



## SHSU students to work with FBI

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— Two graduate students in Sam Houston State University's digital forensics program have been chosen to work with the FBI at the Greater Houston Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory this summer. The selected interns are Jeffrey Szczepanski, of Port Neches, and Todd Whiting, of Houston, both recipients of a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science this past May, and are now part of the SHSU digital forensics graduate program.

Digital forensics is the extraction of evidence from computers or other digital devices for criminal investigations. It usually involves obtaining the contents of files and interpreting their meaning as relevant to a case.

Each summer, a group of outstanding undergraduate and graduate students is selected to participate in the FBI Honors Internship Program in Washington, D.C., or at a Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory.

The internships take place in the GHRCFL, a one-stop, full service forensics laboratory and training center devoted to the examination of digital evidence to support investigations into crimes, such as terrorism, violent Internet attacks and fraud.

The application process was lengthy and meticulous.

"After submitting the application package, I interviewed with an FBI recruiter and the director of the GHRCFL," Szczepanski said. "I passed the interview and was called back in to be drug tested, fingerprinted, and polygraphed.

"Once they were satisfied with my results, they began an extensive background check that lasted months. Finally, after I'd thought I didn't get chosen, I received a call informing me I'd been selected," he said.

The process of attaining a security clearance includes an extensive background check by FBI special agents, who interview family, friends and teachers, according to SHSU articulation coordinator David Burris.

"The polygraph portion can require more than eight hours, hence the students attain very high level security clearances prior to graduation," said Burris.

Once introduced to SHSU's digital forensics program, both students knew it was the path they wanted to take.

Whiting returned to school after working full time for six years for the Houston Zoo and Barnes and Nobles. He was unsure of what he wanted to study until his introduction to digital forensics through a computer science course.

"I've always enjoyed computers, so I took my first computer science class and enjoyed it. I was then invited to take a live digital forensics course, involving password cracking and image carving. This was my first glimpse of digital forensics, and I instantly fell in love with it," Whiting said.

Szczepanski discovered the program during a campus visit.

"I first learned of the program when I attended Saturdays@Sam during my senior year in high school," he said. "Digital forensics was the reason I decided to attend SHSU."

SHSU established the Center of Excellence in Digital Forensics in 2004 to train students and law enforcement personnel in the latest technology for preventing cyber crime.

It is dedicated to preparing digital forensics professionals through teaching, training and research.

Digital crime encompasses not only new crimes, but also traditional crimes committed using digital techniques. SHSU's Center of Excellence in Digital Forensics provides a mechanism to meet these challenges.

"From my internship, I hope to learn as much as I can about how digital forensics examinations work in the real world, as well as what it's like to work for the FBI," Szczepanski said. "I plan on becoming an agent in

the future.”

“Knowledge and experience in the field are the two key things I wish to take with me from the internship. I want to absorb information handed down to me by my co-workers and use that to one day become a digital forensics investigator,” said Whiting.

For more information on the program, contact Burris at (936) 294-1568.

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