it was the cool thing to do, so to speak. But through it, I was able to reunite with a few people from my high school, as well as people I’d lost touch with for years.”

“Unfortunately,” Prasad added, “I also attract the attention of clingy boys looking to pick up girls online.”

In some ways, Friendster has become somewhat of an online popularity contest. There catch is that you can only see profiles for the people within four degrees of your network, giving people more of an incentive to get other people to join so they can invite their friends and so on.

“I think I have about 40 friends,” said Grosch, who joked, “a lot of blood and sweat went into those acquisitions.”

He explained, “I usually know the people who are my ‘friends.’ They’re usually people I’ve met before who I either happen to see on there or else they happen to see me on the site when they’re searching around.”
Hulst agreed. “It was pretty addictive at first, seeing how many people you
could be linked to,” he admitted. “At this point I am close to a million people
in my network through 68 friends.”

Besides the profiles themselves, users can also judge people based on the
testimonials their friends leave for them, which can range from serious to
funny, frank, complimentary, mean or sarcastic.

Orkut is the newest of the sites, less than a month old, but is already turning
out to rival Friendster’s with over 80,000 members. Orkut works similarly to
Friendster with a profile, testimonials and network of friends.

However, Orkut also has additional features such as separate professional and
personal profiles, additional ratings for coolness, trustworthiness and sexiness
with which your friends can rate you, as well as the option of creating or
joining communities for your interests and affiliations, complete with
discussion boards.

Orkut is also invitation only. Patrick Jarrett, a second year computer science
major, points out several advantages to this. “You know, if you go clubbing,
there is almost always a line outside. Bouncers are trained to keep a line and
never empty it. Why? It adds to the draw. ‘Look at all those people! That
club must be awesome!’ So the implementation of invite only keeps more
people wanting to be included, keeps it a house of the ‘elite.’”

The flip side to is that invitation only may limit the diversity of the site, as
evidenced by Orkut’s initial predominantly white male demographic of users.
Since the initial launch of the site, more women and people from different
countries and cultures appear to be joining.

Tech Industrial Design ‘99 grad Laura Slate pointed out another advantage to
Orkut. “Friendster is...not so user-friendly,” she said. Due to the way
communities are set up within Orkut, Slate said, “[its] interface... allows
users to more quickly locate groups of people that share the same interests.”

For example, Slate created a Georgia Tech community on Orkut, which
currently has 83 members including students, faculty and alumni. Though
Slate doesn’t recognize most of the people in the community, she said, “It’s
cool to see other people living all over that went [to Tech]. It seems like there
are a couple of new members everyday.”

However, most students who do use social networking sites at all are
members of multiple services, especially as the popularity of these sites wax
and wane.

“I was into Friendster for a while, but then the fun kind of died,” said Grosch,
who uses both Friendster and MySpace but notes that Friendster is much
slower in terms of loading time.

Shannon Bauman, a masters student in Human-Computer Interaction, said, “I
used to use Friendster, then sort of faded out and now use Orkut.” Bauman
added, “If Orkut stays how it is I wouldn’t be surprised if I slowly lost
interest in this as well...But at the moment I am really enjoying it and having
fun reading lots messages in lots of different communities.”

However, Joe Tullio, a Computer Science graduate student and infrequent
user of both services, remains unconvinced. “I have met no one through it
and don’t know of any other users who have gotten anything out of it,” Tullio
said.
So will these sites last? While they are fodder for dissertations and discourses on how social networking works in the information age, they have yet to determine how they will make money since they are both currently free. Other subscription-based sites such as match.com have added the friends network and search option to their standard personal ads, while professional sites such as Ryze.com have found members willing to pay a monthly premium to get “gold status” through a business networking site.

But regardless of whether these sites are a passing fad or here to stay, they’re a part of pop culture that can be enjoyed for free now during all that downtime in front of the computer screen.
SGA hopes to influence state policy through lobby board

By Christopher Gooley / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

SGA hopes that its Lobby Board will give interested students the chance to interact with Georgia legislators. Though the legislative session is almost over for this year, the Board is aiming to be active in the fall.

