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During the past few years, the controversial dispute concerning music file sharing over Internet connections has rumbled and shown its face from time to time. But just recently, the record and music industries, fed up with the “illegal” activities of high school and college students nationwide, has taken the next step – legal action. And the arguments and debates that now follow are even more heated than before, bringing together issues that range from economic effects to understanding culture, from freedom of speech to today’s rampant technology.

On April 4th, 2003, four students from three colleges – Daniel Peng at Princeton University, Joseph Nievelt at Michigan Technological University, and Aaron Sherman and Jesse Jordan, both at RPI – were targeted because of their extensive file sharing and file trading and were directly sued by the record industry. Their crime? Facilitating major copyright infringement by both sharing music individually with others and by creating a network program through which students could find, search, choose, copy, and save files. Amy Harmon of *The New York Times* writes that “the lawsuits ask for \$150,000 for each of the recordings listed on the students’ websites,” resulting in damages in the billions.

The record and music industries are presently exasperated and dismayed in their attempts to stop or at least slow the downward spiral of CD sales, and so they’ve started a campaign to emphasize that music piracy is a serious offense. Students, however, have responded to such accusations and complaints with comments suggesting that music sharing is a form of freedom of speech, that it’s part of their generation’s music culture,

that it actually introduces people to new artists and songs and encourages them to sample before going out to buy albums and attend concerts. Harmon notes that “the unauthorized copying of digital music... has become as routine a part of college life as cramming and keg parties.”

Recording industries have tried collaborating with college administrations in hopes of establishing an awareness of the unlawfulness of music trading. Harvard University, the United States Naval Academy, and Penn State have all warned and instigated punishments for their students who continue to steal music over high-speed Internet and Ethernet lines and connections. But the warnings don't seem to be significant or harsh enough for anyone to really take notice. So the music executives have decided to take a stand and, in their words, “actually do something.” They're hoping that these four lawsuits will attract a decent amount of media attention and therefore inform and warn present students of the potential of being caught and penalized.

Even more recently, the entertainment industry endured an even bigger blow when Los Angeles courts decided that they could not shut down or disable the music-file sharing programs Grokster and Morpheus, declaring that “they cannot control what is traded over their networks.” And just today, Apple Computer, in attempts to help music industries deal with the free swapping of files, revealed its iTunes Music Store in which users can download songs and burn them for ninety-nine cents each. They're hoping that such a cheap, easily-accessible, and legal service will compete with the free sites, appealing to students and adults both. In reality though, time will only tell whether or not these more stringent actions and alternative approaches will make any difference in the free and technologically-savvy world of music sharing.