

Graceland students reported for illegal downloads

David Bolton

“I got a call from [Dave Mohler of Graceland Comm. Tech. Services] about an illegal download on my computer,” recalls Graceland student Jennifer Good, “I felt really embarrassed. I only did it once and didn’t know I’d get caught. I didn’t think it was a big deal, but it is.” Good is not alone: three students were reported last week, and between six and eight students were reported since the start of the semester, according to Tom Powell, Dean of Students.

Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) represent the largest studios and distributors in the nation, and are pushing the recent crack down on illegal downloads. The university reached an agreement with both organizations regarding Graceland students.

Graceland receives notices from RIAA or individual studios with information including date and time of download, name of song or movie, software used, and IP address linking it to a specific computer. “It’s not Graceland checking, it is reported to us,” says Powell, “but it is our commitment to follow up on the report.”

The IT department turns off Internet access for the offending computer and contacts the Dean of Students. To avoid prosecution, students must clear their computer of illegal downloads within 48 hours and are placed on “probation.” If the student is involved in any future downloads, the student’s Internet access is permanently blocked. “Students are very cooperative,” says Powell about the students he has called in, “We’ve never had anybody violate probation.”

Over the past few years RIAA has sued over 20,000 people in the United States. While many of these cases were legitimate, RIAA faces criticism for suing children, such as 12 year old Brianna LaHara in 2003,¹ a dead grandma, Gertrude Walton, in 2005,² and computer-less James Walls in 2006.³

Proponents of file-sharing compare it to radio and claim it increases the publicity for artists. This claim assumes people will purchase songs and support an artist they like. However, RIAA estimates that it loses 300 million dollars a year domestically, to illegal music distribution.

Copying music from a friend, downloading music from an unauthorized source, or allowing others to copy a personal collection are all examples of copyright infringement. According to RIAA’s website, “online infringement of copyrighted music can be punished by up to 3 years in prison and \$250,000 in fines.”

There are several means of obtaining legal copies of music. Store-bought CDs are the most popular and offer the highest sound-quality. Online stores have gained prominence in recent years, with the option to purchase individual tracks. However, these files carry copy-restrictions that limit choice regarding portable media players (music

¹ “12-Year-Old Sued for Music Downloading,” *Fox News Online*, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,96797,00.html> (Visited: 27 February 2007).

² Eric Bangeman, “I sue dead people,” *Ars Technica*, <http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20050204-4587.html> (Visited: 27 February 2007).

³ Anders Bylund, “RIAA sues computer-less family, 234 others, for file sharing,” *Ars Technica*, <http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20060424-6662.html> (Visited: 27 February 2007).

purchased through iTunes only works on iPod, music purchased through Zune only works with Microsoft's Zune player).

An interesting development in the past year or two is YouTube and similar sites, which offer short video segments for free. YouTube has faced lawsuits of its own, but August 2006 YouTube announced plans to "have every music video ever created" within the next 18 months.⁴ In September Warner Music announced plans to share its entire music video collection in exchange for a portion of YouTube's advertisement income.⁵

Graceland SIFE team works with MPAA, and is in the second year of an anti-piracy video campaign. Graceland encourages participating schools to produce a 60-second commercial and launch an anti-piracy campaign. Graceland SIFE team selects the top ten videos and the MPAA website hosts the videos. Last year, Graceland received entries from 50 schools. "[This year] we have over 50 schools participating and expect 100 schools by the end of the competition," says SIFE student, Michael Say.

⁴ "YouTube aims to show music videos," *BBC News Online*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4798133.stm> (Visited: 27 February 2007).

⁵ Nate Anderson, "Warner Music coming to YouTube," *Ars Technica*, <http://arstechnica.com/news.ars/post/20060918-7764.html> (Visited: 27 February 2007).