ISACA, One In Tech and City Colleges of Chicago: A Cybersecurity Course Collaboration

ISACA

ISACA, One In Tech, City Colleges of Chicago Team Up for Cybersecurity Collaboration

A unique collaboration between ISACA, the One In Tech Foundation and City Colleges of Chicago resulted in a diverse class of community college students taking a giant step toward potential careers in cybersecurity.

The 14-week pilot cybersecurity course recently concluded. Students learned key cybersecurity concepts from ISACA instructors, gained a one-year student membership to the ISACA Chicago Chapter and prepared to take ISACA's CSX Cybersecurity Fundamentals Certificate exam, all with the goal of equipping them to pursue professional paths in the cybersecurity industry. The course also included training in leadership and communications skills through One In Tech, an ISACA foundation.

The lead instructors for the class, Kumararaj Govindaswamy and Adam Erryahi, were provided by the ISACA Chicago Chapter. The course covered major challenges in the cybersecurity field, how companies are managing key threats and explored how students can position themselves for a career in cybersecurity – a field in which there is a major shortage of qualified professionals globally.

The course was taught in a virtual environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the collaboration, City Colleges of Chicago provided student registrants and promoted the course to its academic community, and through their student ISACA membership, students could access ISACA member-only articles and knowledge resources, and gained access to discounts on ISACA training and credentials. The student cohort was diverse in age, background and previous exposure to cybersecurity concepts. While the course material was not overly technical, Govindaswamy said a basic understanding of areas such as data bases, network traffic and IT systems was helpful for students to extract the most from the course material.

Ramona Ratiu, president of the ISACA Chicago Chapter, said the course represented a promising collaboration between ISACA and the academic community. She considered the subject matter highly useful to all students, regardless of whether they are sure of their career plans.

"I think it's a great model," Ratiu said. "Cybersecurity education is not only important for companies to protect their crown jewels and for cybersecurity professionals, but it's also important these days for each one of us to educate ourselves on cyber hygiene, cyber threats and online safety. ISACA's expertise in these foundational building blocks is especially valuable for anyone interested in the cybersecurity field."

A Perfect Synergy

Robert Clarke, Director of Continuing Education and Customized Training for Economic and Workforce Innovation at City Colleges of Chicago, said the collaboration with ISACA represented "a perfect synergy" between like-minded organizations.

> **This program was an excellent fit because ISACA is dedicated to the same mission that we have of giving underrepresented people opportunities in the cybersecurity field,"** Clarke said. "We are trying to stay as current with the industry as we possibly can, and ISACA is clearly on the cutting edge.**

The course is especially valuable for students who have a true passion for cybersecurity, said Pamella Andersen, Training Operations Manager at City Colleges of Chicago. She said learning pathways like the ISACA cybersecurity course can be a true launching pad for students who are not only intrigued by a well-paying career field like cybersecurity, but also enthusiastic to learn from the instructors and one another.

"The people with that foundation, they start building camaraderie with each other and they connect about the parts of the industry that they're most passionate about, and you start to see advanced growth," Andersen said. "They start congealing into focused units and really supporting one another. It's really good to see."

Benefits Outside the Classroom

Some of the biggest advantages of the collaboration came outside the classroom setting. Clarke said the involvement of ISACA's robust Chicago Chapter was among the most appealing aspects of the relationship. The ISACA Chicago Chapter oversees a "GROW" mentorship program through which chapter members can connect and provide each other guidance and networking support. Ratiu said the program has proven popular, and is glad City Colleges of Chicago students also stand to benefit from it as student members.

"It's going amazingly well, even better than I expected," Ratiu said. "Lots of people are interested in being mentored, lots of our members are interested in giving back and mentoring others, so that's fantastic. The students from City Colleges of Chicago can benefit from this. I think those connections can be unbelievably helpful for their careers."

Govindaswamy echoed that enthusiasm, saying networking with professionals in the field can make all the difference for aspiring professionals who are interested in internships and other paths to gain a foothold in the cybersecurity field. Students could also connect with industry experts and participate in discussions through ISACA's Engage platform.

> **If these students can gain some mentorship and internship opportunities through this program, it will be a huge success for City Colleges and for ISACA, as well as making a positive impact in the community,"** Govindaswamy said. "What happens after the class will be very relevant to what we are trying to accomplish.**"**

Preparation for ISACA's CSX Cybersecurity Fundamentals exam was an emphasis in the late stages of the course. Registration for the exam was included as part of the course. The CSX Cybersecurity Fundamentals Certificate is an ideal credential for students and recent graduates to build baseline knowledge in cybersecurity and begin their career path in the field.

The final weeks of the course also included six hours of communication and leadership development skills-building, utilizing training resources identified by ISACA's One In Tech Foundation. Ratiu said even technically skilled cybersecurity professionals often fail to reach their potential because they struggle to communicate well across the organization.

"A lot of times cybersecurity professionals lack the needed soft skills," Ratiu said. "They might be scared of talking to the CISO or what words or terms they should use when communicating across the organization. I'm glad they have included some of those concepts in the class."

PARTNER WITH ISACA AND ONE IN TECH FOUNDATION

If you are interested in an academic program collaboration with ISACA, contact Ajay Barot, ISACA's vice president of strategic partnerships and business development, at **abarot@isaca.org**.

if you are interested in collaborating with One In Tech Foundation, please contact Ginger Spitzer, Executive Director at **gspitzer@oneintech.org**.

ISACA

ONE IN TECH
An ISACA® Foundation