

Editorial

For many of us, the world changed irreversibly on September 11, 2001. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were unthinkable, yet they happened. As a result, US citizens and citizens around the globe are living differently. Our guard is up; our trust that the world will return to 'normal' is shaken. The only thing certain about the future is uncertainty.

But at least one group of our citizens has been training for these eventualities for years—those involved with protecting the security of our public and private information systems. As a nation, we have become incredibly dependent on information technology; when the system crashes, we literally cannot function. Whether those systems hold data concerning the viability of our waterways, the latest developments in the nuclear industry or the underpinnings of our strategic defense plans, protecting their integrity is as key to the strength of our nation as protecting our borders.

As US Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, said in June of this year, 'Computer crime has the potential of being the leading threat in the 21st Century to our national security, public safety, privacy and personal security.' While the hijackers used airplanes instead of databases to do their damage, they have left us feeling vulnerable on many fronts.

In response to our reliance on information technology and in anticipation of terrorist attacks such as those of September 11, the information assurance infrastructure in the United States has grown considerably in both strength and size over the past decade. The National Security Agency (NSA) considers the work important enough to designate 14 different universities throughout the country—including my institution, the University of Idaho—as Centers of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance Education. The NSA is developing a national strategy to protect US computer and information systems from organized threats.

The National Science Foundation just this past spring awarded more than US \$8.6 million in scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students majoring in information assurance and computer security. In exchange for

these healthy stipends, each student agrees to work for the federal government in computer security for one year for each year of scholarship-funded education.

Partnerships within the discipline are strengthening the academic programming in these areas of national importance. For example, the University of Idaho and Idaho State University have joined officials from the University of Tulsa, James Madison University and George Mason University in the National Alliance for Information Assurance. All five schools were among the first seven Centers of Excellence in Information assurance.

The mission of that alliance? To enhance the security of the global information infrastructure by:

- conducting research involving security and information assurance issues and policies,
- educating and training information assurance professionals at all levels – undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate,
- developing new ways to assure the security of information and its delivery,
- transferring new technologies, practices and policies to industry and government, and
- establishing partnerships with government and industry to promote the alliance's objectives.

Jeffrey Hunker, dean of the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management and former senior director for Critical Infrastructure at the White House National Security Council, shared the following words with the University of Idaho community at a commencement ceremony in 1999—years before the World Trade Center would come crashing down, years before the Pentagon's profile would be scarred by hijacking:

'By attacking our computer systems, they can attack us—not just our military, not just our diplomatic posts overseas—but they can attack us in our businesses, our homes and our communities. . . . It is requiring all of us to re-think how we can proactively work to improve our security.'

Information assurance is just one aspect of our overall national security/defense strategy—but a vital aspect that

will command more and more of our attention and resources in the months and years to come.

Robert A. Hoover

*President, University of Idaho, US Security Panel,
President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology
(1999–2000)*

Robert A. Hoover

*Office of the President,
University of Idaho,
Moscow, Idaho 83844-3151,
USA*

Tel: +(208) 885 6356

Fax: +(208) 885 6558

E-mail: hoover@uidaho.edu