

SPOTLIGHT

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Students, faculty voice concerns over CFCC's pornography filter

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Managing Editor

The first time that student Santuscha Badal saw the grey screen pop up reading "this site is blocked by the sonicWALL content filtering service," she was understandably confused.

Badal, the special events coordinator for the Student Activities Board, had been working hard on organizing an SAB approved event that would be taking place two weeks later.

The April event would feature Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, co-authors of the sexual education book "I Love Female Orgasm: An Extraordinary Orgasm Guide," giving a presentation on sexual health to a packed Webber Center.

But when Badal attempted to access the authors' website, sexualityeducation.com, from her computer in the SAB office, she could not do it.

The website was blocked by the college's new internet filtering system for blocking pornography.

"I've been on the website and it's not porn," Badal said, weeks after the very popular event took place. "The only photos are of their t-shirts that they sell. I guess the problem must be the words on the site."

"People could be doing research for themselves because they don't have a computer at home. They just can't do it here."

According to network engineer Ron Kiely, the decision to put the filter into place this semester had nothing to do with pornography specifically. The device, he said, was put in place to stop a bandwidth problem.

"This isn't really a filtering device, it's a security device," Kiely said. "We have a certain amount of bandwidth that we buy to the internet and that was being exceeded on a regular basis."

Kiely also said that most of the problem was due to people accessing illegal downloading sites for music and movies. Those sites are now blocked. Legal download sites like iTunes are not. The device also blocks sites that could be harmful by detecting malware and spyware.

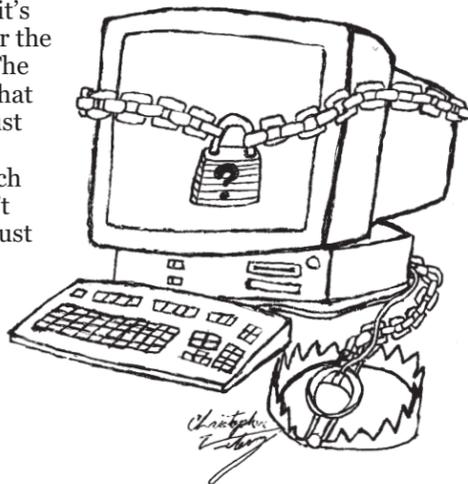
In addition, the system has the ability to block content based on language, violence, pornography, drugs and—vaguest of all the categories—adult/mature content. Which sites fall under those labels are determined by a list that is updated through a sort of subscription that goes along with the security device.

The only blocks currently activated on CFCC's system are the ones for pornography and adult/mature content. Vice President of Instructional Affairs Dr. Barbara Burrows said that one of those blocks will soon be lifted.

Burrows said that after faculty letters prompted her to investigate the issue, the decision was made to unblock sites that were being filtered based solely on adult/mature content. The block for sites that are deemed pornography will remain in place.

"The main thing I want to stress is that we will not be having I.T. making judgement calls on what is and isn't pornography," Burrows said. "If a faculty member has a website they want to use for class that is being blocked, they can contact I.T. The only thing that I.T. is going to check for is malware, to see if this site could be harmful to our system. If it's safe, they can unblock it."

Since the block was put on earlier this year, Kiely said that I.T. has



only been contacted once about allowing a site.

As for students, some were still convinced that any type of filtering based on content was unfair.

"I'm not saying that we should get to look at porn at school," said Ken Reynolds, 21, liberal arts major. "But if that thing makes a mistake, I might not have time to go through a whole process to see what I need to see."

Faculty members were also expressing concerns over the accuracy of the system's filtering. Assistant Professor Sandra Cooper was unable to access a political blog site called rumproast.com.

"I was shocked. I thought maybe it was porn," she said. "I went home and checked, and it was just political commentary. Sure, it was left-wing

political commentary, and there were some curse words, but it wasn't porn. It just feels like censorship to me."

Communications faculty Wendy Adams ran into a problem while attempting to help a student on the forensics team do research for an upcoming speech.

"He mentions plastic surgery in his speech, so I was just trying to help him punch up his jokes," Adams said. "I was trying to find a reference to a celebrity who had plastic surgery that doesn't look good. I just did a search for 'celebrity bad plastic surgery' and the first site I went to was filtered."

"The first thing I'm thinking is 'when did we start this?' Nobody had any idea this was coming. Suppose a student is doing a psychology paper on the negative effects of pornography on women. How do they do their research?"

Nearby colleges have taken varying approaches to internet filtering.

The University of South Florida and the University of Central Florida as a general rule do not block access to any sites. Instead, they enforce strong penalties for misuse.

"UCF does not, nor has it ever, used Internet content filters," said UCF Vice Provost Dr. Joel Hartman. "The reasons are that we feel it is unwarranted...and such technologies often block access to much more than the intended content."

Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville uses a filter similar to CFCC's.

Some of the sites blocked as pornography as of press time

qrmag.com (gay lifestyle)
askmen.com (men's advice)
nakedart.com (nude paintings)
maxim.com (men's interests)
fhmonline.com (men's interests)
rapindustry.com (hip hop news)
smnnews.com (heavy metal news)
sportsofboston.com (sports)
howardstern.com (radio dj)
xxl.com (urban fashion, music)
perezhilton.com (celeb gossip)
collegehumor.com (humor site)
condom.com (condom store)

"We use the features to block spam, spyware sites, online gaming, peer-to-peer sites and pornographic sites," said SFCC Systems Administrator Cori Griffith. "We no longer are faced with the painful porn investigations that were done in the past. It was not pleasant for anyone but the porn surfers."

Burrows said that she plans to address the faculty on the issue through email before the end of spring classes.

"The question becomes, is it worth it to do this?" said Dr. Peter Smith who said he was blocked when attempting to research Gibson guitars for his music humanities class. "We usually want to expand the avenues of inquiry, and—intentional or not, this seems to maybe limit them."

Library and Learning Support Center hours for exam week and beyond

Last day of classes: Friday, May 1: 7:30am-4:30pm

Saturday, May 2: 10:00am-5:00pm

Monday-Wednesday, May 4-6: 7:30am-9:00pm

Thursday, May 7: 7:30am-7:30pm

Friday, May 8: 1:00pm-4:30pm

Saturday and Sunday, May 9 & 10: Closed

Monday and Tuesday, May 11 & 12: 8:00am-4:30pm

Wednesday and Thursday, May 13 & 14: 7:30am-6:00pm

Summer Hours begin: Wednesday, May 13

Monday-Thursday: 7:30am-6:00pm

Friday-Sunday: Closed