

YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: Frequently Asked Questions

Presenter:

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Your Rights and Responsibilities: Frequently Asked Questions

Note: Much of this material has been adapted from the comprehensive [Information Technology Rights and Responsibilities](#) web site.

- ◆ A friend at another school sent me a chain e-mail that says I'll get better grades if I pass it on. Can I do this?
- ◆ My roommate sent a phony e-mail to a pledge in my psych class, pretending to be me. It was obviously a prank, but the student reported it to our professor. What was wrong with what my roommate did?
- ◆ What are other examples of violations of the Policy Regarding Abuse of CIT Computers and Networks?
- ◆ What constitutes a violation under Cornell's Responsible Use of Electronic Communications policy? How do I report violations?
- ◆ I got a threatening e-mail from someone who isn't at Cornell. What can I do?
- ◆ What Internet activities are illegal under local, state, and federal laws?
- ◆ What are some computer or network activities that aren't violations of Cornell policy?
- ◆ OK, so sending me junk e-mail isn't a policy violation? Still, what can I do to get rid of it?
- ◆ Why can't I share my NetID and password with my friends or a family member?
- ◆ I copy articles from web sites all the time and use them for my papers. My TA told me I might be in violation of copyright laws. Where can I get more facts about this?
- ◆ What's wrong with making a copy of my officemate's or friend's word-processing program to use on my personal computer?
- ◆ I just retrieved some music from the Internet. I know it's illegal to copy CDs but is downloading Internet music also illegal?
- ◆ I have reason to believe that a student in another Cornell department copied material from my thesis draft, which I'd posted on my web site for peer review. How do I report this copyright infringement at Cornell?
- ◆ I read about a person's electronic communications and computer hard disk being subpoenaed. But I thought all my e-mail and web-site bookmarks were gone when I erased them. What's the real story?
- ◆ Security concerns, privacy issues, what's legal, what isn't – there's so much to know about using the Internet in a responsible way. Where can I learn more?

Q: A friend at another school sent me a chain e-mail that says I'll get better grades if I pass it on. Can I do this?

A: Initiating or continuing chain mail is a violation of [Cornell's Responsible Use of Electronic Communications Policy](#) and the [Policy Regarding Abuse of CIT Computers and Networks](#). As such, those activities can be reported.

Recent Internet chain mail has included messages that promise good luck, urge you to send post cards to a sick child, or warn you about an impending Internet shutdown or

a new virus (that turns out to be a hoax). **When you get chain e-mail, don't pass it on.** If you have a question about possibly legitimate elements of a message, such as a virus alert, check with the [CIT HelpDesk](#).

Q: My roommate sent a phony e-mail to a pledge in my psych class, pretending to be me. It was obviously a prank, but the student reported it to our professor. What was wrong with what my roommate did?

A: Sending a forged message under someone else's NetID -- e.g., sending hoax messages, even if intended as a joke -- is a violation of [Cornell's Responsible Use of Electronic Communications Policy](#) and the [Policy Regarding Abuse of CIT Computers and Networks](#). Altering electronic communications to hide your identity or impersonate another person is considered forgery. Forgery includes using another person's identity or using an identity that's fake, such as *batman@gothamcity.org*. Remember: All electronic mail, network news postings, and other forms of electronic communication should contain your name and/or NetID.

Q: What are other examples of violations of the Policy Regarding Abuse of CIT Computers and Networks?

A: Many commonplace Internet behaviors are violations under this policy and could be "actionable" under the [Campus Code of Conduct](#). It's worth your while to read the [entire policy](#). Here's a sampling of policy violations in addition to the ones already cited:

- unauthorized use of university information technology resources and unauthorized access to data or files -- even if they aren't securely protected, and no matter how you got access to another person's NetID and password;
- accessing or attempting to access another individual's data or information without proper authorization -- e.g., using another's NetID and password to look at that individual's personal information;
- use of university resources for unauthorized purposes -- which includes your own computer when it is connected to the Cornell Campus Network -- such as illegal, commercial, or profit-making activities
- releasing a virus or other program that damages or otherwise harms a system or network;
- sending a crippling number of files across the network -- for example, e-mail "bombing";
- tapping phone or network lines, including use of unauthorized network "sniffers";
- software piracy and copyright infringement.

Q: What constitutes a violation under Cornell's Responsible Use of Electronic Communications policy? How do I report violations?