By Haining Yu
Contributing Writer

The Student Government Association has recently created a Student Lobbying Board to up the ante in its lobbying efforts at the state legislature. The Board is an extension of SGA’s Governmental and External Affairs Committee, which is responsible for coordinating efforts to inform and communicate with local, state and federal bodies.

Lobbying, an integral though sometimes overlooked part of legislative decision-making, is the main way by which information from an interest group, such as Tech, reaches the ears and minds of legislators. It is the lobbyist’s job to inform the legislator on the facts of the issue, from the standpoint of the client that the lobbyist represents.

The board, headed by the Governmental and External Affairs Committee, will serve as a direct channel of communication between students and state legislators. William Welch, the committee chair, said, “We feel that by giving legislators the opportunity to directly interact with the students
The main focus of the lobbying efforts will be on budget and appropriations issues, to “lay out what Tech needs and stop budget cuts,” Welch said. The Board will lobby to prevent further reductions to Tech’s funding, which, according to Andrew Harris, Director of Governmental Relations and Tech’s current professional lobbyist, has faced considerable cuts in recent years totaling approximately $40 million dollars.

Harris also singled out three main budgetary issues that need to be focused on. These include maintaining full funding for the University System of Georgia’s formula, restoring the Equipment, Technology, and Construction Trust (ETACT) Fund and gaining additional funding for Tech’s Savannah campus.

The ETACT Fund is vital to funding research programs at Tech: its funds are used to match research proposals that are written to organizations such as the National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health, and the availability of matching is an important component in obtaining research grants. President Clough recently indicated in a meeting with the Executive Board of the Faculty Senate that Governor Sonny Perdue’s recommended budget removes ETACT funding from the state lottery. Clough said that unless something changes, Tech will need to position itself to generate other sources of funding after the 2005 fiscal year.

Though it is a student organization, the Lobby Board plans to work closely with Harris. “I anticipate that the Lobbying Board and my office will work very closely together,” said Harris. According to him, communication between the two organizations is crucial: “The key is we need to be informed and share the same information...otherwise our efforts could be counterproductive.”

Harris noted that while it’s not a new idea for students to act as lobbyists for Tech, what is new is that the board is student organized. This may be a good thing, since students are “the best spokesmen and ambassadors...particularly when addressing student-focused issues,” he said.

The idea for such a board was brought up last fall by Governmental and External Affairs committee member Paul Byrne, who was inspired by Auburn University’s successful student lobbying program. Over the course of the semester, the committee had thrown the idea around but “hadn’t done anything solid with it,” Welch said.

However, SGA Undergraduate President Nate Watson later came to the committee with Clough’s approval of the idea. “He told us that this is something President Clough really wanted to happen,” Welch said. With Clough’s interest as a catalyst, the committee was able to draw up plans for the board, and create an application process within a month’s time.

“We said, this is what we need to do and this is who we need to talk to,” Welch said. “We drew up the application, sent it out there to see who would reply.”

So far the Board has finished its first round of applicant interviews with 19 potential members, after the initial batch of applications for the Student Lobby Board were received on Feb. 11.
“We have a good group of people from a pretty wide range of backgrounds who will really represent the student body well,” Welch said.

According to Harris, the most important factor in successful lobbying is strong relationships. “The key thing is to develop a rapport with the legislators, to establish credibility, provide accurate information and to keep your word,” Harris said.

Welch concurred, saying, “We want to make sure that they know us; we want to establish a network...so that ten years from now we’ll have a pre-established relationship with legislators.”

The board has not yet begun lobbying activities this year, since the legislative season is almost over. “It’s too late this season to do much,” Welch admitted.

However, in the six to eight months until the next legislative season, which begins late next fall, much of the time will be spent on internal organization of the board. “It’s a brand new organization and we’re trying to figure out how exactly we are going to work,” said Welch.

In addition, the upcoming summer will be spent “calling legislators...to start forming these relationships, so that [in] November, we’ll be ready to present to them.”

Applications are still being considered for anyone interested in being a part of the Board. Previous lobbying or government experience is not necessary.

In fact, Welch said, “[Lobbying] is a new process to me. It’s a learning experience.”
State budget cuts hurt financial aid as well as academics

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

The campus is filled with hubbub about the economic downturn, and students and faculty alike are noting the cutbacks that Tech’s six colleges have had to make in light of recent Institute budget cuts.

