9-12-2013

Press release : 2013 : 09 : 12 : Graduate student and business professor collaborate on insider threat research

Tom Scherberger

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.usfsp.edu/usfsp_news_press_releases

Recommended Citation
https://digital.usfsp.edu/usfsp_news_press_releases/485
Chris Brown wants to find the next Edward Snowden before he strikes.

The USF St. Petersburg College of Business graduate student is researching a new way for government agencies and businesses to identify potential insider threats like Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor who admitted leaking classified information.

“The NSA has the ability to track what people do on computers but they’re not making sense of all that data,” Brown explains.
Brown aims to fix that and is working closely with Alison Watkins, USFSP professor of information systems and associate dean for graduate and certificate programs. “She basically helped me advance what I had done” during his fellowship, Brown says. They have published three research papers for national conferences.

“This is a really good idea he has developed,” Watkins says. “Chris is great to work with. You give him an idea and he runs with it. Everybody dreams of finding someone like that.”

Brown’s interest in insider threat research began three years ago with a fellowship at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Wash, working with Frank Greitzer, then the lab’s chief scientist of cognitive informatics. “He let me go on a wild good chase,” Brown recalls, “and I came up with this linguistic approach.”

His USF St. Petersburg BA in Anthropology informed his research. “As an anthropology student I knew a fair amount about linguistics,” he explains. “So I thought, there’s got to be a way to infer behavior by looking at subtle variations in the way they use common words.” He ties that to demographic information on social media. “We can’t say that a person is absolutely going to do something,” Brown explains. “But what we can say is this person represents a statistically higher risk.”

They are in discussions with a major U.S. bank about testing the method.

Brown, who is a semester away from graduating with an MBA, praises the collaborative atmosphere of USF St. Petersburg. “I think that one of the unique things about this place is that a student like me can develop a working relationship with a faculty member that can lead to applied research that can make a difference,” he says.

Related News