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McLennan receives NSF grant to enhance CIS program

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McLennan Community College's Community Information Systems (CIS) program has received a $222,274 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) for an "Enhancing Network and Cybersecurity Technician Careers in Collaboration with Industry" project. The project is designed to enhance current CIS degrees by integrating cybersecurity skills in college classes as well as through high school dual credit programs.

The addition of cybersecurity curriculum to the CIS degrees is in response to a growing regional demand identified by industry partners for networking and cybersecurity technicians. It aims to open new opportunities to provide a skilled workforce for the area, enhance future growth in the community, and provide higher-paying careers for students.

Several industry partners have committed to work actively with McLennan's CIS program to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to address their workforce needs and will support students with internships and job-shadowing opportunities.

"The Professional, Technical, and Scientific Services sector is expected to add 168,000 jobs in Texas by 2024, a 26.8 percent increase from 2014-2024. Included in that area are Networking and Cybersecurity professionals," Kris Collins, senior vice president of economic development for the Greater Waco Chamber said. "With continued growth in the major metro areas, such as Dallas and Austin, Waco employers have struggled to fill key information technology positions. This challenge will only increase as Waco continues to grow and attract more businesses and industry to the area. Our current employers have an immediate need for Networking and Cybersecurity Technicians, a need that will continue to accelerate with industry growth."

In addition to the changes in curriculum, the grant will provide for the development of workshops and outreach programs to attract students to the high-paying and growing industry. This will include a summer Cyber Kids Camp beginning in 2019 for students in kindergarten through eighth grade to excite younger students and increase their awareness of the importance of cybersecurity and potential careers in technology. Funds will also be used to purchase an NAO Robot for use in the camps, as well as in McLennan classes and community events.

Waco Independent School District is committed to partnering with McLennan in this endeavor.

"As Waco continues to grow and attract more businesses and industry to our area, the need for Networking and Cybersecurity Technicians will increase, and working with McLennan to help prepare our future workforce is a commitment that we will support," A. Marcus Nelson, Waco ISD superintendent said. "We will assist the effort by recruiting our teachers and counselors for professional development workshops, advertising the STEM Pathway to middle- and high-school students, notifying elementary students and parents of the summer camps, and providing opportunities for McLennan to participate in college and career fairs on campuses."

The project will begin June 1 and is slated to run through May 31, 2021. For more information about the CIS program, visit www.mclennan.edu/cisor contact Cynthia Wagner, CIS program director, at cwagner@mclennan.edu, or Cathy Prause, associate professor of CIS, at cprause@mclennan.edu.