



Editorial

by Saveen Reddy

Welcome to the first issue of *Crossroads*. We dedicate this magazine to you, the student members of the ACM. We hope to educate, entertain, and inform you as much as possible. In addition, we hope this magazine will serve as a ``crossroads" of ideas for computer science students around the world.

Every issue of *Crossroads* will center around a theme. The theme of this issue is the Internet and computer networking. These represent relatively recent inventions. However, the general public's knowledge and appreciation of them is even more recent, spurred on by a deluge of coverage by popular media. Unconfined to military or research purposes, the Internet has grown rapidly. Currently experiencing rapid growth for commercial uses, it is becoming a global resource.

Large scale networking has brought people the capacity to cooperate by means that would have been unimaginable several decades ago. This magazine is a perfect example. It was planned and created entirely through the efforts of geographically-separated contributors. At the time that I write this editorial, I have never met any of the contributors to this magazine outside of email. Were it not for the Internet, how could we have done this? Clearly, networking offers people unprecedented opportunities for commerce, communication, and cooperation across the face of the Earth. Is this a fantastic claim, bordering on fiction? Hardly. Why then is there such serious discussion of a future US National Information Infrastructure (NII)? What could explain the never-ending series of mergers and alliances between producers of software, entertainment industries, and telecommunications firms? However, this is not

to say that the Internet must necessarily be the model for the NII. Regardless, many countries stand to benefit from increased networking in general and the Internet in particular. We can only hope that the benefits will be apparent at many levels, servicing the needs of citizens, business, and government.

Will networking cast humanity into a halcyon era of productivity and mutual understanding? I doubt it. The benefits of massive networking certainly exist. I have no doubt many have yet to be discovered. However, we should concern ourselves with the darker side of networking. Will access to some form of NII mean that people will have virtual lives as important as their real ones? This is a fantastic worry, but unlikely to ever be the case. The real problems are more mundane but still serious. How do we protect our privacy? How will our families be affected? In what manner will our economies change? Can we maintain a secure state? How can we verify identities of those with whom we must communicate? What forms of abuse can occur? How are we to find the information we seek in a worldwide network? Will a NII become the next great subsidy for the sake of universal access? I don't promise terribly profound answers to any of these questions. I do promise that we've made an honest attempt to inform and entertain you about this topic.