

ECSU unveils computer security course

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WILLIMANTIC — In response to the continued threat of cyber attacks on corporations and individuals, Eastern Connecticut State University has created a new course, “Data and Computer Security.”

“It’s almost impossible to imagine spending an entire day without contact with some form of computer technology,” said Sarah Tasneem, professor of computer science and chairman of the computer science department, who was instrumental in designing and implementing the course.

“Current events — cyber breaches, identity theft, ransomware — dictate the need to provide awareness of the problems that exist with respect to computers and the use of technology.”

Tasneem said the new course “will introduce students to practical concepts and principles of data security.”

“We will consider issues such as protecting access to data ensuring proper pro-

tection of data, both when it has been stored and when it is being moved across a network. We will cover the steps needed to ensure the privacy of data that has been recorded about us.”

In addition to individual identify theft and personal email hacking that takes place on a daily basis, widespread cyberattacks in the past five years have ranged from attacks during the 2016 U.S. elections to the compromising of nearly 50 million Facebook user accounts last September.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has described the battleground to protect computer systems as the new “arms race.” Similar personal account attacks and security breaches at Equifax (2017), Target (2013) and Neiman Marcus (2013) impacted millions of people.

Tim Hartley, assistant professor of computer science, teaches the course, which is at capacity this semester.

He has also taught classes in government agencies and companies in the private sector.

In his class, students learn

everything from infrastructure and security software to on-device analytics to rapid detection and accurate identification of a potential or actual attacker.

“My motivation in delivering this course to Eastern students is based on my experience in industry,” said Hartley. “Working with businesses and organizations across the United States and internationally, I recognize the importance of security in various forms.

“I hope that exposing students to cybersecurity issues will prepare them for what lies ahead in the job market and in their own personal lives.”

Tasneem said application developers, project managers, database administrators and security administrators are in need of computer security education and skills in today’s computer environment.

Some students enrolled in the new course have had their own private accounts compromised.

“The first time, I didn’t realize that the link I clicked on to watch a hockey game

online was fake and I accidentally downloaded malware,” said John Funk of Southbury, who is majoring in computer science.

“To get rid of the malware, I used an antivirus program. On the second occasion, I received several emails from different students and faculty members at Eastern, asking me to click a link. I did not click the link because I knew it would lead to a security breach.”

Funk said he believes the computer security course will also enhance his career goals.

“Having knowledge in cybersecurity would be a valuable skill for me to have when looking for jobs because security breaches are more relevant than ever as cyberspace continues to grow,” he said.

Mary Wishart of Pomfret agrees.

“Technology is moving faster than the methods we have to protect it — we live in a world where people hack into light bulbs. Any student taking this class and gaining an interest and knowledge of cyber security should have no problem finding a job.”