A: Under this policy, the use of electronic communications to do any of the following is a violation:

- **Harass, threaten, or otherwise cause harm to specific individuals:**
Report these violations to the Cornell Judicial Administrator, 223 Day Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853 (phone: 607 255-4680). If the violations are potentially serious and require immediate attention, report them directly to the Cornell Police (emergency phone: 911; non-emergency phone: 607 255-1111; e-mail: cu_police@cornell.edu).
- **Impede, interfere with, impair, or otherwise cause harm to the activities of others (e.g., propagating electronic chain mail, or sending forged or falsified e-mail):**
Report these violations to the CIT HelpDesk abuse complaint coordinator, 119 Computing & Communications Center, Ithaca, NY 14853 (phone: 607 255-8990; e-mail: abuse@cornell.edu).
- **Download or post to university computers, or transport across university networks, material that is illegal, proprietary, in violation of university contracts, or otherwise is damaging to the institution (e.g., launching a computer virus, distributing child pornography via the web, or posting a university site-licensed program to a public bulletin board:**
Report these violations to the CIT HelpDesk abuse complaint coordinator, 119 Computing & Communications Center, Ithaca, NY 14853 (phone: 607 255-8990; e-mail: abuse@cornell.edu).
- **Harass or threaten classes of individuals:**
Report these violations directly to the Office of Equal Opportunity, 234 Day Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853 (phone: 607 255-3976; e-mail: equalopportunity@cornell.edu)

Important: When reporting an electronic communication that appears to be in violation, forward the entire electronic copy. Be sure to include complete header information, as this saves time and can lead to swifter resolution. To capture header information in Eudora, simply click on the "Blah Blah Blah" button in the upper left corner of the open message you are forwarding.

Q: I got a threatening e-mail from someone who isn't at Cornell. What can I do?

A: If the person violating the Responsible Use of Electronic Communications policy is not affiliated with Cornell -- and even if you can't identify the individual -- you can still report the incident. Cornell will help you file a complaint with the appropriate entity. In the case of harassing or threatening e-mail, contact the Judicial Administrator, 223 Day Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853 (phone: 607 255-4680) or the Cornell Police (emergency phone: 911; non-emergency phone: 607 255-1111; e-mail: cu_police@cornell.edu).

In the other violation categories, report the incident to the CIT HelpDesk abuse complaint coordinator, 119 Computing & Communications Center, Ithaca, NY 14853 (phone: 607 255-8990; e-mail: abuse@cornell.edu), as well as to the site that provides the individual with Internet access. The [Information Technology Rights and Responsibilities](#) web site contains information about how to report incidents to other entities.

Q: What Internet activities are illegal under local, state, and federal laws?

A: What is illegal in "real life" is also illegal on the Internet. Local, state, and/or federal laws govern the following offenses: child pornography, distribution of pornography to minors, obscenity, copyright infringement, software and sound-recording piracy, bomb threats and hoaxes, scams and pyramid schemes, and federal computer-security violations. For more details, see [Information Technology Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Q: What are some computer or network activities that aren't violations of Cornell policy?

A: The following activities and materials may be objectionable in other respects, but they don't directly violate Cornell policies:

- Sending unsolicited or junk e-mail -- But chain mail is a form of junk mail that is a violation of policy and can be reported.
- Breaches of network etiquette -- If you run into problems like this, try to work them out directly with the people involved. See [Network Culture and Network Courtesy](#) for more information.
- Adult pornography -- Possession of adult material is not a policy violation unless the material itself is illegal (i.e., obscenity, child pornography, distribution of pornography to minors). Do keep in mind, however, that laws restricting adult pornography vary according to jurisdiction and that you may end up in violation of another county, state, or country's laws about possession or distribution of adult pornography if you distribute it over the Internet.
- Hate speech -- But such speech is a violation if it reaches the level of creating a hostile environment.

Q: OK, so sending me junk e-mail isn't a policy violation? Still, what can I do to get rid of it?

A: Junk e-mail (also known as "spam") is annoying and, unfortunately, on the rise. Most junk e-mail comes from sites around the Internet, not from within Cornell. Cornell has no control over what these sites send and cannot distinguish unwanted junk mail from e-mail that people want to receive.

A recommended approach to junk mail is that you simply delete it or ignore it. If you want to complain, send a note to the Internet service provider (ISP). Some people try to contact the sender and ask to be removed from the electronic mailing list. Unfortunately, this doesn't necessarily guarantee you will be free from more invasive junk mail marketing in the future.

Q: Why can't I share my NetID and password with my friends or a family member?

A: As specified under CIT's [Terms and Conditions Governing the Use of CIT Network IDs](#) policy, your NetID and password are to be used *only by you*.

If you share the use of your NetID and password with your spouse, family members, co-workers, friends, or roommates, you are giving them access to services they are not authorized to use, university data they are not authorized to view, or personal data that you might not want them to see -- information it is your obligation to protect by following safe, secure computing and network practices. They may even embarrass you by posting to a news group in your name or by posing as you in a chat session. With so many options for Internet access these days, it's easy to help your family and friends arrange "legal" ways to get on the Internet so you aren't in violation of any Cornell policies. For more information about restricted use of Cornell NetIDs and passwords, see [Frequently Asked Questions about Network IDs](#).

