Students and alumni test cyber skills in Cyber 2.0 challenge

February 20, 2019 by Clark Leonard[1]



Students and alumni from UNG competed in the USA Hackers Challenge on Feb. 14 at Georgia Tech Research Institute.

Students and alumni from the University of North Georgia (UNG) were among the 58 competitors for a $100,000 prize in the USA Hackers Challenge hosted by UNG and Israeli cybersecurity company Cyber 2.0 on Feb. 14 at Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI).

Cyber 2.0 says it can guarantee full protection from the spread of cyber attacks. A winner would be declared at the competition only if someone, with an administrative password and internet protocol addresses provided, compromised Cyber 2.0's defenses to obtain a confidential file. With about 2 million attacks launched, no one broke in and secured the prize.

A total of 11 UNG students and two alumni competed in the contest, in addition to students from Kennesaw State and Georgia Tech, as well as industry and military competitors.

Dr. Bryson Payne[2], professor of computer science and director of the Center for Cyber Operations Education[3] at UNG, was one of the organizers. He also shared a presentation on car hacking with those who participated.

Bradford Regeski, a UNG senior from Atlanta, Georgia, pursuing a degree in computer science with a minor in cybersecurity, said the contest was the first for him in trying to hack into a system in a "red team" — or offensive — manner. Cyber 2.0 made its data unreadable, forcing competitors to look for different methods.

"It's a rare opportunity to get to work on an actual network," Regeski said.

Kevin Lin, a senior from Buford, Georgia, pursuing a degree in computer science with a minor in cybersecurity, also noted the learning opportunity afforded by such a strong cyber defense system.

"It's pretty neat to see what people are doing out there with these types of systems," Lin said.



UNG alumni Cornel and Lydia du Preez competed in the USA Hackers Challenge on Feb. 14. Both work in cybersecurity.

Lydia du Preez, a 2014 UNG graduate with a computer information systems degree, and her husband, Cornel du Preez, a 2015 UNG graduate with the same degree, jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the USA Hackers Challenge. Both work in cybersecurity, Cornel across

the street from GTRI at Honeywell and Lydia at Country Financial.

Cornel du Preez thrived on the opportunity to interact with Erez Kaplan, Cyber 2.0 founder and chief technology officer, who told the contestants he wanted to help them break into his network. Even with that help, the Hackers Challenge task was daunting.

"Challenging is probably a gross understatement," Cornel du Preez said. "It's been difficult because it's a whole new challenge from a network penetration testing perspective."

Kaplan said Cornel du Preez still got further against the Cyber 2.0 system in six hours than 50 military hackers in several days.

"The whole Cyber 2.0 team was really impressed with the quality and ability of the students and other participants," Payne said.

Both Cornel and Lydia remember their appetite for more cyber programs at UNG when they were in school. Lydia's class was the first with the opportunity to pursue a concentration in information assurance and security. Seeing so many UNG students at the Hackers Challenge showed them how much cyber efforts have grown at UNG.

"It's really awesome to see what Bryson has done as far as growing the program," Lydia du Preez said. "And now there's a major, a minor, whatever you want."

Payne was proud to see UNG so well-represented at the Hackers Challenge, which came on the heels of UNG's third-place finish in the NSA Codebreaker Challenge that wrapped up Jan. 6[4].

"It is great to have both students and alumni of UNG here. And they have given some great efforts," Payne said. "They know the right things to try for penetration testing and ethical hacking."

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