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The threat to New Jersey

The threat to New Jersey

Colleges leap into new field: Homeland security

Hundreds of students using grants to concoct better ways to foil terrorists

By Ana M. Alaya

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Security

Continued from Page One

Colleges embrace new field of study
Technology and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, as well as some private schools including Stevens Institute of Technology and Fordham Law, are involved in dozens of homeland security research projects.

Meanwhile, Richard Stockton College, Montclair State and Kean University are among the schools offering new courses or programs dealing with homeland security.

Dr. Roberta, head of Rutgers Center for Secure Mathematics and Theoretical Computer Science, is overseeing a new $1 million grant from the Department of Homeland Security to study ways to monitor new stores, blogs and other sources for signs of potential terrorist activity.

"We will be looking at getting an early warning that someone is planning a terrorist attack or someone is going to dump some anthrax on us," Roberts said.

Like many homeland security projects, the one headed by Roberts involves collaboration. A involve researchers from AT&T Laboratories, Lucent Technologies Bell Labs, Princeton University, other state universities and three universities across the country.

Rutgers also is developing degree and certificate programs to train students in the new technology, Roberts said.

"Our feeling is we're in this for the long haul," Roberts said. "Whether it's protection against terrorist attacks or natural disasters, training the work force for the future is a major initiative."

THE TELLTALE SHRUG

Students say they're learning on the cutting edge of a new field.

"It is great to do research that can be used to help society, especially if it can be used to detect terrorists," said Zhiguo Li, 25, of Beijing, a Rutgers graduate student involved in a $13.5 million project to help interrogators determine when someone is lying.

Zhiguo and other researchers are collaborating with psychologists and neurologists - the cause of an on-site screening process could signal deception. The computer technology could help law enforcement officials such as those serving in high-security locations.

Zhiguo remains a computer science professor and director of the university's Center for Computer Science.

"It's great to do research that can be used for homeland security," he said. "I think it is a very credible cost-effective in terms of their physical and intellectual capabilities," he said.

DHS' university programs division, which is spending $50 million on security research this year, said higher education plays a critical role in national defense.

"They are the leading thinkers, and universities can be incredibly cut-effective in terms of their physical and intellectual capabilities," he said.

It is difficult to estimate the total amount of homeland security research funding for higher education, because so many different governmental agencies provide money for homeland security research, Roberts said.

In 2005, the university's Center for Computer Science, the Department of Defense, National Science Foundation and other agencies provided about $10 million to Stevens.

"It is difficult to estimate the amount of money we have received," Roberts said.

"We have been focusing on working with governmental agencies and providing them tools they can use," Roberts said.

"It is not just research output," Roberts said. "We have been focusing on working with governmental agencies and providing them tools they can use."