Q: I copy articles from web sites all the time and use them for my papers. My TA told me I might be in violation of copyright laws. Where can I get more facts about this?

A: Copying articles or even snippets of text from a web site and using them in your course work -- or in any work! -- without proper citation is plagiarism and could also be copyright infringement. Many people ignore this because downloading from the web is so easy, or it's hard to find citation information when you're trying to make an assignment deadline. Faculty also need to comply with copyright restrictions and permissions when they are putting materials on the web, such as "course-packs".

Copyright infringement is a violation of federal law and also of Cornell's [Code of Academic Integrity and Campus Code of Conduct](#). For more information about copyright infringement, including relevant links to other sites, see the web site [Information Technology Rights and Responsibilities](#). To report a copyright violation, send e-mail to: copyright_abuse@cornell.edu.

Q: What's wrong with making a copy of my officemate or friend's word-processing program to use on my personal computer?

A: Unauthorized duplication, distribution or use of someone else's intellectual property, including computer software, constitutes copyright infringement and is illegal and subject to both civil and criminal penalties. Software piracy violates numerous Cornell policies; for extensive information on the subject, see [Software Piracy: What You Should Know](#).

The CIT publication "Using Software: A Guide to the Ethical and Legal Use of

Software for Members of the Academic Community" -- available at the ATS HelpDesk -- offers a general overview of software categories and copyright law. For a list of Cornell's software site licenses and educational-discount prices for individual and volume purchases, see the [Cornell Software Information Directory](#).

Q: I just retrieved some music from the Internet. I know it's illegal to copy CDs but is downloading Internet music also illegal?

A: Yes, the unauthorized duplication and distribution of sound recordings is a form copyright infringement. Online piracy is increasing as many people use the Internet to illegally distribute digital audio files (e.g., MP3 format). The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) monitors the Internet daily and scans for sites that contain music, forwarding violation reports to many institutions including Cornell. If you reproduce or offer sound recordings for download without the authorization of the copyright owner, you are in violation of federal copyright law and could face civil as well as criminal penalties. Placing statements on your web site, such as "for demo purposes only" or that the sound files must be "deleted within 24 hours" does not prevent or extinguish this liability. For more information about sound recording piracy, see the Copyright Infringement section of the [Information Technology Rights and Responsibilities](#) web site.

Q: I have reason to believe that a student in another Cornell department copied material from my thesis draft, which I'd posted on my web site for peer review. How do I report this copyright infringement at Cornell?

A: To report an alleged copyright infringement at a Cornell University web site, send e-mail to: copyright_abuse@cornell.edu. Note that under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, your infringement claim must be in writing (either electronic mail or on paper) and must include the following elements:

- a physical or electronic signature;
- identification of the infringed work;
- identification of the infringed material;
- contact information for the complainant (e.g. address, telephone number, electronic mail address);
- a statement that the complaining party has a good-faith belief that use of the material in the manner complained of is not authorized by the copyright owner or the law; and
- a statement that the information contained in the notification is accurate, and under penalty of perjury that the complaining party is authorized to act on behalf of the copyright owner.

Q: I read about a person's electronic communications and computer hard disk being subpoenaed. But I thought all my e-mail and web-site bookmarks were gone when I erased them. What's the real story?

A: Electronic communications are seemingly instantaneous; this gives many of us the illusion that they are less permanent records than their "real world" counterparts. But, indeed, electronic records are preserved and can be retrieved. Retrievable records

include business and personal e-mail, postings to news groups and mailing lists, chat sessions, and any information you enter at a specific web site. Server backups are performed routinely and even the files erased from a hard disk drive often can be recovered by using special software utilities. It is unlikely you can ever know when and in what way all the electronic communications you send out are being saved; it's always wise to assume that your copy and your recipient's copy are not the only ones! And it's generally impossible to take something back once it's been sent.

Furthermore, it's impossible to even be aware of, let alone control, the further distribution of electronic information. For example, it's conceivable that if you post to a newsgroup to ask about diamond rings, purchase one over the web with your credit card, and e-mail a friend to say you're getting engaged, your "intended" could get word of all that before you pop the question! The best advice? Use all of these convenient electronic services responsibly and wisely. And don't assume your communications are private.

Q: Security concerns, privacy issues, what's legal, what isn't--there's so much to know about using the Internet in a responsible way. Where can I learn more?

A: A good place to start is Cornell's Computer Policy and Law Program. Their web site houses extensive policy and citations databases to help answer questions about legal risk and responsibility in a world increasingly reliant on information technology. The program also offers workshops and seminars throughout the country on Internet Risks and Liability covering topics such as copyright, pornography, and privacy issues.

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