

## First Class of Computer and Digital Forensics Program Graduates Ready to Make an Impact

**W**hen the first class of six graduates of the Computer and Digital Forensics program at Lorain County Community College received their degrees on May 22, they walked confidently into a future that boasts an average starting salary of \$65,000.

Graduates emerge from the associate of applied science degree program as highly skilled professionals who have spent extensive time in labs using the most current equipment the field can offer.

“The courses provide hands-on experience with industry standard software and hardware,” explained graduate Corey Blaz, 22 of Elyria. “We are trained on the same software and equipment that the FBI and other professionals use every day.”

The hands-on, real world training in the program is so keyed in to employers’ needs that graduates of the associate’s degree program are qualified to compete for jobs that often require master’s degrees.

“Employers have looked at their needs and compared them to our program and, in some cases, have waived the requirement for our applicants to have a master’s degree,” said program coordinator and instructor Hikmat Chedid.

Chedid helped to create the Computer Engineering Technology – Computer and Digital Forensics major to address the lack of forensics professionals in the Northeast Ohio.

“We know that the FBI forensics lab is overworked,” he said. “The waiting period to complete work can take several months, and certain police forensics work is being turned away. That’s just in the FBI, they don’t perform work for private entities.”

One student has already been hired by the FBI, and the local FBI branch is expected to add five more positions to keep up with the demand for digital forensics work, according to Chedid.

Graduates of the program are prepared to work in a variety of fields, including law enforcement agencies like the FBI, government entities such as NASA, as well private



**John Wenzel, computer and digital forensics graduate**

companies. While one student has already found work with the FBI, others are being scouted by area businesses, Chedid said.

“Most mid-to-large sizes companies require someone on board with a digital forensics background,” Chedid said. “That person may be called the network administrator or other title, but digital forensics is part of their role.”

Once employed, graduates may use their skills to track what employees access on company computers, recover deleted files, or track users who accessed top-secret documents. In-class assignments train students to use the procedures needed to conduct this work with extreme proficiency in any kind of setting.

“My instructors pushed me to my limits and beyond, and I will continue to use this work ethic in the field,” said John Wenzel, 23, of Amherst.

Under the direction of Chedid and instructor Larry Atkinson, Wenzel said he learned to never settle for average work. “Hikmat Chedid once told me, ‘Never accept something as good enough, but always strive to make it better and better,’” Wenzel recalled.

For Wenzel, the best result of his hard work would be to get a job doing network and security for a government agency.

Instructors in the program also refuse to settle and are continually gaining certification in all possible programs available in the industry, Chedid said. The importance placed on high-level instruction, he said, results in quality graduates ready to jump headfirst in their careers.

“I feel very confident in my future now and I hope to obtain a job doing network and system security, application and web page security, or secure software and programming development,” Wenzel said.

“The courses take your knowledge about computers and digital devices to a new level,” Blaz said. He hopes to ultimately find work with the FBI as a Federal Investigator.

Jacob Joy of Sheffield Lake stumbled into the digital forensics program after testing out a few different majors. Now 21, Joy began classes at LCCC while still in high school through the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) and decided to enroll full time after he received his high school diploma. After exploring courses through the University Partnership, Joy enrolled in the Computer Networking and Maintenance associate program at LCCC. As part of that coursework, he took an introductory class in digital forensics.

“It was a starter class in forensics and I found that I really like it,” Joy said. “I heard there were more classes being created, so I signed up.”

Joy is optimistic that he will find a job, and would ideally like to work for the Department of Defense.

The confidence in a bright future is shared not only by the graduating class, but also by the many students who continue to fill the seats in classes, Chedid said. “It’s an extremely popular program because people know that they will be able to find a very good job,” Chedid said.

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**For more information on the Digital Forensics program, call Hikmat Chedid at (440) 366-7017 or visit [www.lorainccc.edu](http://www.lorainccc.edu).**