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Stanford music program won't eliminate illegal downloading

By **EDITORIAL BOARD**
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The University recently established a committee to investigate the possibility of creating a legal music file-sharing service for students.

While the idea is interesting and perhaps necessary — particularly since Stanford faces possible legal repercussions for student file sharing on its network — such a service is unlikely to significantly reduce illegal downloading.

The ultimate fault for this lies not with Stanford, but with the music industry. The restrictions that record companies place on legally downloaded files severely limit how songs can be used and shared, making them unattractive to students — and to music downloaders in general, which is one reason why Apple's iTunes software and the new legal version of Napster have done little to quash illegal downloading in general.

Want to share a song you purchased on-line with one of your friends? Go ahead and try — the song won't be readable on their computer. Want to burn your favorite playlist for a party? If you've exceeded the allotment of burnt CDs granted by your downloading software, you're out of luck — those songs are stuck on your computer.

Unless Stanford administrators decide to impose far more draconian restrictions on file sharing, there is little incentive for students to use a legal file-sharing program — paying for crippled files — when they could access a larger library with more versatile music for free.

There have also been suggestions that students could freely play the entire Napster or iTunes music library while connected to the Stanford network, but that leaves students with the unattractive prospect of a nonexistent music collection once they leave the Farm.

Unfortunately, none of the current possibilities for legal file sharing offer particularly compelling reasons to switch from popular programs like Kazaa and ourTunes. The music industry must find ways to adapt to changing technology — just as the film and television industries adapted to the advent of VCRs — rather than clamping down on consumers or on the universities that those students attend.

We understand that Stanford may be in a difficult position legally — a position that might be eased if the University offers a legal file-sharing

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program to its students. And there are students who (either for fear of legal repercussions or the desire to support musicians) will be well-served by such a service. So this could be a good move for both administrators and students — as long as Stanford doesn't follow the lead of Penn State, which includes the cost for a similar program in tuition, then offers the program for “free” to all students.

It's unlikely that student bills will grow substantially, but on the heels of another tuition increase and the reduction of meal-plan options, a universal downloading fee would be another unfortunate step in the University's recent pattern of taking both power and money away from students.

Finally, we urge the new committee to also consider the ramifications of movie file-sharing. While the size of movie files makes downloading movies currently impractical for most students, as technology develops it seems unlikely that the present obstacles will remain. This is an issue that the University will have to face soon — and the sooner administrators start thinking about it, the better.

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