But few faculty, and likely fewer students, probably realize that the Office of Student Financial Planning and Services has had to tighten its own belt as well, due not only to Institute cuts but also to the as-yet-unknown fate of HOPE and other state and federally-funded financial aid programs.

"[We] don’t yet know what the legislature will do with certain state programs,” said Director Marie Mons. “Obviously, the HOPE scholarship has been in the press a lot. They’re trying to make adjustments to that program to make sure that it lasts for the long haul.”

Other state scholarships are also at risk, Mons said, and some have already been affected, including the Governor’s Scholarship, which took a cut during the mid-year budget readjustment in December 2002.

“Anytime there’s a shortfall or reduction in state revenue, those programs have to be looked at very, very closely,” Mons explained.

HOPE has the added complication of being lottery-funded instead of based on public commitment, so, Mons said, what’s “really at the heart of the issue with the HOPE program is finding ways to have a long-term commitment... Georgia does have the largest grant scholarship program currently in practice, and so...the challenge right now will be, ‘Where is HOPE going?’”

On the other hand, federally-funded financial aid continues to receive the same budget every year, although that has created difficulties for its recipients in the face of rising costs and the rising number of Americans pursuing higher education.

“Each year, the President [of the United States] will put into his budget funding for those programs administered by the Department of Education,” Mons said.

"[But] when you couple the programs not being increased with... rising tuition [and] other costs, that, in effect...means the program has less money [than it] has in the past,” she said.

Adding to those concerns, this year Congress has begun the reauthorization process of the Higher Education Act of 1965. In this process, Congress examines the various financial aid programs sponsored by the Act and determines any changes that need to be made, which puts the fate of some federal programs into question.
State and federal concerns aside, the Office of Financial Aid has had to make similar adjustments to the Institute’s budget cuts as the various academic departments.

Mons said, “We face the challenges that all institutions do, and that is trying to control cost, tuition, fees,” while at the same time preserving the quality of education at Tech. “The administration...and others have worked very hard to make sure that quality [is] maintained.”

Mons emphasized, though, that Tech is not a struggling institution, unlike some that faced financial problems even before the economic downturn.

“Tech has a long tradition and great supporters...and there’s still a great commitment to develop those resources,” Mons said. She cited Tech classes celebrating their benchmark reunions as an example, explaining that many of them choose to offer financial support to various Institute-level scholarships as their contribution.

Nevertheless, the economy has demanded some belt tightening, and Mons has helped implement several cost-cutting changes within the Office of Financial Aid. For example, it has invested heavily in the electronic distribution of information, which cuts back on office supply expenses.

Nevertheless, she said, her office is “focused on making sure...that we meet our core obligations.”

And students have responded; Mons reported an increase in the number of students stopping by the office seeking advice on good financial management and various financial aid opportunities.

“They’re faced with the same challenges that everyone is facing,” Mons said. “They’re trying to do more with less funding...[They’re] strategically planning their coursework so that they [can] maximize their time here on campus.”

For example, “students are actually looking at study abroad programs,” because, she said, it is one of the more economical options offered at Tech.

“One of the things that we work with students on in an individual case by case basis is...trying to make sure they know what all their options are,” Mons explained. “[We] help students...identify resources, make sure they apply, make sure they apply on time, make sure they understand what their options are.”

This is especially important for students who may lose funding due to potential cuts to programs like HOPE.

Instead of exploring other options, Mons said, some students are prone to use more unattractive options like covering expenses with a credit card or working too many hours per week on top of a regular academic course load.

Given the current state of the economy, Mons encourages students in financial need to take out loans.

“Loans are probably one of the most attractive long term sources of funding out there,” she said, explaining that loan interest rates are presently below 4 percent, the lowest in history.

However, Mons warned, as the number one provider of college loans is the federal government, loan limits have not risen to meet rising college costs.
Federal work-study programs are another promising option, but Mons said
this has proven unpopular with the student body, citing time commitment and
wages as the primary reasons.

