

MARCH MADNESS

It Isn't Just Basketball



Saturday morning, March 22, witnessed a new kind of March Madness as a few dozen young people began massing at The Edge of Chaos before many weekendng Alabamians even hit the “snooze” button the first time. Young adults representing UAB, Tuskegee University, University of Alabama at Huntsville, Auburn University, the University of South Alabama, and Hoover High School arrived at the 4th floor of Lister Hill Library with laptops in tow, ready to jump into spring games that involved keyboards instead of foul lines at Facebook’s “Hack the World” Capture the Flag event.

Facebook’s Capture the Flag (CTF) event is a computer security competition that encourages players to solve security puzzles in a safe and controlled environment. The goal of these events is to further the education of security professionals and to promote Facebook’s security culture. CTFs are usually comprised of different levels of challenges that represent actual security concerns which crop up in networks and systems. The 9 teams at The Edge of Chaos were competing against one another to see who could solve each level first and, in doing so, progress up a leader-board. At the conclusion of each game, a winner is declared based on points earned.

Gary Warner of Malcovery Security, who also serves as the Director of Research in Computer Forensics at UAB, and Jennifer Morthland, Director of Development in the College of Arts and Sciences, were instrumental in encouraging Facebook to select UAB as the location for a Capture the Flag event. The creative and secure environment provided by The Edge of Chaos was a key factor in choosing TEOC to host the event; according to Dr. Warner, The Edge of Chaos is similar in many ways to the innovation-based, collaborative corporate ecosystem created by Facebook in their offices.

Representatives from Facebook arrived late on the afternoon of Friday, March 21, to set up for the event. Facebook brought their own technology to complement that available at TEOC, as there was a necessity of accommodating high-speed internet access for roughly 40 people simultaneously. It was also necessary that the game be played on an isolated network which ensured that all players were on a level playing field.

Excitement and emotions ran high as students with all ranges of experience competed with one another to win points and break through security barriers. Ultimately, a team comprised of UAB students was victorious, though all competitors received donuts, lunch, and take-home goodies as mementos of their day trying to “Hack the World.”

