n his CNI report this quarter, Richard West points out that the recent passage by Congress of the Telecommunications Act has “focused the leadership of our professional higher education associations—and indeed the leadership of our institutions—on the opportunities, costs, and benefits of information technology, particularly network-related technology.” Richard couldn’t have written a better preamble for this issue of CAUSE/EFFECT. From Mike Roberts’ overview of what the Telecom Act will mean to higher education to Sally Webster and Frank Connolly’s insightful and entertaining look at what to do “when bad things happen to good campuses,” the articles in this issue should stimulate thinking about the challenges networking presents to higher education.

Roberts’ article, written within hours of the Act’s passage, provides a quick estimation of what we “won” and “lost” with this bill. The winners, he says, include benefits from competition, acceleration of the development and delivery of advanced broadband services, and continued Internet growth. The losers are what he calls the “indecency follies”—the failure of rational arguments to prevent inclusion in the bill of the provisions of the Communications Decency Act. While the ACLU has already challenged these provisions, Roberts says, “The Justice Department is going to have to develop guidance for owners and operators of servers as to what ‘reasonable, effective, and appropriate’ measures to avoid transmission or display of indecent content to minors actually means.”

An area of network-related policy of growing importance is the governance of programs electronically delivered across state lines. The Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET) of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) has published a booklet summarizing existing regulations in this area for the Western states, including a set of principles of good practice for electronically offered academic degree and certificate programs. That set of principles is included in its entirety in Barbara Krauth’s article about the project that spawned the WCET publication.

Donald Norris and Michael Dolence’s article on the role of the IT leader in transformation extends the premise of their recent book, Transforming Higher Education: A Vision for Learning in the 21st Century. In this article, they articulate an emerging model for IT leadership founded on educating, collaborating, and cooperating across diverse campus constituencies to achieve an institutional vision for learning in the next century—a model for leadership exemplified by last year’s CAUSE ELITE Award winner, Carole Barone. Norris and Dolence end by examining the need to develop new economic and financial paradigms, a theme that is the focus of John Oberlin’s article, which challenges information technologists and business officers to relinquish “legacy-based fiscal thinking.” Oberlin believes that understanding the attendant economics of IT—through understanding its value, demand, and cost—is fundamental to developing financial strategies to accommodate technological advances and to manage IT investments effectively.

Network technologies also enable new ways of doing business, among them the electronic data interchange (EDI) of student records. While this technology offers many clear advantages, one important question author Paul Rhinehart says must be addressed is how students’ privacy will be protected under this means of transmission. His article examines protections afforded by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) in light of new interpretations of FERPA, principles established in past case law, and the world of electronic banking, where procedures, legislation, and case law are well established.

Two follow-on viewpoints also look at the growth of EDI and privacy of student information. Virginia Rezmierski shares three areas she believes are of concern as higher education moves rapidly in this technological direction: determining purpose and direction, focusing and staying the course, and remembering our responsibilities along the way. Robert Morley believes that as long as the stewards of protected information continue to act in a responsible manner, “new and emerging technologies should be considered an opportunity, not a threat.”

Beyond FERPA and EDI, there are other issues arising related to privacy of student information in an increasingly networked environment. To explore these issues, CAUSE has established a task force (in cooperation with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers) to develop a white paper that will include guidelines for developing institutional policy in this area. This task force is the first of several activities CAUSE is planning related to institutional information policies in a networked environment. A new page on the CAUSE Web server will function as a gateway to campus network-related policies, as well as to other relevant resources (see http://cause-www.colorado.edu/issues/policy.html). We invite you to contribute appropriate policies or their URLs to this collection, and send your ideas for related activities to CAUSE President Jane Ryland (jryland@cause.colorado.edu).

Julia A. Rudy, Editor