# University Hosts Virtual Digital Forensics Lab

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In order to meet a need demonstrated by institutions teaching information security and digital forensics, the university received funding to create shared virtual lab space.

The Office of Information Technology (OIT) received $109,514 from the CyberWATCH consortium to establish a regional Digital Forensics Lab through a grant from the National Science Foundation. The lab will be a virtual resource in the teaching of digital forensics at CyberWATCH universities and community colleges, as well as serve as a tool for performing digital forensic investigations in the future.

"We went to CyberWATCH with the idea to offer this as an asset that others could use," says Robert Maxwell, OIT's lead incident handler.

"There is a nationwide shortage of computer security professionals," adds Gerry Sneeringer, OIT security director. "Our laboratory will enable consortium faculty to better prepare their students to fill these jobs by exposing them to resources that might be cost prohibitive if purchased at each school."

An important part of the project involves making available computing power and software appropriate for the forensic examination of both network activity and digital media. The lab will consist of virtual machines running on hardware hosted at the university that will function as forensic workstations. Member institutions will use these machines to offer courses in forensic examination of digital media and network activity.

Maxwell says that a number of people with security expertise in OIT will be involved in the project.

"The University of Maryland has been a part of the CyberWATCH consortium for many years, and we are excited to provide hands-on experience and education to the next generation of information security professionals in the region," says Jeffrey Huskamp, UM's vice president and chief information officer.

The lab also will offer sample curricula and curriculum materials, including forensic case studies, for use by CyberWATCH member institutions throughout the Washington, D.C., region in developing their own courses. There isn't such a program at Maryland, though Maxwell says that with its cross-disciplinary nature and real-world applications, it is hoped that the university will offer similar programs in the future.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the CyberWATCH consortium is composed of higher education institutions, businesses and government agencies from across the region focused on improving cybersecurity and safety through education.

OIT expects to officially launch the DFL at the 2008 C3 (Cyberethics, Cybersafety, and Cybersecurity) Conference in October during National Cybersecurity Awareness Month. The first full semester the DFL

# Between the Columns

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will be available for use in courses will be spring 2009.