Don't like spam? Computing professors may have an answer

Elizabeth Campell
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Casino gambling, weight loss products, the Bank of Nigeria has money for you. Sex, sex and more sex.

Anyone with an e-mail account recognizes these marketing come-ons from the spam — or unsolicited e-mail — they’ve received. Experts say it is not your imagination: the number of spam e-mails is increasing. One estimate predicts that 50 percent of all e-mail traffic this year will be spam, according to Brightmail Inc., an anti-spam firm. For March 2003, Brightmail says 45 percent of all e-mail traffic was spam, up from 8 percent in September 2001.

The problem has grown to the point where the Federal Trade Commission recently held a three-day conference to focus on the issue. In several states, legislation is pending in an effort to outlaw spam or at least curb e-marketers using questionable tactics such as using false sender names and misleading subject lines to entice users to open the e-mail. The problem has grown to such an extent that the three largest e-mail providers — AOL, Microsoft and Yahoo — recently announced an alliance to work together to reduce spam.

“That alliance points out that spam has become a major problem, even for the Internet Service Providers (ISPs),” says Richard Lipton, professor and Frederick G. Storey Chair in Computing in the Georgia Tech Information Security Center (GTISC). “All of the ISPs tout their anti-spam filters as the best to reduce unwanted e-mail, but obviously they feel the need to pool their efforts to tackle this growing problem.”

Spam is a serious problem that is growing worse for ISPs for two main reasons: one, it uses up valuable computing resources; two, their customers don’t like spam.

ISP’s have to store these e-mails until their customers delete them, consuming their storage capabilities and forcing them to grow their bandwidth to handle the additional traffic. Ferris Research, a market research firm, estimates that American corporations spend $9 billion per year fighting spam and lose $4 billion in productivity because of spam. As of April 30, AOL reports that the company blocks 2.3 billion spam e-mails every day. These are the real costs.

Adding to the pressure, ISP customers want or expect the provider to prevent junk e-mail from arriving in their in-boxes.

Currently, Lipton says, most approaches to reduce spam can be sorted into three categories. The most common method filters the “From” field for unwanted or suspicious e-mail.

“For some time now, we’ve been talking about legislation that would require ISPs to provide anti-spam filters,” he said. “However, since the spam problem is already out of control, we need to pool our efforts.”

“Spam is a problem that is going to get worse,” he said. “We need to get the ISPs to agree on a common filter, or better yet, just stop the spam servers.”

 Spam continued, page 3

Campus update on SARS

Dr. Cindy Smith
Health Services

As news about Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) continues to capture public attention. It is important that everyone in the Georgia Tech community continue to have reliable information about the disease. As a university with a global presence and reputation for global events and/or body fluids of a known carrier. It does not include activities such as walking past a person or sitting in a waiting room for a brief period of time.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who has traveled to these areas is considered to be a carrier of SARS:
• China • Singapore
• Hanoi, Vietnam • Taiwan
• Hong Kong

Symptoms may include:
• Fever greater than 100.4 F
• Cough
• Shortness of breath

Georgia Tech will continue to follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in managing SARS-related issues.

Students, faculty, staff and visitors who have experienced either direct contact or traveled to any of these areas should contact Health Services at 894-1170 or e-mail cindy.smith@health.gatech.edu.

Fulbright Fellowship earns Tech student a return trip to Budapest

David Terraso
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Last spring, computer science and applied mathematics major David Eger left Budapest, Hungary, after studying math in a semester abroad program. He’s been trying to find his way back ever since.

So he did what any enterprising student would do: he applied for a Fulbright Fellowship. This spring, Eger found out he’ll be returning to Budapest — courtesy of the U.S. State Department — as the second Tech student in two years to win such a fellowship.

“If you go to a country where the food is wonderful and the people are awesome, you just can’t wait to get back,” he said. “There is a great kindliness to the people and to the country. Their mathematicians are second to none. It’s just beautiful.”

The Fulbright program was created in 1946 with legislation sponsored by Sen. J. William Fulbright. A fervent believer in cultural exchange, he reasoned that nations would be less likely to go to war against each other if people could live abroad and learn about each other’s culture, a philosophy Eger has taken to heart.

“There are a lot of far-off places that we may hear about on the news, but we have no concept of what they are really like,” said Eger.

On his first trip, Eger rented a room from an 85-year-old Hungarian woman. Eger didn’t speak much Hungarian, and she didn’t speak English. On his second trip, Eger is staying with a Hungarian, and she didn’t speak English.

Eger continued, page 2

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Eger continued, page 2
It’s a beautiful spring day, and Donna Chronic is working outside. On days such as this one, there are many who probably wish they had her job. A few of them tell her so.

“But when the weather is not so nice,” she says with a wink, “those people are nowhere to be found.”

As a horticulturist at Tech for more than 18 years, Donna is one of those responsible for tending to Tech’s urban oasis — the trees, shrubs, flowers and grass that provide a tranquil environment in a setting often marked by stress and anxiety. For anyone who hasn’t strayed along its paths, Tech’s lush vegetation is a revelation.

“Visitors are constantly surprised how beautiful it is here,” Donna said. “I love interacting with folks on campus who have an interest in this.”

For those who just want to play in the dirt, she says, the job is more than just planting and watering flower beds. In fact, she and her co-workers devote three hours each day to picking up trash. Only then do they proceed with caring for plants.

