

Summer camp gives students a closer look at cybersecurity work

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As the world becomes more and more connected through the web, trained individuals in the field of cybersecurity are becoming increasingly important members of the workforce.

That demand prompted the Center for Applied Cybersecurity Research at Indiana University to create its first one-day Security Matters Cybercamp.

August Spiegel, an incoming senior at Brown County High School, is already planning to attend IU to study cybersecurity.

"I've always had an interest in computers. Now, I'd like to know how attacks are done (by hackers) and how to defend against them," he said.

The free camp was advertised in local high schools and is geared toward students interested in computers and computer science. Organizers didn't know what to expect, although they planned to accommodate up to 25 people.

In the end, 20 current students and recent graduates of Bloomington high schools North and South, Edgewood and Brown County high schools, Sellersburg and North Central high schools and some home-schooled students all showed up Friday morning at the Cyberinfrastructure Building at 10th Street and the Ind. 45/46 Bypass.

Anurag Shankar, a senior security analyst at the CACR, said the growing number of lucrative and essential employment opportunities was a driving force behind organizing the camp.

"There's simply a huge shortage of cybersecurity experts in the field right now," Shankar said. "IU has a lot of very good resources, so it made sense to help these kids, who are already interested in computers, to take advantage of that knowledge."

The hands-on experience that the camp provided, especially at such a young age, will put them well above their peers should they choose cybersecurity as a field of study, Shankar said.

"They'll learn how to avoid getting phished and see how hackers basically breach security on a website," he said. "We show them how easy it is for someone with some very basic knowledge to infiltrate a site's security, and how to protect against that."

Michael Rusk, an incoming senior at Edgewood, said mobile privacy and protecting information on one's cellphone was what interested him the most.

"That whole topic in general is just interesting to me," he said. Rusk is also planning to attend IU. "I think I'd like to at least minor in informatics in college."

Campers were hard at work all day long, each hunched over a laptop, occasionally grabbing a doughnut, a bag of chips and some Mountain Dew to keep up their energy.

In all, campers learned about cybersecurity ethics, how computer networks function, how they are secured and why that all matters.

They learned what your smartphone is doing without your knowledge, how to defend against cyber attacks and what a professional cybersecurity career looks like.

They also took a tour of the half-submerged, F5 tornado-proof IU Data Center at the end of the day.

"The fact that they're taking this camp during the summer puts them ahead and shows interest at an early age to potential employers," Shankar said.

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