Know the rules for proper Internet use

Illegal software, ignored copyrights, or electronic harassment can land students in hot water

By Michael Hines
Editor in Chief

Even though the computing center sends a copy of Internet guidelines to everyone who starts a new account, the rules aren't always followed.

According to Joe St Sauver, assistant director of University Computing, some students break those rules willfully and intentionally, and others do it because they don't know any better.

"We see very few folks who run into problems with it," St Sauver said.

Last year, nine computing cases were referred to the University Office of Student Life, said Elaine Green, associate dean of student life.

"We see them regularly," Green said. She estimated student life handles between six and 10 computing cases each year.

The most common World Wide Web cases deal with copyright, according to Green and St Sauver.

"Something doesn't have to be registered to be copyrighted," Green said.

Therefore, students cannot put copyrighted music or print stories on their Web sites. They can, however, create links to sites that do have the desired material.

Another problem is sharing accounts. The University's system of 330 modems is constantly in use, St Sauver said, and if students are sharing their accounts it burdens the system that is aimed at students.

In addition, much of the software that students have access to is paid for by the University on a per-student license fee basis.

The computing center is also concerned with electronic privacy. The University Conduct Code addresses privacy and states: "The code prohibits, among other things, lewd or indecent conduct, threat of physical harm, stalking, forgery, intentional disruption of University services, and damaging or destroying University property."

"We don't want you doing things like distributing viruses or worms or e-mail bombs," St Sauver said.

The University has an estimated 100,000 Web pages on its more than 200 servers. The gladstone server alone has about 4,000 Web authors.

This kind of access to the Web gives University students freedoms, St Sauver said, and the freedom "has responsibilities associated with it."

The computing center isn't looking for trouble, St Sauver said.

"We actually aren't like the judge, jury and executioner or anything," he said. "We'd like to encourage people to go ahead and use their accounts, but use it responsibly."

The number of instances of students not using their accounts responsibly has risen over the years, Green said.

"It's been a growing number as more students are online and become more sophisticated," she said.

Some students are aware of the rules before they are referred to student life, she said, and some don't. Those who do violate the rules can receive a number of sanctions.

"We make sure they understand the policies, but also in a number of ways have taken away access to an account," Green said. So far, the toughest sanction student life has given for an Internet case has been denying access to an account.

Some of the computing guidelines are fundamental. The guidelines give an example: "If you are given access to an administrative computing system solely to enter accounting information or prepare class rosters, it is inappropriate for you to use the system to play a compute-intensive online computer game."

Other prohibited behaviors include interception or diversion of network transmissions, accessing clearly confidential files and accessing confidential files about an individual without consent.