

Tulane SoPA equips tech students to safeguard infrastructure

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Students from Tulane School of Professional Advancement and local institutions participated in a cybersecurity challenge, showcasing their skills in a simulated cyberattacks.

In a simulated cyberattack exercise, [Tulane School of Professional Advancement \(SoPA\) Information Technology](#) students showcased their skills by participating in a public utility hack challenge.

The scenario, crafted to mimic real-world cyber threats, saw the takeover of Zap Electric Company's data and technology systems by hackers. The exercise aimed to prepare the next generation of cybersecurity professionals to defend critical infrastructure against evolving cyber threats.

The event took place on Friday, April 5, 2024, at Operation Spark headquarters, a New Orleans-based non-profit organization and [partner of Tulane University](#) that offers intensive software development training and workforce preparation to low-opportunity individuals.

SoPA and Operation Spark students were joined by students from Delgado Community College and Southeastern Louisiana University and split into five teams to tackle a series of tasks.

Under the watchful eyes of local experts, including Chris White, SoPA alumni and Information Security Engineer for Entergy, the students demonstrated their skills in detecting, analyzing, and mitigating the cyberattack on a utility company.

“This event allows students to demonstrate the troubleshooting skills they learn in the classroom in a real-world scenario,” said White. “It’s a great space to practice critical thinking skills and learn to collaborate effectively under pressure.”

The challenge provided the participants with a hands-on opportunity to apply their knowledge and collaborate effectively under pressure. Using a variety of techniques, such as network monitoring, malware analysis, and incident response, the students worked diligently to regain control of compromised systems.

Zoe Murphy, a Tulane student majoring in information technology and computer science, said the event provided invaluable experience.

“I’ve been learning about many different information technology concepts in my classes, but I haven’t been able to apply them in a real-world scenario until now,” said Murphy “This event made me confident that I am going down the right career path.”

Members of the winning team were awarded a drone, sponsored by Bayou Braces, adding an extra layer of excitement and incentive to the competition.

As cyber threats continue to evolve and pose increasingly complex challenges to organizations worldwide, the need for skilled cybersecurity professionals becomes

more critical than ever. By engaging in hands-on exercises students are better equipped to safeguard essential infrastructure and protect against threats in the digital age.



First-place winners from left, John Harris, Operation Spark Operation Coordinator Johnnie James, Nicholas Carter, Director of Tulane SoPA Information Technology Program Ralph Russo, Joshua Cantu, James Sheppard, and Victoria Chan.