

# EAST BAY HILLS

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# UC's joke is on the Web site

*Because of a production error, this story did not run in its entirety in Tuesday's newspaper.*

**By William Brand**

STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY — Here's a joke: How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb? Answer: That's not funny.

How about this one:

A dog walks into Western Union and asks to send a telegram. He fills out a form on which he writes down the telegram he wishes to send: "Bow wow wow, Bow wow wow."

The clerk says, "You can add another 'Bow wow' for the same price." The dog responds: "Now wouldn't that sound a little silly."

Were these jokes funny? How funny? On a scale of 1-10 — from not funny at all (1) to very funny (10) — rate these jokes.

To find out more, you'll have to log onto a Web site at the University of California, Berkeley. It's called Jester 2.0 — Jokes for Your Sense of Humor.

The site began as an experiment by graduate students in a computer database class taught by Associate Professor of Industrial Engineering Ken Goldberg. There are thousands of joke Web sites, but this experiment takes jokes a bit further.

The idea, Goldberg explains, was to explore an emerging sci-

ence called "collaborative filtering," a way to group people by their preferences.

It's a field of high interest to the Internet business community, explains graduate student Dhruv Gupta. If you can predict what people like, you're ahead.

Goldberg said sites like amazon.com and movies.com ask visitors to rate books or films, then attempt to recommend books or films they might like.

Jokes, he thought, might be simpler, because everybody knows what's funny. So students and Goldberg got jokes from everywhere, tossing out those that are merely stupid or offensive, then posted the rest.

The site has been wildly popular and as of Monday afternoon more than 16,500 individuals had visited the site in the last six months.

After a lot of math and a revision or two, Goldberg said the theory works in most cases.

"If you complete our set of 10 sample jokes, rating each of them, we've devised a system to recommend more jokes that you may think funny," Goldberg said. But it's impossible to generalize, he said. Human sense of humor varies tremendously.

"We thought that when we plotted the responses mathematically, (a dot for each person's

response to a joke), there would be big constellations or clusters around each type of joke," Goldberg said.

"Instead, what we got was a nicely distributed cloud of responses. Humor is spread out all over the place."

The system works, they understand why it works — but they still don't understand what makes people laugh. "We found out for example, that President Clinton jokes and feminist jokes go together. We have no idea why," Goldberg said.