She mentioned two common mistakes that inhibit healthy plants. “The biggest mistake is putting plants into existing soil,” she says. Mixing in organic matter is essential. Planting isn’t limited to one season, but she admits being puzzled by nurseries that market their trees and shrubs in the springtime. The harsh Southern summer, she says, makes it difficult for the root system to develop. Better to wait until autumn, she suggests, when water is less scarce.

This kind of advice is why more than a few people have sought her counsel over the years, which she welcomes. “I enjoy passing on whatever help or information I can,” she says.

To capitalize on her expertise, The Whistle plans to feature Donna periodically, offering seasonal advice and tips, and answering questions related to gardening. If you have specific gardening questions, e-mail editor@icpa.gatech.edu.

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**Gardening at Georgia Tech**

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**Student government associations honor faculty and staff**

At a year-end banquet, representatives of both the undergraduate and graduate student government association (SGA) honored members of the faculty and staff for their service to Georgia Tech.

**Undergraduate SGA**

**FACULTY MEMBER OF THE YEAR:**

**Alan Doolittle,** Electrical and Computer Engineering

**Friend of the Student:**

**Paul Hurst,** Office of Enrollment Services

**Administrator of the Year:**

**Lee Wilcox,** Office of Student Affairs

**Graduate SGA**

**FACULTY MEMBER OF THE YEAR:**

**Barry Crouse,** Institute of Paper Science and Technology

**John Iyemura,** Electrical and Computer Engineering

**Friend of the Student:**

**Butch Stanphill,** Campus Recreation

**Administrator of the Year:**

**Stephanie Ray,** Office of Student Affairs

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**For more information...**

**Fulbright Program:**

[http://exchanges.state.gov/education](http://exchanges.state.gov/education)
To visit. So, they have created [URL]— for potential customers as a Uniform Resource Locator contains a Web address— known this means that most spam con-

In thinking about the prob-

lem from the spammer’s point of view, Lee and Lipton realized this means that most spam con-
tains a Web address— known as a Uniform Resource Locator (URL)— for potential customers to visit. So, they have created a filter application based on looking for unwanted URLs. “This approach and applica-
tion are elegant and incredibly computer cheap and fast,” says Lipton. “It seems to work better than the existing commercial products, and the end user can customize it easily.” Lee developed the working prototype over the past year, and the two have been running the prototype on several com-

puters since December. So far, the developers are very pleased with the results.

The end user can designate URLs that are acceptable— such as favorite news sites or online retailers—and, con-
versely, create a blacklist that filters specific sites. A “wild card” category allows all e-mails within university domains— URLs that end with “.edu.” E-mail that does not contain a Web address is not blocked, while unwanted e-mail is deliv-

ered to a “Spam Can,” allowing the user to ensure no legitimate e-mails were trashed.

“We’ve had very few false positives,” says Lipton. “It’s important that the system not accidentally remove legitimate e-mail.”

Lipton and Lee have received a provisional patent on their new spam tool. This summer they plan to refine the applica-
tion and hope to eventually license the application for broad use.

For more information...

IN BRIEF:

Tech Professor named dean of engineering at U. of Arkansas
Ashok Saxena, Regents’ Professor and former chair of the School of Materials Science and Engineering at Georgia Tech, has been named dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Arkansas (UA), effective July 21.

Saxena, 54, also will serve as distinguished professor of materials science and engineering and as graduate research chair for the College.

He is the first UA faculty member to hold an endowed chair funded by the $500 million gift from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation.

He joined the Tech faculty in 1985 as profes-
sor in the School of Materials Science and Engineering. From 1991-94 he served as direc-
tor of the Composites Education and Research Center. He served as chair of the School of Materials Science and Engineering from 1993 until 2002 and was named Regents’ Professor in 2002.

Dressing down

The Office of Human Resources recently issued a statement concerning workplace attire.

Quoting the Human Resources Manual, “It is the policy of Georgia Tech that each employee’s dress and grooming be appropriate for our work environment.”

The normal dress code is relaxed during the summer to provide a more practical and com-
fortable clothing standard. This policy is in effect at the beginning of the summer semester and ending after the Labor Day holiday. It is the intent that each employee may choose to wear less formal attire as long as clothing will not negatively affect the Institute’s image.

Supervisors are responsible for determining appropriate dress for each specific work situa-
tion or environment. When dealing with cus-
tomers and the public, attire should be consis-
tent with a positive business image.

In addition, those employees whose jobs require them to wear uniforms and/or whose attire must meet prescribed safety standards are not covered by this policy.

For more information, refer to the Human Resources Manual at www.admin-fin.gatech.edu/human.

Summer recreation

According to Director Butch Stanphill, the Campus Recreation Center (CRC) is closed to the Georgia Tech community until August. Other campus recreation programs are affected as well. The Fitness/Options Program will offer only limited classes during the summer and the summer camp has been cancelled. However, Outdoor Recreation (ORUT) and Intramurals will proceed normally through-

summer.

In an effort to provide as much up-to-date information to the Georgia Tech community, the Campus Recreation Department announced the development of the CRC Web site. Specific Information concerning this summer’s changes as well as bi-monthly updates and pictures of construction progress will be posted here. Users may also subscribe to the Campus Recreation list serve at www.sac2.gatech.edu.