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Walsh honored for cyber security education effort

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Wendy Walsh, Photo courtesy of NPS

Wendy Walsh began work at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security as a liaison whose role was to link Center students to the wealth of research and expertise with the broader Naval Postgraduate School community.

Nine years later, Walsh has taken on a bevy of roles centering on security and defense education. Her latest accomplishment continues that trend in a wholly different medium: Walsh was awarded the 2014 Security Leadership in Education Award from the California Information Security Office (ISO) at the 2014 Cyber security Symposium in Sacramento in September.

The honor is for Walsh's volunteer work with the California Cyber Security Task Force, a coalition of state government, academia and private industry dedicated to the state's information network protection through collaboration and education.

"I've been fortunate to connect with the NPS Cyber Academic Group and its chair, Dr. Cynthia Irvine, and learn about what kind of cyber security offerings are here at the school," Walsh said during an interview at her Spanagel Hall office. "In that work I kind of just got my toe in the water and discovered cyber security is a network of needed capabilities to secure our cyber environment. It's not just coders and white hats and hackers, it's everyone's responsibility."

As part of that work she is co-chair of the Task Force's Workforce Development and Education Subcommittee, whose aim is ensuring future education opportunities develop skills that will be necessary in the future to ensure cyber-security. The group, one of seven Task Force subcommittees, studies what educational levels will be needed for future professionals in the field and what industry's needs will be. There is also a singular effort on veterans to provide education and job opportunities they may need whether or not their military job was network-related.

"It's looking at how we create a cyber secure environment strategically; which always comes down in my mind to including the whole of community," she said. "The education subcommittee is looking at how do we build and support that next generation of cybersecurity workers. We want to create opportunities to get people interested in this world

and how they fit into the world of cybersecurity.”

Future cyber threats continue to evolve as hackers adapt to security measures in a near tit-for-tat battle for cyber supremacy. Proliferation of mobile devices increasingly used for industrial control systems purposes, internet control linkages to critical infrastructure and information manipulation as big data analytics are just some of the current emerging threats, according to a 2014 Georgia Tech Research Institute report.

“There is a huge need,” Walsh noted. “It’s pretty overwhelming what the projections say for what the cybersecurity workforce will need now and in the future.”

During her day job at NPS, Walsh is the Homeland Defense and Security Coordinator, but her duties extend well beyond that label. She currently is assigned to the Modeling, Virtual Environments and Simulation (MOVES) and the Littoral Operations Center. Originally, she was hired by former CHDS Director Paul Stockton as a liaison for the Center and the NPS community to ensure campus research could be utilized and maximized.

“So, anything that falls under that purview of research, education or activity that could fall under that purview of homeland defense and homeland security I can be engaged in,” she said.

She remains actively engaged with the Center, seeking out subject matter expertise that may be valuable to the rest of NPS, and vice versa.

“I always want to be available to students if they are interested in field experimentation or who want to connect their education to the broader NPS community,” Walsh said. “I want to make sure students have the opportunity to be connected with anything I’m seeing out there that is cool and would have relevance to their education or research.”

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