



Governor Tina Kotek signs H.B. 2049 into law, establishing the Oregon Cybersecurity Center of Excellence (OCCOE) in collaboration with Portland State, Oregon State and the University of Oregon to fortify the state's digital defense against cyber threats. Courtesy of Birol Yesilada.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Oregon Cybersecurity Center of Excellence

PSU helps establish cybersecurity hub for Oregon's defense

ANISH ARUMUGAM · FEBRUARY 1, 2024 · 0 COMMENTS

In the ever-evolving landscape of the digital age, Oregon is gearing up to fortify its defenses against cyber threats with a groundbreaking initiative—the Oregon Cybersecurity Center of Excellence (OCCOE).

The center—which will serve as an advisory body to the governor and the state legislature—was formed by the collaborative efforts of Portland State, Oregon State and the University of Oregon.

Oregon's [House Bill 2049](#) was signed into law by Governor Tina Kotek in July 2023.

Representative Nancy Nathanson—co-sponsor of the bill—emphasized the urgency. “The threat of cyber warfare and ransomware is real and not just a theoretical discussion,” Nathanson stated.

The bill represents years of concerted effort to fortify Oregon’s digital defense and addresses the increasing frequency of cyberattacks.

The Oregon Department of Justice’s Data Breach Notice database recorded a significant increase in breach notifications in Oregon from Feb. 1 to Oct. 1, 2023. This surge averaged almost one breach notification every other day during this period, signaling a concerning trend in cyber incidents.

ne entities affected by these breaches include the Bank of Eastern Oregon, Clatsop County, Klamath County, Heritage Life Insurance and OnPoint Community Credit Union.

“Smaller entities that can’t afford full-time cybersecurity personnel will have the ability to work with the Center, which can conduct vulnerability assessments and offer cyber hygiene services to prevent a cross-domain attack,” Nathanson stated in June 2023 during her floor speech supporting the center.

Dr. Birol Yeşilada—the director of the Cybersecurity Center—envisioned a united front against cyber threats. The center serves as an advisory body to the state and a hub for coordinating education, workforce training and awareness.

Yeşilada underscored the center’s impact on students. “The center offers many workforce training programs that students can participate in and enhance their knowledge in the area of cybersecurity,” he said.

Plans include offering core education courses in cybersecurity for all students, as well as developing training for the general public to bridge the gap in cyber literacy across society.

Yeşilada challenged the stereotype that cybersecurity is exclusive to computer science majors and emphasized inclusivity. “Our goal in all three universities and all across the state is to provide inclusive and equitable activities that can accommodate a diverse population,” he said.

Recognizing the multidimensional nature of cybersecurity, the center aims to attract students from diverse academic backgrounds. Yeşilada emphasized creating pathways for students from various disciplines to pursue knowledge in cybersecurity.

“The center offers many workforce training programs that students can participate in and enhance their knowledge in the area of cybersecurity, which creates great job opportunities for them and helps address the shortage of trained workforce across the state and the nation,” said Dr. Reza Rejaie, the associate director of the center.

Students with cybersecurity knowledge can participate in various cybersecurity services, activities and training that the center offers to other stakeholders across the state and gain more hands-on experience on issues related to cybersecurity.

Dr. Rakesh Bobba—the associate director of the center—said that it helps students and the community as a whole. “OCCOE is tasked with supporting workforce development in cybersecurity throughout the state,” he said.

Higher education schools—such as Mt. Hood Community College, Portland Community College and the Oregon Institute of Technology—work with the center to grow cybersecurity programs.

“In addition to formal education and workforce development, OCCOE will also undertake general cybersecurity awareness initiatives that target the broader community,” Bobba said. The center envisions outreach through libraries, community centers and popular media to enhance cybersecurity education at a grassroots level.

The center is jointly operated by three of Oregon's public universities. It will meet the challenge of having nearly 7,000 unfilled, high-paying cybersecurity jobs in Oregon and help local governments, school districts and other public, non-profit and private entities prepare for and defend against cyberattacks.

