



## **EMPLOYEE USE OF PEER-TO-PEER FILE SHARING SOFTWARE**

Peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing programs permit users to find and access each other's hard drives and to share information directly without a central server. Although this technology is perfectly legal and has some legitimate uses, it has become an issue for four reasons:

- The material shared, usually music or movies, is generally subject to copyright protection and most uses are in violation of the copyright laws.
- Providing this kind of access to a computer leaves it extremely vulnerable to contamination by worms, viruses and other invasive software that puts both the individual computer and the College's systems at risk.
- Dealing with contaminated computers is extremely disruptive for the individual or department affected and very time-intensive for the LITS staff.
- These technologies often require very high bandwidth that can slow or disrupt the College's systems.

Some P2P software is particularly dangerous, because the default settings encourage serving out downloaded materials, often without the knowledge of the owner of the computer. Using such software makes it extremely difficult to stay in compliance with copyright laws. Programs designed for obtaining or sharing music or videos should be particularly avoided. For those who have legitimate need to use P2P software, LITS can provide more benign and equally effective versions.

Other software that uses file sharing capabilities, such as Skype and other similar "soft phone" technology, is relatively benign and has been used without major difficulty. These products should still be used with caution. They may risk contamination and may cause system performance degradation.

There are likely to be very few College staff or faculty who need to use most kinds of P2P software in connection with their jobs. Given the risks of contamination, inadvertent violation of copyright laws and demand for bandwidth involved, for your own protection and that of the College, you should consult with the Dean of Faculty (for faculty) or the appropriate Division Head (for staff) if you plan to use any job-related P2P software other than Skype or something similar. Use of P2P software on College machines or on any machine connected to the College network for purposes other than academic or job-related uses is prohibited.

A broader discussion of appropriate computer use is available in the "Policy on Responsible Use of Computing Resources at Mount Holyoke College".