

Laws threaten file-sharing

Law now tackles students after taking on software programs

By MARGARET BAUER

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College campuses across the country are becoming staging grounds for an imminent battle over digital copyright infringement as university officials fear lawsuits from recording and music industry officials.

The leaders of six higher-education organizations recently sent a letter to over 2,300 colleges and universities requesting stricter regulations on digital file-sharing technologies. Representatives of the music and recording industries sent out a similar request soon thereafter.

The letters assert that evidence of illegal distribution of copyrighted material through peer-to-peer (p2p) and other digital file sharing connections on college campuses may result in lawsuits and legal action against universities that choose to remain impartial.

At Washington University, the service policy for Residential Technology states that "users should assume that material is copyrighted unless they know otherwise and not copy or disseminate copyrighted material without permission."

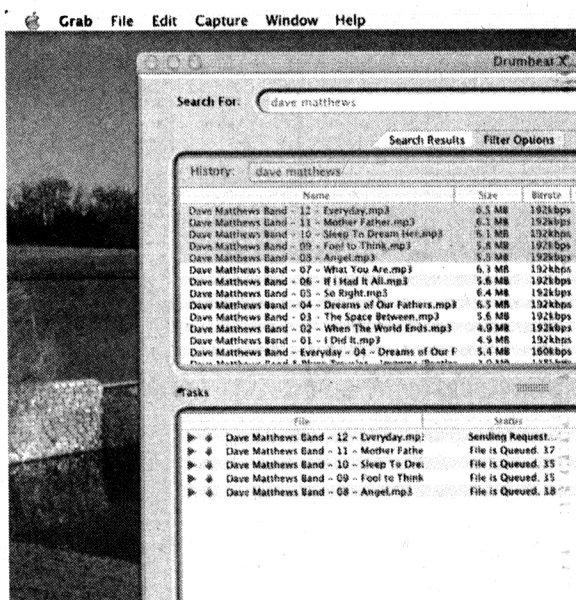
Despite the policy's warning, most students with a computer use some variation of the popular p2p programs, including KaZaA, Morpheus, and Blubster. Numerous students in the WU residential community also have embraced Direct Connect, a file-sharing program with several on-campus hubs run by students, though many students erroneously complain that the university is "shutting down" such programs.

In many cases, students have little idea what the actual problems are with file sharing and copyright infringement on campus.

"It seems like many students come to campus as freshmen thinking that downloading [and making available for uploading] music, games, software, etc....is not a problem," said Matt Arthur, director of Residential Technology Services (RTS). "Our hope is to educate new students so that they fully understand the ramifications of this issue."

As Arthur explained, many people tend to mix up the problems of bandwidth and the content of that bandwidth.

"It's not my business to look at what people are running over the bandwidth," said Arthur. "File sharing programs are not, in and of themselves, a problem...it is how these tools are used that can become a



Bernell Dorrrough/*Student Life*

Drumbeat X (shown above) is one of many file sharing programs that can be used by students to pirate software.

concern, both from a bandwidth and copyright point of view."

At WU, as on many college campuses, bandwidth usage tends to be crucial. A mere five to 10 percent of the WU student population sometimes uses up to 50 percent of the available bandwidth at any given time.

If a student user or group of users is drawing upon so much of the network's resources that it causes a strain, Arthur said, "[RTS] will take appropriate action to assure the entire community will continue to get access. Sometimes that means shutting off [a student's] connection immediately, sometimes that means calling the student and talking about it."

While Arthur focuses primarily on bandwidth issues, Rob Wild, associate housing director of Residential Life, is concerned with the content of what students are downloading.

"The sense I get is that many students feel that they have a right to share copyrighted Internet files," said Wild. "Students should be made more aware of the federal and state regulations regarding copyright infringement and the Internet. As a result of the increased number of copyright infringements that have been occurring in the past several months, the Office of Residential Life will need to take on a more active role in communicating expectations of computer use to our residents."

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Wild believes it is the duty of the RAs to relay correct Internet usage rules to their floors. "[RAs] have a responsibility to role model appropriate computer use and communicate the policy," he said. Still, Wild contended that RTS should bear the burden of enforcing those rules. "The policing of this policy needs to be at the discretion of RTS. RTS and Residential Life will continue to work together to investigate and sanction those who violate the policy," he said.

Freshman Zena Johnson, however, is not worried about the consequences of sharing music online. "No one is looking for us," Johnson said. "I don't consider it stealing until someone starts selling music. That is breaking copyrights. [But] when I listen to an artist that I really like, it makes me more interested in their music, and I'm more likely to go to a concert or two," she added.

Freshman Andy Feldman made a similar point. "I wouldn't worry about consequences, because of how many people on campus also trade files. [Those who share files] are anonymous by virtue of the sheer number of people who participate. I don't think the campus should encourage it, because of the bandwidth drain, but on a personal level, I don't have any strong moral objections."

Sophomore Diane Adams thinks that copyright is not a huge issue on campus. "I think that it gets out of control in some cases, but in general it is not necessarily something to be concerned about," she said.

Despite copyright restrictions and bandwidth problems, students continue to be optimistic about file sharing: "I do think that it is stealing," said Adams, "But I also think that ResTech is stealing from us by charging us \$100 per semester [for Ethernet access]."