November 26, 2001

Richard Clarke  
Special Advisor for Cyberspace Security  
The White House  
Street Address  
Washington, DC  
Dear Chairman Powell,

The research and education community faces a pressing need for more effective and efficient methods of security for its networked computers. This has become a matter of critical importance for stakeholders of higher education both on campus and off. In one well-known example, vulnerable systems on campus networks have been implicated as unknowing participants in Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS) attacks on critical government and commercial Internet sites. Universities themselves have also been attacked, exposing confidential medical and student records. Higher education clearly needs a systematic strategy of defense – as well as an executive level appreciation of the critical importance of this problem.

In response to this need, EDUCAUSE has formed the Higher Education Systems Security Taskforce, a

To accomplish these tasks, EDUCAUSE will bring together the leading experts in both technology and higher education business practices and policies to develop the best practical approach to solving these problems in the higher education community.

EDUCAUSE will distribute the best practices though extensive national and regional meetings, publications for IT staff as well as campus executives, web libraries, and through partner organizations such as the American Council on Education (ACE), the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), and the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA).

EDUCAUSE is an international, nonprofit association whose mission is to help improve and transform higher education through the introduction, use, and management of information resources and technologies in teaching, learning, scholarship and institutional management. Our membership currently includes more than 1800 colleges, universities, and education organizations, as well as 180 of the nation’s foremost technology companies.
The security problem in research and education is both large and complex. There are over 3,500 institutions of higher learning in the United States, including more than 150 focused on research. In research labs, workstations and servers are often deployed on high-speed networks without professional security administration and are controlled by graduate students assigned to manage the systems on a temporary basis. Many university residence halls are networked to provide each student with high-speed access to digital resources. The same network may offer a rich collection of networked computers for the illicit use of hackers. E-commerce and Internet-based distributed education will greatly extend access to high-quality education, but also may expose institutions and individuals to significant liabilities.

Present resources for systems security in higher education are not equal to the task. Smaller institutions often do not have staff with technical security skills, and most larger institutions have fewer staff than they need even to fix emergencies as they arise. Very few institutions have even one designated officer for network security, much less a complete office dedicated to this task. Most universities do not have appropriate campus policies in place to support the activities of systems security personnel.

Solutions to these problems will require a comprehensive program of professional development on the best practices of systems security on an institutional scale. This, in turn, will require executive education in higher education on the critical importance of better security practices.

There is a need for a coordinated approach on two fronts: (1) the development of a best practices guide regarding the campus technologies, procedures and policies to support secure operations, and (2) presentations and related materials to disseminate these best practices throughout the research and education community.

This proposed effort would build on previous work by the EDUCAUSE/Internet2 Systems Security Taskforce, SANS, CERT, and member campuses, and would seek to incorporate the best efforts of the federal government and private industry.

Best regards,

Mark Luker

c: House Committee….
Senate Committee…