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Serving the SIPA Community

Narrowing the Digital Divide:

CITI's Broadband Workshop Tackles Globalization Issues

By LAURA FORLANO

Six leaders from the telecom industry participated in a panel discussion at Columbia University on Sept. 12 to assess a multitude of issues, including national broadband deployment, a recent report issued by the FCC and the width of the "digital divide." The workshop was organized by the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information (CITI) at the Business School in order to stimulate discussion, provoke thoughts and form a basis for future telecom policy, in lieu of the recent changes from the Oval Office.

Broadband, now a hot topic among politicians, bankers, regulators and journalists, is high-speed connectivity that is four to 80 times faster than a standard 56K modem. It is "always on" and therefore eliminates the need for dial-up connection. The technology is used to deliver, video and audio information over digital subscriber lines (DSL), cable, wireless local multi-point distribution services (LMDS) and satellite networks.

In his introduction to the workshop, Deputy Director of CITI Kenneth Carter paralleled the implications of broadband deployment to the ancient Roman road structure. Carter noted, "while broadband may not be that important to users in the short-run, in the long-run broadband will affect all aspects of our lives including commerce, media, government and education."

Panelists including economist Bruce Egan, a Senior Research Fellow at CITI, expressed concern over the rapid changes in this area. He believes that they might exacerbate the "digital divide," commonly referred to as lack of access to new technologies for rural and urban poor, both nationally and

internationally. "We need good regulations to achieve our goal of advanced telecommunications service for all," Egan said. "This may require drastic government intervention in order to turn over years of bad regulations."

On the international level, panelist Barbara Dooley, President the Commercial eXchange Association, which represents Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Washington, said she believes the FCC is



courtesy of www.cix.org

sending the wrong message to the world. Since many countries look to the FCC for guidance on issues such as deregulation and privatization in the telecom sector, it is extremely important the FCC get telecom policy right, she

said.

Dooley argued that the U.S. is now in a painful stage of "demonopolization," and that countries cannot move too quickly between monopolization and deregulation.

Recently, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has taken steps to get involved in the creation of international telecom policy in order to insure that certain countries do not have an unfair advantage in this area.

If you would like more information on CITI events, please register with their Web site at www.citi.columbia.edu.

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