

Software Shanghai

Despite illegality, computer theft on the rise

BY SUSAN OVERCASH
The Battalion

Last August, Jeffrey Levy, a 22-year-old student at the University of Oregon, pleaded guilty and was convicted of a crime that may carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. Levy's crime was not cheating, hazing, or even committing violent crime; instead Levy was convicted of illegally posting pirated software, digital movies and music on a personal web page for the public to download.

According to the Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA) the principal trade association for the software code and technical information industry, the percentage of undergraduate college students who obtained software by "borrowing" it from family and friends increased by 17 percent last year. This means 47 percent of Aggies and their peers not only condone software piracy, an illegal action, but actively participate in it.

One student who declined to have his name published, said companies would not be making money off software he copied.

"The last time I bought software was three years ago," the student said. "Some people say companies can lose millions of dollars because people copy software, but I wouldn't have bought it or used it if I couldn't have copied it."

Ryan Allain, a senior mechanical engineering major, said that most students do not have the means to buy expensive software packages. "If they wouldn't charge so much for the software — when students have to eat off-brand macaroni and cheese because they had to buy expensive software for a class, it makes that much easier to call up a friend and say, 'Hey, let me borrow this,'" Allain said.

The anonymous student said there are many ways for students to obtain pirated software, including ResNet, the network connecting dorm computers, as well as through other students through the Internet.

"Instead of transferring 600 megabytes, the size of most files," the student said, "there's ripping, where all the unnecessary stuff — sounds and all — are taken out of the software. The file is compressed down to about 200 megabytes and zipped, and that's what you normally see in people's folders on ResNet."

The anonymous student said, students may also share serial numbers that allow them to use shareware packages and copy-righted software.

"There used to be a database on ResNet with a list of names and keys or serials that people can use to access software," he said. "That's mostly for shareware, though."

Such postings are against University regulation and state and federal law.

Jeff McCabe, associate director of computing information services (CIS), said CIS acts as technical support for ResNet and University computing resources.

"We provide the wiring and connections and just try to make sure its a good, quality service," McCabe said. "The networks group, a sub-group of CIS, structures the firewalls and wires the dorms."

However, McCabe said if a complaint of illegal activity is filed, CIS may act as an investigator in the situation.

"We don't go out and look for violations," McCabe said. "We process complaints, and if we find anything, we'll turn it over to [Student Judicial Services of Conflict Resolution Services]."

If networking options are not available, students on campus obtain pirated software using CD burners and similar equipment, and sometimes make a living out of it.

Allain said when he lived on campus his freshman year, he knew students whose income came from selling burned CDs and pirated software.

"One student would buy a CD burner," Allain said, "and everybody else would pay to have them burn the CD's — that's how they would make their money."

Using CD burners these days, however, may be a dying trade. The anonymous student said companies are now adding bad "sectors" to the CD to prevent copying.

"You can still read the CD," the student said, "but when you try to burn it, the burner can't copy the bad sectors and won't let you copy it."

Instead of burning a CD, students can use an official copy of the software as long as they have a key, which is a code that the software deciphers to allow a specific user access to the program.

The anonymous student said, programmers have created "crackz," or programs that work around keys, bad sectors, serials and other security measures.

"Crackz can decipher the algorithm in the software that codes the key," the anonymous student said. "People distribute crackz on the Internet, and then students can download those to get a key for an official CD."

According to SIIA, because of crackz and other pirating efforts, the American piracy rate was 25 percent in the United States in 1998, which is more than \$2.8 billion dollars in piracy losses, in an industry where business personal computer application software accounted for worldwide revenues of \$17.8 billion.

Much of this loss is due to pirated software being distributed over the Internet. The anonymous student said, the most prevalent place to get pirated software, or "warez," is Internet Relay Chat (IRC).

"IRC is a network that over 25,000 people connect to," the anonymous student said. "You can get anything — MP3's, downloads, all kinds of stuff — from people."

Students, like Levy, who are caught pirating or using pirated software on college campuses are subject to harsh penalties. McCabe said that students in violation of University regulations with respect to software piracy are subject to legal actions.

"Companies can come in and take students to court," McCabe said. "They are subject to the full weight of the law."



