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Help

Harvard U. Will Offer Lifetime E-Mail Accounts to Its Alumni

By FLORENCE OLSEN

Harvard University will soon join a few of its peers in offering permanent Web-based e-mail accounts to alumni. Harvard officials say the new Webmail accounts will help the university stay in touch with graduates and will eliminate occasional problems it has had with its current e-mail-forwarding service for alumni.

Since 1998, alumni have been able to sign up for a Harvard "@post.harvard.edu" account, from which Harvard forwards messages to their personal e-mailbox, such as an address at Yahoo.com or at work. Harvard forwards three million e-mail messages a day to its alumni.

But mail sent to the new Harvard accounts will not be forwarded. Alumni will go directly to the Harvard alumni Web site to check their e-mail.

The Webmail accounts will have several advantages over e-mail forwarding, says Andrew K. Tiedemann, communications director for alumni affairs and development. When alumni change employers or switch to a new Internet service provider, they frequently forget to register their new e-mail addresses with Harvard's e-mail forwarding service, and the university loses e-mail contact.

Harvard officials say the new accounts are a relatively inexpensive way to stay in contact with alumni, especially recent graduates. According to Mr. Tiedemann, 93 percent of last year's graduating seniors signed up for Harvard's e-mail forwarding service. He hopes that a large percentage of alumni will sign up for the new Webmail accounts, especially the graduates of Harvard's professional schools. The university immediately loses contact with a much higher portion of those graduates, Mr. Tiedemann says.

The new accounts, which the university will offer initially to the class of 2003, would provide a permanent e-mail address for alumni who like having a Harvard address. "We're not going anywhere," Mr. Tiedemann says. "If you have a Harvard e-mail address, it's a pretty good bet that you'd have a Harvard e-mail address forever."

The Webmail accounts also have advantages for the Harvard Alumni Association. The accounts will bring alumni to Harvard's alumni Web site to check their e-mail, increasing the likelihood that other news and promotions on the Web site will get their attention.

Harvard has had problems with its e-mail forwarding service as recently as this week. America Online, Yahoo, and other Internet service providers use spam filters to shield their customers from junk e-mail. On Tuesday, a filter set up by Yahoo began blocking e-mail from the university's @post.harvard.edu forwarding service.

At least two dozen alumni contacted the university about the loss of service, Mr. Tiedemann says. The university, in turn, contacted Yahoo, which corrected the blocking problem within 24 hours.

Harvard is not the first college to offer Webmail accounts to its alumni. Dartmouth College, Princeton

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Harvard U. will offer lifetime e-mail accounts to its alumni

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University, and Stanford University offer similar accounts.

Institutions that do offer Webmail accounts typically outsource the service through contracts with companies like Harris Publishing and Publishing Concepts, which specialize in providing Webmail account services to colleges and universities.

When Stanford University requested bids for its "@stanfordalumni.org" Webmail, its own computer-services department was underbid by USA-Net, which competed for the business.

To offer the service itself to Stanford's 170,000 alumni, the university would have had to greatly expand its existing e-mail facilities, says Gabriela Tovar, director of online services for the Stanford Alumni Association. "That's more than 10 times the number of faculty, students, and staff that we have."

Stanford offers its alumni free Webmail accounts for what it calls "basic" service. It also offers two levels of premium service, for \$19.95 and \$29.95. With premium service, alumni get larger mailboxes and expanded virus protection.

Harvard officials say they have not yet decided what to charge for alumni Webmail accounts.

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Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [More Colleges Offer Graduates Lifetime E-Mail Addresses](#) (8/17/2001)



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