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Training to Fight Cybercrime

If you could learn more about how to stop people who hang out in chat rooms looking for unsuspecting victims and send fraudulent e-mails about money scams, and the only cost to you would be for transportation, would you be on the next plane, train or car out of town?

Thanks to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Mississippi State University operates the National Forensics Training Center (NFTC) to train law enforcement officers about fighting cybercrime, all at no cost to the officers or their agencies. Meals and lodging are provided during the free training; all students have to do is go online to the NFTC Web site and register, then get themselves to the class for which they have enrolled. Classes take place at the Mississippi State University Campus in Starkville and at the Cyber Crime Fusion Center in Jackson, Miss.

If officers cannot come to the training, in some instances the training will come to them. The training itself is still free, but meals and lodging are not included as the instructors' travel expenses must be covered.

"When the distance is great, so that it doesn't make sense for single officers to come to Mississippi, and a central agency or resource center will serve as a host, we will discuss coming out to provide training," says Dr. David Dampier, associate professor of computer science and engineering and director of the center at Mississippi State. "We take it on a case-by-case basis and it just really depends on the situation. We just did one in Marietta, Ga., where they got together a group of people from all over the area."

NFTC has also previously offered training through the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)-Northwest in Anchorage, in February and June 2009. One session was a four-day advanced training course and the other featured back-to-back two-day classes at a more introductory level.

"Obviously, law enforcement officers from Alaska would have a hard time traveling to Mississippi to attend our training, so we were happy to do that," Dampier says.

NLECTC-Northwest is a program of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice. Bruce Richter, deputy director at NLECTC-Northwest, said the Center was tipped off about the free training by the local FBI field office.

"Compared to other alternatives in the commercial marketplace, the price certainly is right," Richter says. "The instructors have solid backgrounds and they offer a wide variety of instruction. This is a good venue that law enforcement agencies should be aware of and we're going to try to keep working with them to schedule more sessions in the future."

Participants in the sessions at NLECTC-Northwest came from around the state of Alaska and filled every seat in the Center's training center.

"We had federal, state and local officers from a whole variety of agencies. It was really good stuff," Richter says. "The courses have this great mix that addresses the practical needs of the law enforcement community and it's something that agencies need to know about."

Students were responsible for paying for their own travel, but funding from the state's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force supplemented that for officers outside the immediate Anchorage area.

"It was a nice mix. The local FBI was interested, the task force brought in people, and everything all came together to make it a nice opportunity," Richter says.

Dampier says that when the program started in 2005, NFTC initially had difficulty getting the word out, but as the program continues, word of mouth from agencies such as NLECTC-Northwest is helping publicize

the training. NFTC is currently funded through FY 2010, and Dampier says as long as DOJ continues to provide funding, the university plans to continue to operate the program.

NFTC offers 11 different classes onsite, ranging from basic computer use through legal aspects of search and seizure and running the gamut in between. Individuals can also receive certification as a digital crime scene technician or a bit stream imaging technician after completing specific courses and successfully passing an exam.

For more information, visit the National Forensics Training Center Web site at http://www.security.cse. msstate.edu/ftc/.