

Illegal software and film downloads exhaust university computer networks

Up to half of data network capacity taken up by film, music, and software downloads

Films, music, and computer software spreading in the Internet's peer-to-peer networks take up huge portions of the Finnish universities' data transfer capacity. For example, last autumn up to two-thirds of the server capacity at the University of Turku was spent on transferring data in the peer-to-peer networks. The University of Helsinki's corresponding figure is 30-50 percent. The number of students making use of the peer-to-peer networks is in the hundreds in every university.

"At least 90 percent of the information circulating in the peer-to-peer networks is protected by copyright law", says [Mauri Rosendahl](#), information security manager at the University of Helsinki.

Rosendahl explains that the authorities intervene in the illegal dissemination of copyright-protected material whenever international copyright organisations report on any wrongdoings. Usually this happens a couple of times a week, in both the Helsinki and Turku universities.

Belonging in peer-to-peer networks in itself is not illegal. According to Finnish law it is not illegal to copy films, music, or computer software for one's own use. Many of the peer-to-peer networks, however, require that the members allow access to their downloaded material for further circulation. This, in turn, is illegal.

Last Wednesday, Tampere University of Technology resorted to expelling three students who had been identified as distributors of illegal material. In other universities such drastic measures have not been introduced as yet. In Helsinki and Turku, computer connections have been temporarily disconnected, while in some other universities of technology students have been issued with warnings. "Network supervision can be problematic. We cannot decide for other people what kind of usage is good or bad. The peer-to-peer networks cannot be closed down as the scientific community benefits from them as well", explains information security manager [Mats Kommonen](#) from the University of Turku. Peer-to-peer networks cause problems mainly at universities where the student accommodation connections are not separate from the university network. "At the end of the day, the number of students guilty of software and entertainment piracy is fairly small, but even a few pirate servers can drastically slow down other information traffic", says information security manager [Kaisu Rahko](#) from the University of Oulu.

Executive director Antti Kotilainen of the Anti-Piracy Centre in Finland, CIAPC, sees the decision by Tampere University of Technology to expel students suspected of piracy as an encouraging step in the right direction. "There is no justification for the usage of networks that were set up with tax-payers' money for the purpose of acquiring free entertainment for the students", Kotilainen emphasises. Kotilainen feels Finland should act even more forcefully to stop the use of the peer-to-peer networks for copyright violations. In the United States and Great Britain, surveillance campaigns have effectively reduced the illegal copying of music. This has put a stop to the downward trend of the music industry's sales figures.

It is estimated that each year the 50,000 Finnish peer-to-peer network users copy from each other over 340,000 films, almost 800,000 CDs' worth of music, plus hundreds of thousands of computer games and programmes.