

BY TIM DRAKE

Businessman Richard Maring knows the dangers of Internet pornography. His 8-year-old niece was exposed to it three years ago while performing an innocent online search on algae for a homework project.

"Ninety percent of children ages 8-18 have been exposed to hard-core pornography while doing homework," said Maring, CEO and founder of Tribinium Corp., a high-tech company that seeks to develop programs to protect children from Internet dangers. "Even with filters, 69% of students are still exposed at school."

Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa., has taken an uncommon step in trying to protect its students from such exposure. Shortly after taking office in 2006, the college's president, Jim Towey, introduced a policy to filter both pornography and gambling sites in all public and residence hall computers.

"In my third week on the job, the dean of students raised the issue," Towey said. "As a parent of five children, I assumed that at a Catholic college you couldn't stream porn into your dorm room."

Towey was in for a shock.

"I asked our people to do some research and check with all of the big Catholic colleges," said Towey. "Very few, if any, colleges and universities filter for pornography or gambling sites."

Towey cited an article in *University Business* that drew his attention to the problem of gambling.

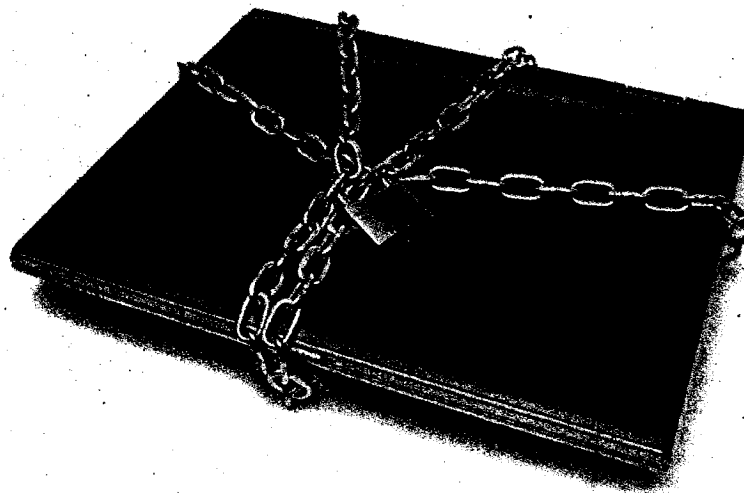
"It showed the consequences of what happens when an 18-year-old arrives at college, and how they can become indebted or addicted in a matter of seconds," he said. He used statistics from a Register article to demonstrate the pornography problem.

"Talk to any priest confessor and they'll tell you how prevalent pornography is with teenagers and college students," said Towey, who once served under President George W. Bush as director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. "The reality is that students are getting addicted."

Towey heard opinions pro and con. After consulting with administrators, faculty and the Benedictine monks on campus, the school instituted the policy in August 2006, installing SonicWall filtering software on computers in the residence halls and computer labs,

# ELEPHANT in the Dorm Room

## Catholic Colleges Beginning to Block Online Porn and Gambling Sites



**CENSORSHIP?** Some may see filtering for pornography and online gambling as Victorian and Puritanical, but one Catholic college president regards the action as a 'faithful witness on how sin degrades human dignity.' *Stock*

In response, some students referred to the president as "Mama Towey," saying he overstepped his role. Towey admitted that many faculty members disapprove of the policy.

"The college's role is not to prevent students from sinning as much as it is to give a faithful witness on how sin degrades human dignity and how grace helps us rediscover our high calling," said Towey. "Any college student on any campus who wants to access Internet gambling or pornography can find a way to do it. My question is whether the college will be complicit in this or not."

### Some Do, Some Don't

Towey stands relatively alone among academics. Most Catholic colleges, such as Boston College, Duquesne University, Loyola University, St. John's University in Colle-

ville, Minn., and the University of Notre Dame do not filter Web access.

"Our students are 18 or older," said Jim Koenig, director of information technology services at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict in Collegeville. "We do not filter at the college. Internet access goes out directly through the router so I don't know how much a problem that may or may not be."

Because of age, the IT department does filter access at the middle and high school level at the preparatory school located on its campus.

Franciscan University of Steubenville does filter. At Wyoming Catholic College, the administration has gone one step further.

Wyoming Catholic, which has 35 students from 23 states, doesn't allow televisions,

Internet access in the dorms or cell phone usage. And it limits iPod use.

"We're not anti-technology," said the president, Father Robert Cook. "We tell students, 'God gave you your brain, which is better than any computer ever invented. We're giving you four years of freedom to learn how to use it.'"

Father Cook said that students have uniformly appreciated the policy. Freshman Antonio Padilla of Laramie agreed.

"I didn't think it was a bad idea," said Padilla. "It eliminates the distractions. People become so accustomed to technology they feel they can't live without it. Society doesn't know how to shut off the noise."

Even with the policy in place, there are still distractions.

"I've noticed some students wasting a lot of time playing online games on public

machines," said Padilla. "The school could do a better job of filtering that."

### See No Evil

Maring, the founder of Tribinium, says that reliance on filters is misguided.

"We're seeing more Christian colleges looking to filter," said Maring. "Filtering technology is location-based. A filter is only as good as the list it's tied to."

Maring explained that pornographers have figured out that the way to stay ahead of filter companies is to purchase blocks of domain names, copying content and advertising new sites.

"There were 75,000 pornography sites in 1998," said Maring. "That rose to 1.2 million in 2002. Two years later it doubled to 4.2 million."

After his niece was exposed to pornography, Maring set out to tackle the problem. On Jan. 22, Maring's company released See No Evil, a software program designed to prevent pornographic images from appearing on the computer screen.

The software package has two components — a client side and a service side. On the client side, the software provides parents complete control over what can be accessed in the home. On the service side, the program analyzes unknown websites covering potentially harmful images until a parent can check the site.

"This is our first shot across the bow of the porn industry to say you're not going unchecked anymore," said Maring. "We want to give parents tools to take back control of the Internet."

Anticipating charges of censorship Towey said that while academic freedom is an important principle, it's not an absolute. "Ex Corde Ecclesiae says that," he said. "The Church as shepherd, and college administration as a reflection of that, has to realize there are casualties to Internet gambling and porn."

Senior staff writer Tim Drake writes from St. Joseph, Minnesota

### MORE INFORMATION

For more information on St. Vincent's College, go to [stvincent.edu/](http://stvincent.edu/) or call (724) 532-6600. For more information on the See No Evil program, go to [tribinium.com](http://tribinium.com)