Auburn University at Montgomery launches new Center for Cyber Security and names Amerson director

A new Center for Cyber Security at Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) will be dedicated to developing research and partnerships that ensure the next generation of cyber security professionals have the tools needed to meet today's challenges in fighting cybersecurity attacks and hacking.

AUM has chosen Gary Amerson, who previously served as head of the Operational Cyber Security Support Branch at the Naval Education and Training Command at Saufley Field in Pensacola, Fla., to head the new AUM Center for Cyber Security (AUMCCS).

"AUM's new Center for Cyber Security was established to create strong relationships with local government, military, private industry and the greater Montgomery community," Amerson said. "The center will foster awareness of cyber security issues and their solutions while serving as an incubator of new concepts, knowledge and skills to address the threats of the ever-changing cyber security landscape."

Amerson said the center's focus is on developing partnerships with industry, governmental agencies, universities and K-12 schools, hosting cyber education conferences and events, and developing proposals for externally funded research and programming.

"The center's ultimate goal is to ensure the next generation of cyber security professionals have the tools needed to meet the challenges they will face," he said.

In raising awareness about AUM's new role in cyber security education, the center will host a kickoff event October 1 in observance of National Cybersecurity Awareness Month (NCSAM). Matthew Travis, deputy director for the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), will be featured as the event's keynote speaker.

 AUM Chancellor Carl A. Stockton said Amerson was chosen to lead the new center because of the considerable industry and federal experience he brings to the position. In his most recent role with the U.S. Navy's premier training and professional development facility, Amerson was responsible for security as well as the availability of training networks and complex transformation goals on three continents.

"We are delighted to have Gary as a member of the Auburn University at Montgomery family," Stockton said. "His blend of leadership experience in industry and federal government settings made him a natural choice to shape the mission and vision of this new center. Montgomery's recent recognition in the Smart Cities Readiness Challenge and the success of such initiatives as MGMWERX and the TechMGM has positioned the city to be a technology hub capable of driving innovation and economic growth.

"As a university, we have an opportunity to develop collaborative partnerships with the public and private sectors, engage in research that will ultimately help companies and agencies operate more

securely, and provide programming that will support workforce development in Montgomery and beyond."

AUM recently ranked No.16 among the most innovative regional comprehensive universities in the South, according to *U.S. News & World Report's* 2021 Best Colleges survey. The new Center for Cyber Security, housed within the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science within the College of Sciences, presents possibilities for students in AUM's undergraduate computer science and graduate computer science, computer information systems and cyber security programs.

"The center will address the cybersecurity education and certification gap in the local area by providing opportunities to students through partnering with AFCEA, TechMGM, MGMWerx and the local military community to expand on internships and assist students with potential cyber security job placement upon graduation," Amerson said.

Amerson previously taught cyber security classes at Nebraska's Bellevue University for 12 years and was instrumental in developing its cyber security program. Before retiring from the U.S. Air Force, Amerson also wrote curricula and assigned resources for nine unique crew positions as the first superintendent of training at the schoolhouse for aircrew training.

"I was drawn to Auburn University at Montgomery by the amazing growth it has demonstrated, especially over the last three years," Amerson said. "AUM's *U.S. News & World Report* rankings continue to go up in multiple categories, and I want to see us recognized for our cyber program next. I can't wait to help build on the growth already happening, and I look forward to creating new, exciting opportunities for AUM students -- both in the classroom and in the community."

Amerson earned a bachelor's degree in Business Information Systems with an information security concentration from Bellevue University in 2005 and a master's degree in Management Information Systems with a cyber security concentration from Bellevue University in 2008. He also became a (ISC)2 Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP) in 2010.

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