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State gets cybersecurity grant  
BARBARA HOBEROCK World Capitol Bureau  
09/30/2004  
Tulsa World (Final Home Edition), Page A17 of News

The \$3 million grant will be used to develop training programs at TU and at community colleges. OKLAHOMA CITY -- Oklahoma has received a \$3 million grant from the National Science Foundation to develop programs for cybersecurity research and education, officials announced Wednesday. Designation as an advanced technology education center and the accompanying grant were awarded to a consortium called the Oklahoma Center for Information Assurance and Forensics Education, which includes state community colleges, CareerTech centers and the University of Tulsa.

Information assurance is a discipline focused on protecting and defending information, computer systems and networks. Digital forensics is the science of extracting, examining and preserving digital evidence.

Commerce Secretary Kathy Taylor said Oklahoma will become the country's second center for computer security and work force development.

Gov. Brad Henry said security and forensics education are "critical in post-9/11 America."

"All businesses and government entities must ensure that their computer networks are secure and reliable," he said.

"Furthermore, practically every crime now involves electronic evidence and law enforcement personnel and the expertise to deal with those cases."

TU will be the lead training institution.

Participating educational institutions include: Central Tech in Drumright, Moore Norman Technology Center, Francis Tuttle Technology Center in Oklahoma City, Rose State College in Midwest City, Oklahoma City Community College, Tulsa Community College and Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee.

More than 100 people are enrolled in associate's degree programs in community colleges, a figure that will grow, Taylor said.

"Highly trained specialized information technology students not only will have incredibly marketable skills, but will attract companies to this state to use those skills," she said. "The jobs will grow over time."

The group hopes to develop internships for the students with companies in Oklahoma and around the country.

The program was the vision of Sujeet Sheno, a University of Tulsa computer science professor, Taylor said.

Sheno called computer security a high-tech field "that permeates all sectors of our economy and also supports our law enforcement and homeland security efforts."

The consortium has worked hard during the last three years training faculty members, designing curriculum and building academic programs, he said.

TU and the National Security Agency made the initial investment of \$400,000, Sheno said.

"The \$3 million -- and I am expecting a lot more down the road over the next four years -- will improve the quality, quantity and accessibility of cybersecurity programs," he said.

The consortium hopes to roll out programs at six new CareerTech centers and 14 community colleges in Oklahoma and neighboring states by 2008, Sheno said.

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