

## Start Buying the Music or Face It, says RIAA

By Surajit Sen Sharma

On July 18, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) sent out more than 400 letters to 23 schools informing them of illegal downloading of music on their campuses. The RIAA asked the universities to forward the letters to errant students. The University of Florida received around 50 letters, while Florida International University received about 16. Ohio State University received 19 letters and forwarded them to students. Several universities, including the University of Wisconsin and University of North Dakota, have refused to comply with the RIAA's request.

Since February, the RIAA has sent out more than 2,400 pre-litigation letters to campuses across the country in an effort to check illegal downloading and music sharing. However, many remain skeptical of the methods adopted by the RIAA and its decision to target college students.

Many students have illegally downloaded music on their computers; the RIAA knows this and has decided to target them. The minimum fine would be \$750 for each shared copyright recording if a lawsuit is filed against a student. Cara Duckworth, a spokeswoman for the RIAA, said the industry has lost hundreds of billions of dollars due to on-campus piracy. It plans to get some of that back. According to the RIAA website, students illegally download music at a disproportionately higher rate than other groups, and according to recent surveys, more than half of college students currently download music illegally. The sources of and methods used by these surveys have not been revealed.

Because it is not possible for the RIAA to identify specific students who have made illegal downloads, it has asked the schools to identify errant students and forward letters to them. If no response is received from a school by a certain time, the RIAA will file a "John Doe" lawsuit and subpoena the school for the identities of the errant students. Each student will get one last chance to agree to an out-of-court settlement, and if that doesn't work out, a lawsuit will ensue.

During 2006, the RIAA gave more than \$4,000 to Florida Representative Rick Keller, who introduced the Curb Illegal Downloading on College Campuses Act of 2007 in Congress this March. However, Keller's chief of staff has stated that Keller's actions were not influenced by the RIAA's donation to his campaign.