Yeşilada envisions a transformative impact. "Activities coordinated by the center will measurably improve the security, privacy and resiliency of cyberspace in Oregon," he said.

With plans to expand the Teaching Security Operations Center and develop interdisciplinary degrees, Oregon's cybersecurity hub is poised for innovation and education.

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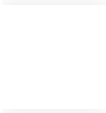
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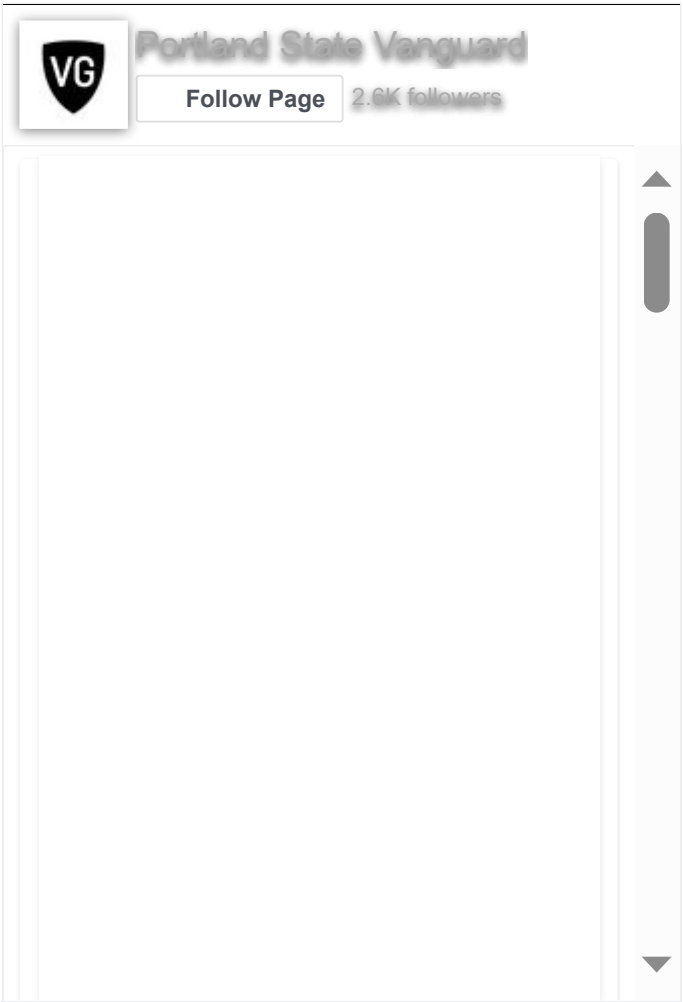
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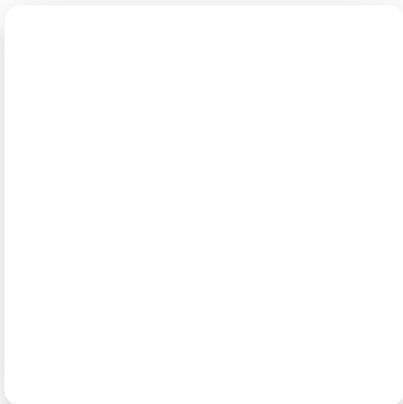
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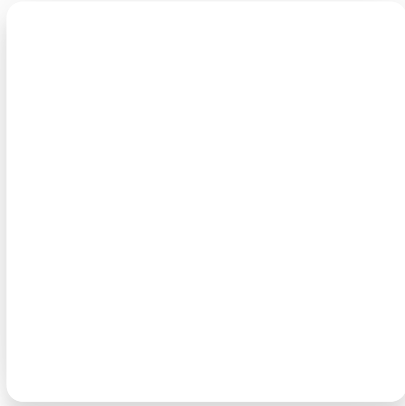
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