
Effective Date: **April 21, 2026**

POLICY

ACADEMICS, EMPLOYMENT, ETHICS, INFORMATION MANAGEMENT, STUDENT LIFE

Copyright Policy

RESPONSIBLE OFFICES

Human Resources, Office of the Dean of Students, Office of the University Provost

Purpose

This policy describes obligation of the University community to comply with Copyright Law.

Covered Parties

This Policy applies to University faculty, staff and students.

Introduction

The copyright law of the United States consists of Title 17 of the United States Code (the Copyright Act) and court decisions interpreting the Act (collectively, the “Copyright Law”). Copyright Law governs the use and reproduction of copyrighted material. Examples of works protected by the Copyright Law include books, journals, videos, musical recordings, photographs, paintings, dramatic works, and software, regardless of whether the work is in

hard copy or digital form. Under the Copyright Law, a copyright holder is granted certain exclusive rights to their creation, including the rights to reproduce the work, create derivative works based upon the original, distribute copies of the work by sale, rental, lease, or lending, and perform or display an audio or visual work publicly. Multiple parties may have an interest in a given work; for example, in the case of a song, the music and lyrics may be held by different parties, and sometimes works are collaborative such that more than one person holds a copyright in all or part of the work.

An original work is copyrighted as soon as it is created and fixed in a tangible form. Decades of caselaw defines what it means for a work to be “original” and “fixed.” Most works meet these requirements quite easily.

The Copyright Act provides remedies for infringement. Monetary damages can be large, particularly in cases of widespread infringement.

University Policy

Boston University faculty, staff and students are required to comply with the Copyright Law and this Policy. Members of the Boston University community who use or share copyrighted materials without permission, in connection with their work for the university or through use of university resources (including unauthorized downloading or sharing of music, video, or software files), are subject to disciplinary action by the University, among other possible penalties. If the University is notified by a copyright owner, publisher, distributor, or law enforcement agency of possible infringement, the University may direct an investigation, require the violator(s) to correct any infringement, and impose disciplinary action on the responsible parties. Use of University computing services in violation of the Copyright Law is a violation of the BU Acceptable Use of Computing Services Policy and may also violate the Student Codes of Conduct (see the [Copyright Violation Process](#)).

Guidance on the Copyright Law and suggestions on how to avoid copyright infringement are available on this [Copyright Guidance](#) (BU password required). Notably, use of copyrighted materials to train an Artificial Intelligence Large Language model may violate the rights of the copyright holder(s), and you should consult with the Office of General Counsel before engaging in such activity.

Copying Materials

As a general matter, it is preferable to provide links to copyrighted materials rather than distributing hard or digital copies of those materials or incorporating copyrighted materials into a website without permission.

Under certain conditions specified in the Copyright Law, copyrighted works may be reproduced or used without permission. These conditions include:

- Single copies for private study, scholarship or research;
- One-time placement of an article on library reserve;
- Materials not under copyright protection (e.g., materials that are in the public domain or materials published by the U.S. Government);
- Materials under the terms of a [Creative Commons license](#) that are used within the terms of that license;
- Copies made for classroom use that meet the requirements of the TEACH Act and (if offered for a remote class) are password-protected so only students can access them (the requirements of the TEACH Act are described in Section IV of the [Copyright Guidance](#)); and
- Uses that meet applicable “fair use” standards. Fair use does sometimes allow reproduction of a copyrighted article for the purpose of criticism, comment, scholarship, or research. Considerations for determining whether such a reproduction constitutes fair use involve balancing the following factors:
 - character of the use (nonprofit as opposed to commercial);
 - nature of the work;
 - amount and substantiality of the portion used (less is better); and
 - effect of the use on the value or commercial market of the work.

A more detailed description of these permitted uses may be found in the [Copyright Guidance](#) and at <https://www.copyright.gov/fair-use/>.

The University requires a warning poster to be placed on or near every public copying machine with the following text: “Notice: The copyright law of the United States governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. The person using this equipment is liable for any infringement.”

Some frequently asked questions on copyright are answered here: [Copyright FAQ](#).

Making Copyrighted Materials Available to Students

Course Packs are compilations of materials gathered by or at the request of faculty to serve as classroom texts or supplements. Course Packs have the potential to violate the copyright of the original author(s). If a faculty member chooses to assemble and sell or grant access to a Course Pack directly or through a third party, it is up to that faculty member to confirm that any required permissions have been obtained and any license fees due to third parties have been paid.

Related BU Policies and Information

Under the [Intellectual Property Policy](#), faculty and students maintain copyright ownership in many works they produce, with certain exceptions as outlined in the Policy. Works produced by an employee in the course of their employment (including non-academic works produced by students that are employees) generally belong to the University.

BU Acceptable Use of Computing Services Policy

This Policy replaces existing copyright policies in the Non-Represented Employee Handbook.

END OF POLICY TEXT

Additional Resources Regarding This Policy

Related Policies and Procedures

- [Intellectual Property Policy](#)
- [BU Acceptable Use of Computing Services Policy](#)

History

This Policy replaced the existing copyright policies in the Non-Represented Employee Handbook and the Faculty Handbook.

Categories: Academics, AI, Copyright, Employment, Ethics, Faculty Handbook: Ethics and Activities, General Policies, Information Management, Non-Represented Staff, Student Academics, Student Life