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**Strategic Investment in Cybersecurity Education Drives Record Enrollment at LSU**

**Enrollment in LSU's computer science program has tripled over the last decade, largely driven by growing student interest in cybersecurity, part of the defense priority of LSU's Scholarship First Agenda.**

This fall, 351 LSU freshmen have already declared computer science as their major. Meanwhile, a decade ago, LSU had a total of 351 computer science students on all levels combined—undergraduate, master's and PhD. Between fall 2013 and fall 2023, the computer science program has effectively tripled, rising from seventh to first place in College of Engineering enrollment.

There are now 1,115 computer science students at LSU. Among them, 196 have chosen the recently established cybersecurity concentration—a tenfold increase in three years. This growth is largely due to strategic investments in cybersecurity education, research and service in alignment with LSU's Scholarship First Agenda, where cybersecurity and military science are part of the university's defense priority, a top-five target.

"The groundwork for our growth in computer science began nearly 10 years ago with strong support from our partners at Louisiana Economic Development for projects like IBM in Baton Rouge and DXC in New Orleans," said Karsten Thompson, interim dean of the LSU College of Engineering.

"Today, that growth is accelerating in areas like software engineering and cybersecurity because they touch every industry, and there is a demand for talent. The real credit is to our top computer science faculty, who have not only been able to strengthen our core offerings but also adapt to emerging areas like deeply technical cyber domains, making LSU a destination for new students, a trusted institution for federal security partners and an attractive home for new researchers."

The explosive growth of LSU's cybersecurity program continues to attract top talent. Last year, with support from the Louisiana legislature, LSU made two strategic hires, adding [Professor Ibrahim "Abe" Baggili and Associate Professor Aisha Ali-Gombe](#) to its existing cybersecurity faculty. Baggili now leads a \$600K Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, project to support military cybersecurity at LSU, while Ali-Gombe is the principal investigator on the newly awarded LSU Cybersecurity Clinic for Louisiana small businesses, the first cyber clinic in the country to be funded by the National Security Agency, with \$1.5 million.

This fall, LSU welcomes two more cybersecurity faculty to its flagship campus—Associate Professor Elias Bou-Harb and Assistant Professor Phani Vadrevu. Bou-Harb joins LSU from the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he directed its interdisciplinary Cyber Center for Security and Analytics. His research focus is primarily on network security and internet-of-things insecurity, while Vadrevu, formerly at University of New Orleans, fights social engineering attacks, such as internet scams and phishing. Together, Bou-Harb and Vadrevu bring well over \$1 million in federal funding to LSU and Louisiana with four active research projects supported by the National Science Foundation.

"LSU has a good strategic vision and an excellent reputation," Bou-Harb said. "I wanted to bring my expertise where I can contribute to top cybersecurity research together with excellent students in a computer science department that has the support of university leadership and excellent plans to grow."



Associate Professor Elias Bou-Harb and Assistant Professor Phani Vadrevu are new, strategic cybersecurity hires at LSU this fall. Together, they bring well over \$1 million in federal research funding to LSU and Louisiana. "I wanted to bring my expertise where I can contribute to top cybersecurity research together with excellent students in a computer science department that has the support of university leadership and excellent plans to grow," said Bou-Harb, who joins LSU from the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he directed its interdisciplinary Cyber Center for Security and Analytics.

“I want to continue my research at LSU to protect computer users from scams,” Vadrevu said. “One of the things I’m interested in is deliberate strategies to confuse users, especially the older adult population. You see a lot of websites now where you can’t tell what is an ad or not; confusing content and inaccurate information. Studying this can give us empirical data that companies like Google can use to make browsing safer and protect computer users from harm.”

In addition to Bou-Harb and Vadrevu, the LSU division of computer science and engineering added four more faculty in software engineering, human-computer interaction and high-performance computing this fall. Professor Hartmut Kaiser leads the **STE||AR Group** at the LSU Center for Computation & Technology and serves on the international C++ standardization committee. Associate Professor David Shepherd joins LSU from Virginia Commonwealth University after a career in industry. Assistant Professor Mahmood Jasim earned his PhD from University of Massachusetts Amherst this year, while Assistant Professor Umar Farooq graduated from University of California, Riverside with a PhD in 2021 and then spent two years working as a software engineer for ByteDance, the owner of TikTok.

“Being able to add these incredible researchers to our team is both a boon and an absolute necessity for us to meet the demands of hundreds of new and brilliant students,” said Professor Golden Richard, interim director of the LSU Cyber Center and faculty lead for cybersecurity at LSU with joint appointments in the College of Engineering and Center for Computation & Technology. “We’re now well on our way to becoming the number-one school for cybersecurity in the United States, which President Tate set as our goal just 18 months ago.”

In a strategic move, the flagship campus recently elevated the LSU Cyber Center to coordinate cybersecurity research across the disciplines.

**Publish Date:**  
10-09-2023



Among the 36 schools newly designated or redesignated by the NSA this year, LSU is the only university to become a Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Operations, the most selective and highly technical of the NSA designations. Left to right: Andrew Case, LSU industry liaison for cyber and adjunct computer science faculty; LSU Director of Economic Development Greg Trahan, special advisor to LSU President William Tate on cyber initiatives; Professor Golden Richard, LSU faculty lead for cybersecurity and interim director of the LSU Cyber Center with joint appointments in the LSU College of Engineering and LSU Center for Computation & Technology.