

Internet File Sharing and Copyrighted Materials

All students, faculty and staff,

Easy access allows each of us to explore the vastness of the Internet in different ways. On our quest for adventure, individuality, community and information, we find new experiences and ways to entertain and express ourselves. While most of this activity is healthy and encouraged, some behaviors cause problems that can harm us individually and threaten our community.

One example is the widespread use of Internet file sharing. Through peer-to-peer applications such as Gnutella, BitTorrent and eDonkey individuals have previously caused severe congestion of the JMU network, denying effective Internet access for others and causing teaching, learning, research and service functions to all suffer.

Besides adversely affecting network traffic flow, inappropriate use of file sharing programs to exchange copyrighted songs, movies, software and games has resulted in legal risk to individuals in our community and forced the university's increased involvement with handling recording and movie industry complaints served on such persons. Aggressive steps—such as invasive content scans, suspension of Internet access and cooperation with industry representatives in their pursuit of legal remedies—loom as potentially necessary actions. Such measures have already been undertaken at other universities.

In a manner consistent with our tradition of promoting individual responsibility within the university community, JMU has to this point relied most heavily on the individual commitment of students, faculty and staff to behave responsibly. We have expected each member of the JMU community to honor university policies and applicable laws. Yet each year there are some among us who abuse this trust by using the university's information technology resources inappropriately.

Individuals who abuse this trust must realize that when possible violations of copyright law are brought to our attention, JMU administrators have no choice but to make contact and ask for remedy of the problem. Failure to respond to such a request will be handled in a manner consistent with existing JMU policies. Consequences can be serious including suspension or termination from the university. And those who violate copyright law are also subject to civil and criminal penalties which can be quite severe.

Please avoid such a situation by informing yourself about JMU policies, educating others and demonstrating responsible behavior that respects the rights of fellow students, faculty and employees as well as the rights of copyright owners.

For additional security details and applicable policies see: www.jmu.edu/computing/filesshare.shtml.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Ralph Alberico
Dean of Libraries & Educational Technologies

Dale Hulvey
Assistant Vice President for Information Technology