



Music Industry Cracks Down on Colleges

By TED BRIDIS
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WASHINGTON -- College students who faced lawsuits for illegally sharing large music collections over campus computer networks increasingly risk being unplugged from the Internet or even suspended over lesser complaints by the recording industry.

In a nationwide crackdown, the music industry is sending thousands more copyright complaints to universities this school year than last. In some cases, students are targeted for allegedly sharing a single mp3 file online.

A few schools _ Ohio University and Purdue University are at the top of the list _ already have received more than 1,000 complaints accusing individual students since last fall. For students who are caught, punishments can vary from e-mail warnings to semester-long suspensions from classes.

Ohio University said students caught twice sharing music online would face the same disciplinary sanctions as classmates accused of violence or cheating: suspension, probation or an assignment to write a homework paper on the subject. Ohio said no student ever has been caught twice.

"When they told me I freaked," said Ryan Real of Louisville, an Ohio University sophomore who was accused in November of illegally sharing not music but a popular video game, "Grand Theft Auto," over the school's network. Real said he was ordered to delete the game and the Bittorrent file-sharing

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software he was using from his computer before the school would turn his Internet connection back on.

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"Everybody does it," Real said. "The odds that you are going to get caught, it's not something you think about." Classmates who also have been caught "still download illegally," Real said.

At the request of The Associated Press, the trade group for the largest music labels, the Recording Industry Association of America, identified the 25 universities to which it has sent the most copyright complaints so far this school year.

The group, which has long pressured schools to act more aggressively, said software tools are improving to trace illegal file-sharing on campuses.

"We are taking advantage of that technology to make universities aware of the problem on their campuses," said RIAA President Cary Sherman. "They need to be sending a message to their students about how to live a lawful life."

The top five schools are Ohio, Purdue, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Tennessee and the University of South Carolina. The RIAA complained about almost 15,000 students at the 25 universities, nearly triple the number for the previous school year.

"They're trying to make a statement," said Randall Hall, who polices computers at Michigan State University, seventh on the list with 753 complaints. Michigan State received 432 such complaints in December alone, when students attended classes for only half the month.

Hall meets personally with students caught twice and forces them to watch an eight-minute anti-piracy DVD produced by the RIAA. A third-time offender can be suspended for a semester; at least one student was targeted with three strikes so far this year.

"I get the whole spectrum of excuses," Hall said. "The most common answer I get is, 'All my friends are doing this. Why did I get caught?'"

The University of Tennessee requires second-time offenders to carry computers to a technology lab where popular music-sharing programs are deleted before Internet connections are restored. A student subjected to a third complaint _ which typically happens once each year _ faces punishment that ranges from a formal reprimand to suspension.

"They're apologetic and somewhat embarrassed," said Tim Rogers, the school's vice chancellor for student affairs.

At the University of Massachusetts at Amherst _ which received 897 complaints _ first- and second-time offenders receive escalating warnings about piracy. After a third complaint, the school unplugs a student's Internet connection and sends the case to a dean for punishment.

The music group said each university should set its own penalties for stealing songs and said campuses are rife with such thefts. "When we look at the problem, it's particularly acute in the

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college context," said the group's chief executive, Mitch Bainwol.

The trade group said popular software programs it has targeted at schools include AresWarez, BitTorrent, eDonkey and other programs that operate on the Gnutella and FastTrack services.

Under federal law, universities that receive complaints about students illegally distributing copyrighted songs generally must act to stop repeat offenders or else the schools can be sued. The entertainment industry typically can identify a student only by his or her numerical Internet address and must rely on the school to correlate that information with its own records to trace a person's identity.

Some schools aggressively warn students after they receive complaints. Others don't. Purdue, which has received 1,068 complaints so far this year but only 37 in 2006, said it rarely even notifies students accused by the RIAA because it's too much trouble to track down alleged offenders. Purdue said its students aren't repeat offenders.

"In a sense, the (complaint) letter is asking us to pursue an investigation and as the service provider we don't see that as our role," spokesman Steve Tally said. "We are a leading technology school with thousands and thousands of curious and talented technology students."

On the Net:

Recording Industry Association of America: <http://www.riaa.com>

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