

## UTILITIES INCLUDED

*University shouldn't control students' private Web use*



Here's a question for you – who controls the utilities you have if you live in a residence hall?

Technically, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is in charge of them, right? But if you're breaking the law using the services, no one goes after the university. They go after you. If you're making a treasonous phone call on your phone line, the university can't be held accountable.

By the same degree, though, you as the average student do have some control over those same very resources that the administration says it runs.

Want to test this theory?  
I want all people who

you'll blow all the fuses in the building. And you still didn't break any rules. (If you're really ticked at the administration, go take your hairdryers to the administration building and shut it down.)

Why am I bringing all this up? Well, universities across the nation are attempting to put new rules on another utility – the Internet.

I remember when I lived in the residence halls and savored my T1 Internet connection – it wouldn't be until this year that I had an off-campus connection even moderately close to the speed I had when I lived on Schramm 10.

And the arguments I made with the phone system and the power system are similar to the one I'm constructing with the Internet situation, although there are some differences.

Students across the nation have been using their Internet connections for all sorts of things, but  
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treasonous phone calls or copyright infringement when treason and piracy take place entirely out of its hands.

Still, the university wants to try to prevent students from using their Internet connections this way, regardless of whether they're doing it legally.

The program that led to the lockdown is called Napster. Napster was designed so people could share their MP3 collections over the Internet and search through other people's collections.

It does make piracy a hell of a lot easier because you can type in a song title and odds are, if it's from someone even remotely popular, you'll find it.

Like the real world, of course, the more popular it is, the easier it is to find. If you're looking for the new Backstreet Boys single, I guarantee

ship late and has to catch up. If the RIAA had put its foot down on the format early, it might have prevented programs that promote piracy, like Napster, from springing up.

I'm a Napster user. I use the program rarely, but when I do, I'm usually looking for cover versions of live songs. Through Napster, I've found Tori Amos' version of the Cure's "Lovesong," Phish doing a James Brown-style cover of Hanson's "Mmmmbop," the Smashing Pumpkins doing U2's "Stay (Faraway, So Close!)" and dozens of others.

But I'm the exception to the rule that Napster users are getting pirated music, and I accept that.

What I can't accept, however, is the fact that the administration has the right to tell you that you can't use a specific

If you want to leave your phone busy around the clock, you can. If you want to have appliances sucking power out of your outlets every minute of every hour, you can. So who gives the university the right to mess with your Internet?

While I empathize with the universities that are losing precious bandwidth (the term for the amount and speed of data flowing through an Internet connection) to Napster, they can't simply ban the program.

There are several reasons for this. Under a total ban of Napster, those of us who use the program for legitimate reasons would be shut out of something within our legal rights.

Limiting traffic also isn't a fair option – computer science students send and receive large amounts of data



Scott Eastman/DN

live in residence halls to go to their telephones and simply make a local call at exactly 6 p.m. Call anyone at all, even the time and temperature lady. Synchronize your watches with the local cable time clock, otherwise this won't be as effective. If you all do this, you know what's going to happen? At least some of you will get "system is busy" messages, and you will, essentially, crash the system.

And you aren't breaking any rules in doing it.

You can do the same thing with the power in the building. If everyone plugs a hairdryer into every outlet and turns them all on at once, more than likely

biggest hog on the system has been MP3 files.

MP3 is a file format that lets music be compressed into a very small, yet very efficient audio format, allowing people to swap songs using their computers.

Consider MP3 file traders the hairdryers of Internet usage – they suck up more resources than nearly anything else.

Most MP3 usage is a violation of copyrights, but that's not really the university's problem, as I stated earlier. The university isn't obligated to stop

you'll have a much easier time than I will

looking for a Spiritualized b-side.

In the past half decade, the term MP3 has gone from techie talk to average userspeak. The Recording Industry Association of America is trying to find some way to control it, but it's getting out of hand.

MP3s are swapped back and forth across the Internet without hesitation. It's starting to cut into album sales.

Obviously, the problem needs to be dealt with, but the RIAA jumped on the

program on your personal computer, legal or illegal.

If I want to leave a hairdryer running in my room around the clock, the university couldn't do a thing about it, because it's a personal use of a service provided me by the university.

Universities have claimed their only option was to block those using the program and to institute a ban of Napster across campus.

No hairdryers allowed, it seems. The Internet's a little easier to monitor than power usage, however. Universities know where the resource is going, so they intend to lock down on the drain.

Now, on university computers, this makes sense for the same reason that you can't view pornography or play games on the laboratory computers – it's the university's property. Their stuff, their rules.

But your computer really isn't any of their business. Your stuff, your rules.

through the Internet as do gamers like myself, who download the newest computer game demos the moment they hit the Web. Some of this usage is academic, some of it isn't. Of course, you could say the same thing about your local phone calls.

The best reason of all, however, is that Napster isn't going to be the only program like this in a few months. More programs like this are coming. And they aren't going to stop.

High-speed Internet connections are becoming a standard utility. While window shopping for apartments in California through the Web, I saw many of them advertise "high-speed Internet connections in every apartment!"

Once a cable television connection was considered a luxury. Now it's commonplace. And the university has to come to terms with this.

Universities can and should upgrade their Internet connections.

Computer engineers will tell you the Internet itself needs a hardware upgrade, and it's coming, albeit slowly. Many of the information pipelines are old and need to be replaced or updated.

What it all boils down to, though, is that universities shouldn't be able to stop all students from picking up their phones at once, and they shouldn't be able to regulate the amount or content of information you send through your Internet connection.

They simply give us our utilities, and that's the end of it. They should have no more control over our Internet usage than they do our power usage or our phone usage.

But look at it this way – when a student gets arrested for breaking copyright laws, the university's ass is already covered.