Just as IT professionals face the conundrum of where to direct their attention, so does EDUCAUSE. Over the last few months, we’ve been engaged in a strategic planning process, asking our members what they think and what they need. Our members care passionately about higher education. In all of our discussions, our members had a lot to say about why they do what they do and why it matters. EDUCAUSE members talked not only about higher education but also about its role in the creation of human potential and about the transformative power of information technology.

The mission of EDUCAUSE is to help our members realize these transformative benefits of information technology for colleges and universities and for the students, faculty, and communities they serve. Often that involves “uncommon thinking”— looking at challenges in new and different ways. This year’s Catalyst Award celebrates an uncommon idea in its day: regional networks. Today, information technology, higher education, and institutions of all types, sizes, and missions have benefited immensely from regional networks and their visionary pioneers. The uPortal Project and course management systems, Catalyst Award winners in 2006 and 2007, also represented uncommon ideas in their time. Those in the IT profession can boast a host of uncommon thoughts: the web, e-mail, Outsourcing, Virtual worlds. Cloud computing. Data repositories. E-discovery. Shibboleth. Policy. Cybersecurity. Social networks. Mobility. The scope and the complexity of information technology have grown. The number and types of IT applications have grown. The strategic implications of information technology have grown. But there are still only 24 hours in a day and 365 days in a year.

The other theme that came out of our interviews with and surveys of EDUCAUSE members is the need for focus. One way for EDUCAUSE to narrow its focus is to think about what is truly important to higher education. The value of information technology is predicated on how well it supports the mission of colleges and universities—that is, how well it supports teaching and learning, administration of the institution, and research and scholarship. In addition, as a professional organization, EDUCAUSE needs to look at how information technology itself is evolving and what this means for the IT profession and for the development of future IT leaders. Earlier this year, EDUCAUSE members, its board, and its senior leaders, shared their thoughts on the Common Good for Higher Education.
management team defined a set of strategic directions for the association (http://www.educause.edu/15531). Approved in early May, these directions call for a stronger focus in the four areas noted above:

- Teaching and Learning: Using information technology to improve access to teaching and learning, learning effectiveness, student success, and learning outcomes
- Managing the Enterprise: Helping EDUCAUSE members ensure that their institutions are managed efficiently and effectively and that information technology supports institutional priorities
- E-Research and E-Scholarship: Developing techniques for using information technology to speed research, discovery, and innovation, as well as to enable collaborative intelligence and virtual organizations
- Evolving Role of IT and Leadership: Exploring and monitoring changes in information technology and their relation to corresponding shifts in the expectations and responsibilities of IT professionals and leaders.

Teaching and Learning. Technology is important to higher education because it provides greater learning flexibility for students and enriches their options. But technology is not the primary issue of importance. Effective teaching and learning is, first, about the learner. With an understanding of learners, instructors can select pedagogies and technologies to support successful learning where technology, both information technology and instructional technology, plays a supporting role rather than a leading one.

Managing the Enterprise. The “business” of higher education could not be done without information technology. Whether it is security, ERP systems, disaster recovery, identity management, e-mail, help-desk support, networking, or software systems, a complex infrastructure and human system enables the college or university to function.

E-Research and E-Scholarship. Information technology underpins a vibrant and growing research enterprise. Virtually all academic disciplines rely on information technology for research. Entire disciplines are embracing the new research possibilities presented by high-performance computing, networks, grids, large datasets, visualization, and distributed teams. The promise is immense, but realizing the promise requires the integration of infrastructure, multi-institutional and multi-national systems, communities of scholars, and new ways of working.

Evolving Role of IT and Leadership. EDUCAUSE, as a professional organization, must also monitor the evolving role of information technology in higher education and the changing roles of IT professionals and leaders. Today, IT is more than networks and e-mail systems. Social networks, virtual worlds, and cloud computing are redefining expectations and outcomes. And these technology changes extend to the role of IT professionals. Once responsible only for technological issues, today’s IT professionals and leaders contend with legal issues, legislative relations, economic competitiveness, and relationship building.

The articles in this issue of EDUCAUSE Review address the focus areas identified above. Kicking off the discussion are four op-ed pieces, one in each focus area. Joel L. Hartman, Vice Provost for Information Technologies and Resources at the University of Central Florida and recipient of the 2008 EDUCAUSE Leadership Award, discusses the need for systemic transformation to improve teaching and learning with technology (“Teaching and Learning”); Colin Currie, Director of Administrative Information Services at Princeton University, argues that the IT organization needs to take control of its own future “in the clouds” (“Managing the Enterprise”); Christine L. Borgman, Professor and Presidential Chair in Information Studies at UCLA and Chair of the National Science Foundation Task Force on Cyberlearning, explains why higher education needs to focus on the “scholarship” aspect of e-scholarship (“E-Research and E-Scholarship”); and H. David Lambert, Vice President and CIO at Georgetown University, explores the emerging centrality of the CIO position in higher education (“Evolving Role of IT and Leadership”). Our hope is that these four initial articles will stimulate ongoing and diverging conversations and will be joined by future op-ed pieces, all published online and organized topically in the four focus areas, allowing readers to comment and contribute.


Of course, these four IT focus areas overlap and intertwine. They have fuzzy boundaries. Teaching and Learning merges into the Evolving Role of IT and Leadership, which influences Managing the Enterprise, which has a profound effect on E-Research and E-Scholarship. But that’s the idea: they all come together, for the common good of higher education. The EDUCAUSE concentration on these four areas is the result of focusing on what is truly important to higher education. And these technology changes extend to the role of IT professionals. Once responsible only for technological issues, today’s IT professionals and leaders contend with legal issues, legislative relations, economic competitiveness, and relationship building.

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