ITS View of Peer to Peer File Sharing

Technology Guideline

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Peer to peer (p2p) file sharing is used to both download files and make them available for upload to other computers. Some common peer to peer clients are LimeWire, Kazaa, FrostWire, and BitTorrent. More information on removing peer to peer software may be found here [1].

Dangers of File Sharing Programs
File sharing can be a useful and powerful tool; however, due to the nature of this technology, it carries with it a variety of potential problems:

- File sharing software makes it easy to distribute copyrighted materials. Sharing copyrighted material without express consent from the copyright owner is illegal and prohibited by federal law. Penalties for copyright infringement may include civil and criminal penalties and university disciplinary action. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has been aggressively targeting college students through legal action, including large fines, and even imprisonment in extreme cases. Sharing protected materials has legal implications and should be treated seriously.
- Updates to file sharing software may reset system parameters. Your efforts to control the behavior of file sharing programs may be reset by software updates. The best solution is to remove all peer to peer programs whenever possible.
- File sharing may open up your computer to hackers by allowing them easy access to your computer or through vulnerabilities in the file sharing software. Identity thieves could access potentially private information without your consent or knowledge.
- Peer to peer networks also distribute spyware, adware, and viruses in seemingly harmless files.

Avoiding Copyright Infringement

- Remove any peer to peer programs installed on your computer.
- Obtain copyrighted material legally (see Legal Alternatives below) and don't share it with others. If you do choose to retain peer to peer software on your computer, ensure that it is configured to not share any files from your computer.
- Become educated:
  - U.S. Copyright Office [2]
  - What Do You Think? (Video on Intellectual Property) [3]
  - RIAA [4]
  - Electronic Frontier Foundation [5]

Legal Alternatives
Many sites exist to provide legal ways to obtain music, movies, and other media. Most downloads are available by

subscription or a per-download fee. It is important to read the terms of use before downloading to ensure it is a legal service and that you understand all restrictions and commitments of the service. Educause maintains a list of legal alternatives for downloading of digital media.

- Educause list of Legal Sources of Online Content [6]

UNI's Stance
While UNI respects the right of ownership for all intellectual and entertainment property and explicitly prohibits sharing of this material, the University does not routinely monitor for sharing of protected materials. The copyright owners do monitor peer to peer networks, however, and UNI has an obligation under the Digital Millenium Copyright Act to respond to various legal notices from copyright owners or their representatives.

Additionally, copyright infringement violates the Student Conduct Code. Therefore, students found responsible for copyright infringement will be subject to university sanctions which will include disabling their network devices for a specified period of time and may include university warning, probation or other sanctions. Repeated violations of this policy can result in the permanent suspension of network access.

- Statement on Unauthorized Distribution of Copyrighted Materials and Penalties for Violation of Federal Law [7]
- ResNet Policy (including Copyright Violation policy) [8]

Need Help?
If you are confused about file sharing or need help removing software from your computer, feel free to contact one of the following resources. If you are a student living in on of UNI?s residential facilities contact the ResNet Helpdesk at 273-7768. All staff and students can contact the ITS Computer Consulting Center at 273-5555. If you received a copyright violation notice, you will need to follow the steps included in the original notification.

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Source URL: http://www.uni.edu/its/policies/its-view-peer-peer-file-sharing

Links:
[1] http://www.uni.edu/resnet/content/remove-peer-peer
[2] http://www.copyright.gov/
[3] http://law.richmond.edu/ipi/whatdoyouthink.htm
[4] http://www.riaa.com/
[5] http://www.eff.org/
[6] http://www.educause.edu/legalcontent
[7] http://www.uni.edu/its/policies/statement-unauthorized-distribution-copyrighted-materials-and-penalties-violation-federal-l
[8] http://www.uni.edu/resnet/content/policy