

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE

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MEDIA RELEASE

AFIT Center for Cyberspace Research earns top score

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio - According to the results posted May 6 by the National Security Agency, students from the Air Force Institute of Technology's Center for Cyberspace Research, Team Two, earned the best score of the NSA 2010 Cyber Defense Exercise.

While AFIT may have won bragging rights, the coveted CDX trophy went to the U.S. Naval Academy. The CDX trophy is reserved for the undergraduate service academy with the best score. While AFIT had the best score, its designation as the Air Force's postgraduate school disqualified the school from the trophy competition. AFIT ceased awarding undergraduate degrees in 1985.

AFIT students began competing in the CDX in 2003 and have earned high point distinction for seven of the past eight years (in 2007 AFIT earned second).

AFIT entered this year's competition with two teams under the leadership of Tim Lacey, CCR Lab Manager and Adjunct Instructor of Computer Science.

"Both the AFIT1 and AFIT2 teams performed very well and had some of the most brilliant cyber students that CCR faculty and staff have had the pleasure of working with," Mr. Lacey said.

"In addition to achieving the best score, AFIT2 virtually aced the cyber forensics inject with 995 out of a possible 1000 points," he continued. Inject is short for injection of a unplanned, scripted attack, inserted into the middle of the exercise, by the NSA "Red Team," playing the aggressor role.

The CDX provides real-life experience protecting critical computing resources. Teams endeavor to protect their respective networks while under attack by the NSA "Red Team" for the entirety of the five day competition. The computers must operate through the attacks and students must ensure computing services remain available to users. The entire exercise is conducted on Virtual Private Networks which provide an isolated environment for the exercise and prevents interference with real-world networks.

"This year's exercise incorporated additional realism by adding users who perform typical tasks that end up compromising their computer," stated Lacey, "Through this realism students learned firsthand how difficult it is to secure a network where unsuspecting users inadvertently infect their own computers with viruses."

During this year's exercise users received e-mail attachment from people they did not know, when opened a virus immediately installed and connected back to an attacker at NSA.

"Network users should be aware of suspicious e-mail messages, links in their e-mail, and attachments just as they are aware of any unusual package left in their office cube or on their front porch" said Lacey.

NSA's Cyber Defense Exercise was begun in 2000 and is held annually pitting NSA cyber

security experts against students from U.S. military service academies and DoD post-graduate schools. Along with AFIT, this year's competitors included the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Naval Postgraduate School, and Royal Military College of Canada. The CDX is sponsored and run by NSA's Information Assurance Directorate.