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Student-developed app challenges Princeton bathroom policy

By: [Cathryn Asip](#) January 19, 2015 5:54 pm

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A new, student-developed app was shut down due to perceived safety concerns.

The app, called GirlCode, created by three Princeton students, was created in opposition to the university's current bathroom policies, in which students must enter a code to access women's restrooms. GirlCode provided an interface through which students and the general public could easily find the required codes by inputting their residential college, followed by their building.

The university's administration met with developers Monica Shi, Amanda Shi and Victor Zhou to discuss the implications of the app, which has caused controversy both on campus and on social media since its appearance on Jan. 7.

"The school is forcing us take down the app," said Monica Shi. "None of us want to jeopardize the progress of our degrees, so we'll be complying with the request."

Shi cited the obvious problem of inconvenience to female students as a major impetus for GirlCode's creation.

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The app's developers also pointed out that codes are not currently required for men's bathrooms and said that the use of the codes drills "in the very gender stereotypes that have held back social and technological advancement for so long. As a leading research university, Princeton should be doing its part in reducing these gender norms rather than enforcing them."

The developers saw GirlCode not only as a temporary solution, but also as a means for larger social change on campus.

"The power of GirlCode isn't in the technology," Shi said. "It's in the message we want to send to the



The door to a women's restroom at Princeton University. (Monica Shi)

Princeton community and to anyone in the world who cares about gender issues.”

University spokesperson Martin Mbugua says the university's primary concern is the safety and privacy of its students and explained that the codes were introduced before a security system for exterior doors was installed in residential buildings.

The development of the app, previously available on iOS and Android, comes on the heels of recent criticisms about the ways in which colleges and universities across the country are dealing with sexual assault and gender issues.

In November, Princeton University was [found in violation of Title IX for its handling of sexual assault cases](#) and in December the *Times of Trenton*, [reported that three more allegations of sexual assault](#) were filed with the Princeton University Public Safety Department.

GirlCode sparked debate on social media both by students in agreement with the developers' push for gender equality and by students who felt threatened by the dissemination of such private information.

The Daily Princetonian notes that [in a poll of the undergraduate student body](#) concerning the use of bathroom codes, "54.7 percent of students elected for no bathroom codes, 23.9 percent voted to implement codes for female students and 21.4 percent ... voted for bathroom codes for both male and female bathrooms."

Mbugua disclosed that the university plans to revisit the issue of bathroom codes.

"At the end of 2014, University administrators and representatives of the Undergraduate Student Government met to begin the discussion on the bathroom code policy. The discussions will continue this semester."

Shi expressed frustration at the turn events have taken. However, she remains hopeful that the app's message will eventually be heard by the administration.

"We're still actively working on eliminating codes on female restrooms -- we have a meeting with the student body president -- but it's difficult when the administration is intent on keeping them."

Cathryn Asip is a student at Hollins University. You can follow her on twitter @CadyAspis

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