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Community Colleges Respond to Cyber Threats

Headlines describing massive data breaches at multinational corporations are commonplace these days. However, virtually all employers are vulnerable to similar attacks. Stolen employee information, customer data, or industry secrets can lead to identity theft, compromised financial information, or even cyberterrorism. While the tech industry and research universities have key roles to play in adapting to this threat, community colleges also have a pivotal role to play in “Information Assurance.”

The National Security Agency (NSA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have established the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) program to recognize colleges that are at the forefront in education and research on information assurance. This designation, first created in 1998, recognizes colleges that have integrated core cybersecurity/information assurance concepts into their programs. In 2010, a category was added for two-year colleges (CAE2Y).

Snead State Community College is among 33 two-year colleges to hold CAE2Y designation, and the only two-year institution in Alabama. Snead’s Computer Science Technology program helps students master the fifteen core competencies identified by NSA/DHS as appropriate for two-year programs. These include cyber defense, security design, cryptography, and ethics. The coursework specific to cybersecurity is also designed to lead to the Certified Ethical Hacker (C|EH) certification, an industry-recognized credential.

Cybersecurity-related jobs are growing rapidly, and many of these positions require an Associate’s degree or less. A growing number of workers are turning to the cybersecurity field as an opportunity to quickly build a skillset that can command a premium in the job market. At Snead State, almost 10% of the students in the Computer Science Technology program already hold a Bachelor’s degree.

Other NCIA institutions holding CAE2Y designation include Moraine Valley Community College (IL) and Florida State College at Jacksonville. For more information about the CAE2Y designation, visit https://www.nsa.gov/ia/academic_outreach/index.shtml