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY GUY ROGERS AND CHAD ADAMS/THE BATTALION

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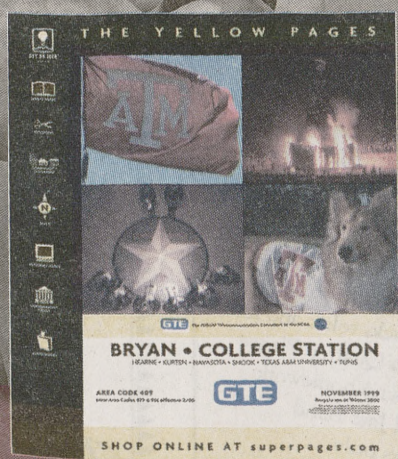
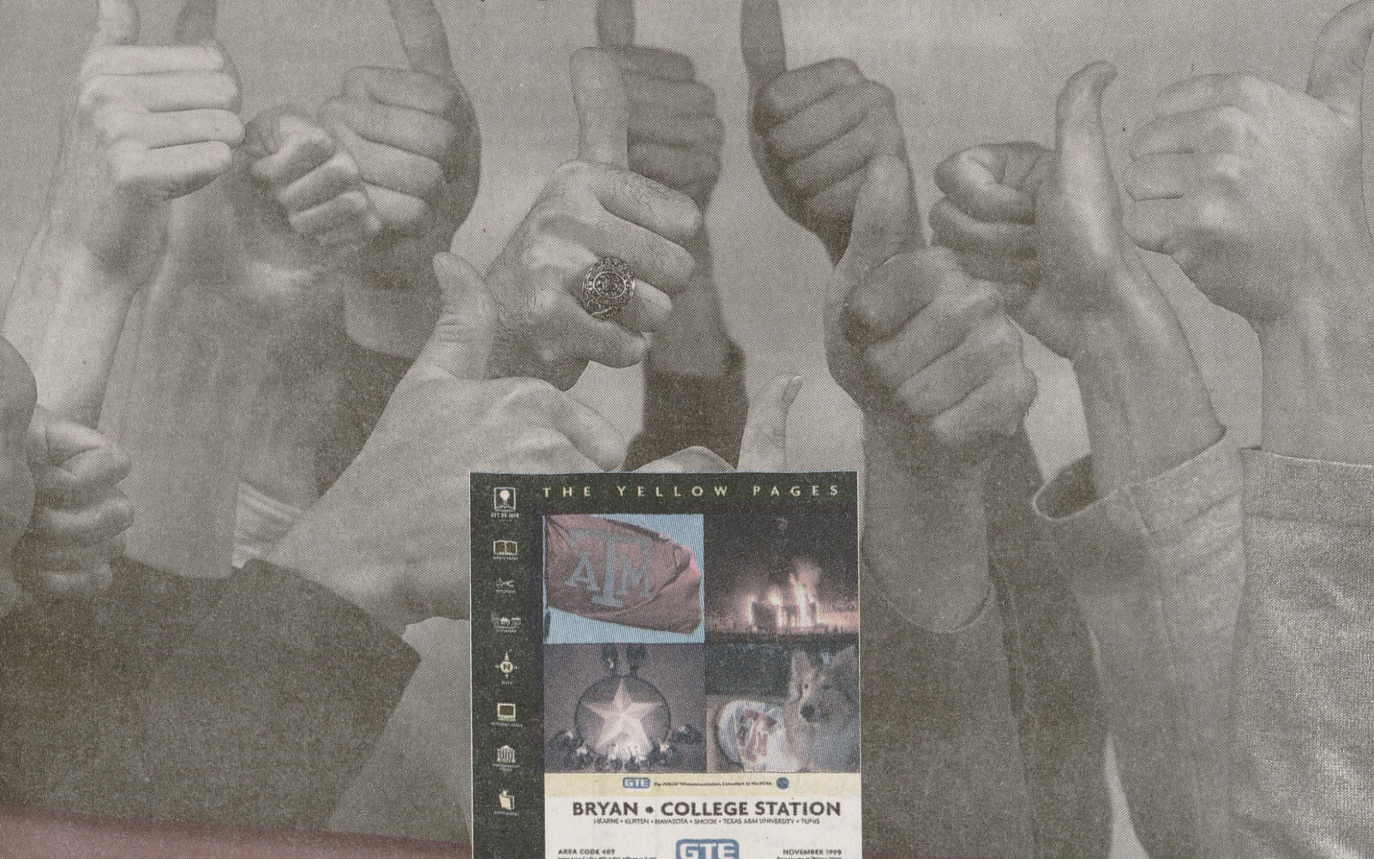
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