“Most students will tell you that, quite honestly, many of them can find jobs
with better pay rate out in the community,” she said. “We wish more students
would participate in the federal work-study program, but they don’t.”

Mons also stressed the importance of good academic planning. Students who
are prone to registering for too many classes in a given semester and later
dropping them, having meanwhile purchased the extra books, use up their
HOPE attempted hours and funding faster than necessary.

“[So] they have a whole year or so left on their program, but their HOPE runs
out because they’ve attempted so many hours,” Mons said.

Others, she said, are guilty of poor financial planning, and she described the
great strain placed on her office last year when a number of students didn’t
apply for financial aid until August 1, two weeks before fall semester was
due to begin.

“It really concerns me that students would wait that long to have their
financial house in order,” she said.

“So one of the things students can do is to apply, and to apply early...so that
their options can be out there.”

The situation could potentially be worse this year if funding from HOPE is
cut, increasing the number of students seeking financial aid.

“I really hope we don’t all scramble and do that in August,” Mons said. “I
really hope we do all that scrambling in May and June.”

Meanwhile, despite tight budgets, the office is busy working to attract both
potential and current students with financial incentives.

“We are constantly putting together packages for students so that...attention
gets given to rewarding merit as well as supporting students who financially
otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford it,” Mons said.

“You don’t have to be ‘destitute’ to get help to pay for college, and you
shouldn’t wait until you’re desperate to start asking questions,” she said.
Harvard administration says no to funding student sex magazine

(U-WIRE) Brown University-Harvard University has built a reputation as a pioneer in a number of fields—medicine, business, law and theology among them. Pornography, it appears, will not make the list.

After coming under intense media scrutiny, the university released a statement last week saying it will not fund a proposed student publication that would have included nude photographs of undergraduates. Two days earlier, the school’s Committee on College Life had granted approval to the magazine, a decision that would have enabled it to apply for school funding.

In a written statement prepared for the media, the two female students behind the proposal wrote that the magazine, called H Bomb, would “serve as a popular forum for discussion about sex that is not otherwise available.” The magazine would include sex related feature articles, fiction, art, advice columns and photography submitted by students, they wrote.

But the committee’s decision set off a storm of confusion, controversy and backpedaling. Harvard’s student newspaper, the Crimson, dubbed H Bomb a “porn magazine” in a headline, and national and international media outlets quickly picked up the story.

Robert Mitchell, director of communications at Harvard, said his office had received “literally hundreds of inquiries.”

Harvard then issued a statement reversing its position on H Bomb. It said there had been “much misunderstanding” about the publication and that the committee had made its decision on the assumption “that it would not include material that would be considered pornographic.”

The statement clarified that no funding would be provided for the magazine, and the committee would review its decision with the students.

But despite the amount of controversy H Bomb generated, the magazine would not have been the first of its kind. Before granting its approval, the Harvard committee had reviewed copies of Squirm, a sex publication from Vassar College.

Sarah Zarrow, a senior at Vassar and assistant photo editor of Squirm, described the publication, now in its fifth year, as an “artistic and literary magazine” exploring issues of sexuality absent from mainstream culture.

Among other things, Squirm includes nude photographs of Vassar students.

“We’re not a porn mag, so there are certain things we can’t show,” Zarrow said. “A lot of the photos are pretty artsy. I guess they would probably qualify as erotica.”

The magazine, which receives funding from the Vassar Student Association,
operates with the same level of recognition as other student groups, Zarrow said.

Zarrow applauded Harvard’s initial endorsement of H Bomb, saying additional discussion of such issues represents a step forward. She said Harvard had succumbed to the pressure of the media by reversing its decision.

Although Brown has no publication to rival Squirm, issues of sex and sexuality are on the agenda of several student groups.

Daniel Bassichis, advocacy chair of Queer Alliance, said discussion about the nature of sexuality is needed on campus.

“I think it’s incredibly important to dismantle the notion that sexuality is rigid and private and disconnected from our everyday lives,” Bassichis said.

An article about H Bomb in the Washington Post listed Queer Alliance’s annual party, Sex Power God, as an example of frank discussion about sexuality at elite colleges.

“I think for a lot of people, [Sex Power God] provides a different space for expression than other parties,” Bassichis said.