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Contact: Amy Hewes

805-756-6402; ahewes@calpoly.edu

McAfee Steps into the Classroom to Help Create Cybersecurity Experts at Cal Poly

SAN LUIS OBISPO – This spring, McAfee Inc., part of Intel Security, joined with Cal Poly to provide cutting-edge curriculum on a topic that evolves by the minute: cybersecurity.

As the world's largest dedicated security technology company and a member of Cal Poly's Cybersecurity Council, McAfee has a strong interest in developing ready-to-work graduates who can build layered cyber defense systems and secure environments for government and industry. To this end — and in support of Cal Poly's educational initiative in cybersecurity — the company helped deliver a new course unofficially titled "Defense Against the Dark Arts."

Over the 10-week academic quarter, eight McAfee experts presented topics such as malware detection techniques and common OS vulnerabilities, advanced digital forensics, Web and messaging vulnerabilities and exploitation, network security, and mobile malware.

According to Computer Science Professor Zachary Peterson, malware — software that performs malicious or unintended actions on your computer — has grown both in prevalence and sophistication. He noted that there have been 170 million unique malware samples detected in a 12-month period.

"Due to the rapidity of changes in what's relevant," said Peterson, "the course significantly benefits from a 'boots on the ground' industry perspective. Students are learning about the cutting edge techniques used by both the attackers and defenders, along with the real-world tools used to analyze and defend against malware."

McAfee's relationship with Cal Poly began several years ago when Cal Poly Computer Science Chair Ignatios Vakalis invited Kate Rezina, McAfee's partner product manager, to join the department's Industry Advisory Board. She and other board members have provided advice and support for the development and implementation of a continuously expanding curricular emphasis in cybersecurity. "McAfee is a key partner in this effort," Vakalis said.

McAfee vice chair Todd Gebhart explained that the company was motivated to collaborate on the cyber course because, as he noted, "there are not enough people to defend against the dark arts. Industry and government has 12 openings for every qualified cyber professional."

The company has also been impressed with Cal Poly interns. "These are very talented students," said Gebhart. "By building on what many of them are doing as a hobby, McAfee hopes to give them a career path."

Our company believes that the university's Learn by Doing model can make Cal Poly the lead provider of cyber professionals, because the students don't just study current practices — they actually develop the new systems we need."

“We thank McAfee for its support,” said Deb Larson, dean of the College of Engineering. “Because of this collaboration, our students are learning the latest and greatest from specialists who do this on a daily basis for one of the world’s leading computer security companies. We’re grateful for McAfee’s partnership in producing the next generation of experts responsible for operating, defending, and securing cyberspace for all businesses, all institutions.

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