

FORUM

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To ensure that we have time to fully evaluate your submissions, guest columns should be e-mailed to the next issue's editor or forwarded to forum@studlife.com by no later than 5 p.m. two days before publication. Late pieces will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

We welcome your submissions, and thank you for your consideration.

STAFF EDITORIAL

Try the new ArtSci Web mail programs

Arts & Sciences Computing is currently allowing students to test out three different Web mail programs: Horde Webmail, SquirrelMail and the current default, SakeMail. Students now have the opportunity to cast preliminary votes on which of the three programs they prefer, though another poll at a later date will be the determinant of what program ultimately stays. The test programs and voting options can be found online at artsci.wustl.edu/webmail. Soon, students will have a chance to make a difference in the way they and future generations of students access Web mail on campus.

But thus far, few students have chosen to take advantage of the opportunity to vote, with the number of respondents only breaking 1,000 as

of Monday night. Because this vote is preliminary and unpublicized by Arts & Sciences, only those students who regularly visit the ArtSci Web mail site (read: those students who don't already forward their e-mail to Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, or another Web-based e-mail service) have had a say in the voting. Arts & Sciences representatives noted that the later voting process will be better publicized, so that the hundreds of students who forward their e-mail to other services will be aware of their options.

Of note, though, is the fact that the majority of students who cast votes to date in the preliminary poll have simply chosen SakeMail, the current default program. While we can't make assumptions about why students have voted the way they did, we fear several

things. First, we worry that students are just choosing the default Web mail program because they are familiar with its interface, not because it's the best program available. Second, we fear that students aren't taking the time to fully evaluate the provided e-mail options. And while this is only a preliminary poll, we fear that the results of the actual poll later on will reflect the same problems.

So while it is certainly simpler in the short term to stick with tried-and-true solutions, rather than to take the time to learn a new program, we urge students to test out the new ArtSci Web mail options early on so they can make informed decisions when it counts later this year. Each of the available programs has associated benefits and problems, and it's

important to know what these are before making a decision.

The Horde Webmail program, for instance, allows students access not only to their e-mail accounts, but also to their University-provided Web space (via the public_html folder in Horde's File Manager). This is a great boon to students interested in hosting their own Web site on the ArtSci server, as the University currently does not post clear instructions for how to transfer files to the server, change file permissions, and otherwise make use of the provided space. Most students who make use of their University Web space end up going through a trial-and-error process to get things up and running—accessing this space through Horde appears to simplify things greatly.

SquirrelMail, on the other

hand, provides a vastly simplified interface, allowing students to access basic e-mail functions more easily, while also giving them a chance to customize a number of program functions through the options menu. SquirrelMail's organization might be a benefit to both students who wish to customize their e-mail options and students who wish to just send and receive e-mail without a lot of hassle.

Finally, all other pros and cons aside, both Horde Webmail and SquirrelMail offer a search function, allowing students to search through their e-mails to find that one important letter or a reminder from a student group. This is a great improvement over the default SakeMail program, which lacks search capability. Whatever the results of the future poll

turn out to be, Arts & Sciences might do well to leave all three programs functional, so individual students retain the option to choose the Web mail client that best suits them.

We urge students to take advantage of this opportunity to check out the Web mail programs ahead of time. Take a little time to go through and test out each of the available programs, then vote in the preliminary poll for the one you find most useful. Look through all the options and try things like composing an e-mail, changing your reply-to address, setting forwarding, and uploading files to your Web space. E-mail is a crucial tool in the University setting; those who have inadequate e-mail access in an environment like this are at a distinct disadvantage.