

What Are the Cyber Padawans?

Our team competes in all kinds of competitions online, face-to-face, ones that are local, that are in other countries.

I'm Jesse Varsalone, and I'm the coach of the UMUC cyber competition team also known as the Cyber Padawans.

We're involved in the National Cyber League, which is an online competition. We do the National Cyber analysts challenge.

We do the CCDC, which is the Collegiate College Defense Cyber competition, and that one is basically a red team/blue team. Basically a bunch of hackers come into their systems, they take over the systems, they mess them up, and the job of the blue team is to get everything stable and running and patched and basically operational while they're under duress of attack from the red team.

We have people all over the world. We do have a lot of local competitions, so we have a strong presence in the DC metro area but we do have people in California, in Texas, in Ohio.

The faculty do compete. I do compete when I'm allowed to. It's something I enjoy because I'm passionate about cyber. And I'm learning something, and that's part of the reason that you like to do this. There's a challenge and you're like, "How do I solve this, how can I approach this, what methodologies have I learned in my courses or in the classroom that I can use to try to attack this problem." And often you can also work with other team members and say, "what do you think about this method?"

Why Join the Cyber Padawans?

The benefit of being part of the Cyber Padawans is you get a really nice network of other people. Often we have people that say "hey we're looking for an entry-level pen tester at my position. Are you interested? Are you looking?" We have constantly have employers or people coming to us and saying, "hey, we have these open positions."

This gives you a chance to you know see some really cool things, have fun, network, and many of the people that are part of the Padawans are still connected to the university to this day because of the Padawans.

What Do the Padawans Do?

It's just basically like a think tank where they talk about these cyber issues or this cybersecurity problem. And it's a really great network and it allows you to you know compete with us once you become a Padawan. And it's something that many people take a lot of pride in.

They do have a lab currently in College Park Maryland. The lab currently has 19 servers. We just acquired some net labs devices from an NSA grant.

We also have a tryout that's a competition that's run completely online, and that's every month.

Over time we're developing more resources and more mentoring for the people that are interested, and once they get the 5000 points, we make them an official Padawan. We send them a shirt.

Who Can Join?

We have a variety of people

You know pen testers, we have people in forensics, we have people doing incident response, we have people you know basically doing securing systems.

But one of the things that I wanted to mention about that is you do not have to be a cyber major necessarily to try out for the Padawans. We have people in cybersecurity policy and management, we have people in software development, computer science, even if you were in business, you could still try out for the Padawans. We're not restricting it to a certain major.

How Can You Get Involved?

You can send an email and say I'm interested. The email is Padawans@umuc.edu. The tryout runs on the first weekend in the month and it starts on Friday night at 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, it goes all the way to Sunday 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.