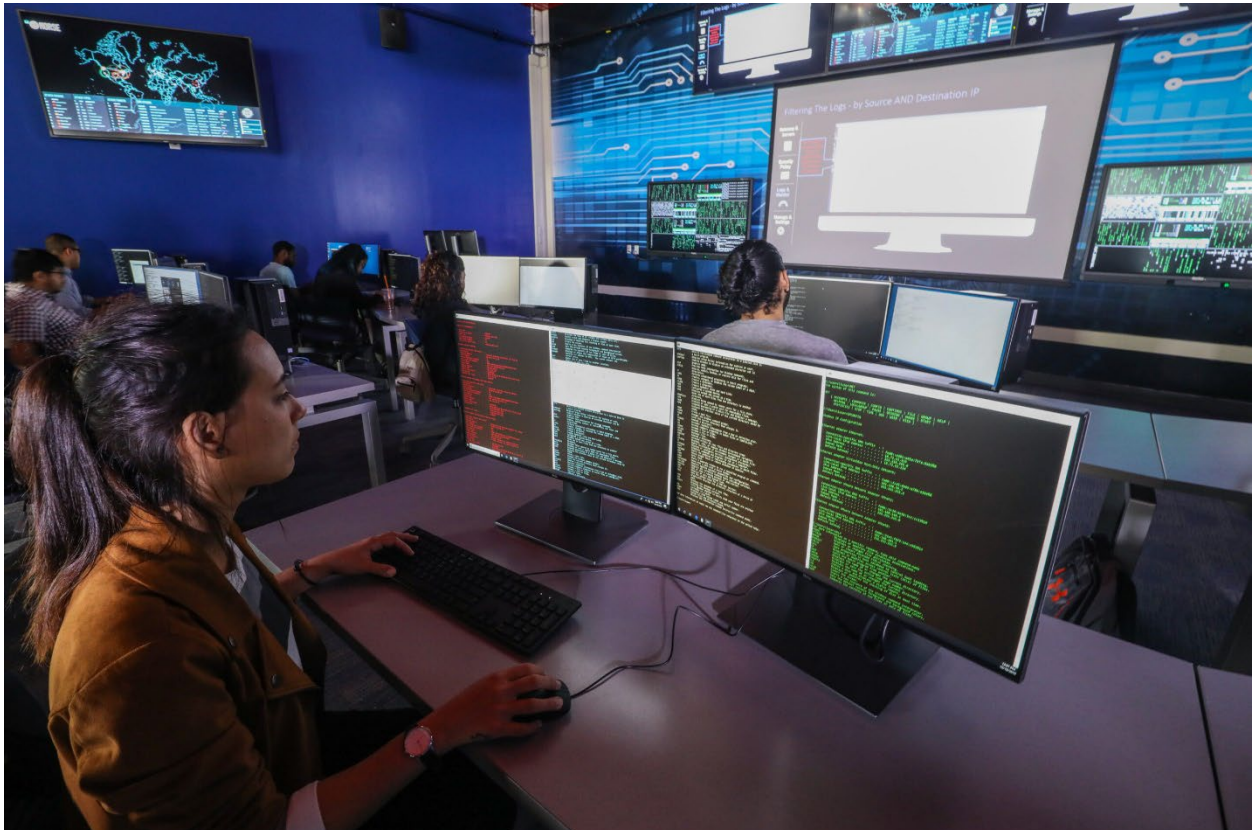




Prestigious NSA validation of both cybersecurity degree programs is latest win for Miami Dade College



Nancy Dahlberg
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By Nancy Dahlberg

Back in 2018, [Miami Dade College](#) began building its first cybersecurity degree program for students, soon after hearing Manny Medina and other executives proclaim the important role Miami tech could play in meeting the growing demands for cybersecurity talent, especially at a time when cyber attacks and breaches on businesses big and small were rapidly increasing. That year the college also opened its Cybersecurity Center of the Americas. The college's associate degree program in cybersecurity rolled out in 2020, and a bachelor's degree followed in 2021.

Miami Dade College recently announced it received its second validation from the National Security Agency, making it the first institution in Florida to offer both associate and bachelor's degree programs in cybersecurity validated by the NSA. This year, MDC received the prestigious validation for the Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity, two years after the college received the NSA validation for its Associate of Science in Cybersecurity. MDC also holds a prestigious designation as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense by NSA for its impressive cybersecurity curriculum.

"When you're working in academia and you have a cybersecurity program, this is the most important recognition you can get – it's the real deal of validations," explained Antonio Delgado, vice president of Innovation and Technology Partnerships at Miami Dade College. "The NSA developed this framework to validate how academic institutions are teaching what the companies need, the standard skills, procedures, everything." What's more, it is only awarded after an academic program has shown it is also graduating highly qualified students.

MDC, being relatively new to offering cybersecurity, received the NSA validation for both programs in a short period of time, enabling its students to obtain a high-quality cybersecurity education without leaving Miami Dade College. The NSA said the college's ability to meet the increasing demands of the program criteria will serve the nation well in contributing to the protection of the National Information Infrastructure. This need comes amid a critical shortage of professionals with cybersecurity skills.

The recognition “underscores our commitment to expanding our cybersecurity program, solidifying the College’s position as a leader in talent development for the future workforce,” said Miami Dade College President Madeline Pumariega. “We couldn’t do this without the unwavering support of our world-class faculty, esteemed partners, and industry-leading advisors.”

Students who complete a cybersecurity degree receive explicit recognition in their transcripts. They are also eligible to apply for grants, training and scholarships from the NSA and other federal partners, and even federal jobs, Delgado said. “From a student perspective this is huge, because it validates that they have skills that make them employable on top of the scholarships or jobs they can apply for.”

So far, 75 students have graduated from the cybersecurity bachelor’s program, with another class graduating this semester. Entry level positions start around \$60K, rapidly growing above six figures based on experience, Delgado said.

Some of the graduates work at Miami-based Kaseya, which signaled its plans in 2021 to base a cybersecurity unit in Miami, on the heels of its acquisition of RocketCyber, a managed SOC platform. Since then, the unit has grown, and has attracted MDC graduates [including Perla Oquendo](#), who switched her degree from nursing to cybersecurity and was hired for an internship and then a full-time job as an SOC analyst at Kaseya.

MDC’s cybersecurity graduates are also employed by City National Bank, InfoSight, UDT, Telefonica, Accenture, Schonfeld, City Bank, BankUnited, Royal Caribbean, Compuquip and Barry University, among others, Delgado said.