

**National Centers of Academic Excellence in  
Cyber Defense (CAE-CD) Program Guidance**  
*Jointly Sponsored by the National Security Agency (NSA)  
and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)*

### **Eligibility**

All regionally accredited two-year, four-year and graduate level institutions in the United States (US) can apply for designation as a NSA/DHS National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense (CAE-CD).

### **Submission Process**

The CAE-CD application must be completed via the CAE application website. Access to the application website can be found here: <https://www.iad.gov/NIETP/index.cfm>. Institutions must clearly demonstrate how the institution meets the requirements for each CAE designation application submitted. The application must include supporting documentation where required and appropriate. The onus of proof is on the institution. The institution must also include an official letter (*pdf copy uploaded into the website-do not mail a hard copy*) stating the institution's intent to apply for CAE IA/CD designation. The letter must be on official institution letterhead, signed by a collegiate official at an appropriate level (Dean or higher) and addressed to:

National Security Agency  
Attn: NSA/DHS CAE Program Manager  
9800 Savage Road, Suite 6744  
Fort Meade, MD 20755-6744

### **Requirements**

#### **NSA/DHS CAE-CD in Two-year Education (CAE-2Y):**

Applicable to regionally accredited two-year community colleges, technical schools, state or federally endorsed Cybersecurity training centers or U.S. Government Cybersecurity training centers.

The criteria include:

- Demonstration of program outreach and collaboration, student development, CD Center establishment and maintenance, CD multidisciplinary efforts, practice of CD at the institution level, CD faculty, and student curriculum path and student recognition (See CAE-CD 2Y Criteria)
- Successful mapping of the institution's curriculum to the two-year Core Knowledge Unit (KUs) (See CAE IA/CD KUs)

#### **NSA/DHS CAE-CD in Education Four-year+ (CAE-CDE)<sup>1</sup>:**

Applicable to regionally accredited four-year colleges, graduate-level universities, and DoD schools.

The criteria include:

- Demonstration of program outreach and collaboration, student development, CD Center establishment and maintenance, CD multidisciplinary efforts, practice of CD at the institution level, CD faculty, and student curriculum path and student recognition; (See CAE-CD 4yr Criteria)
- Successful mapping of the institution's curriculum to all of the two-year Core KUs, the four-year Core KUs, and five (5) Optional KUs of the institution's choice. (See CAE IA/CD KUs)

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<sup>1</sup> Regionally accredited 4-year colleges, graduate-level universities, and DoD schools can apply to be designated as both a CAE-CDE and CAE-R.

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## **NSA/DHS CAE-CD in Research Designation (CAE-R):**

Applicable to DoD schools, PhD producing military academies or regionally accredited, degree granting four-year institutions rated as either Research University - Very High Research Activity (RU-VH), Research University – High Research Activity (RU-H), or Doctoral/Research University (DRU) as determined by the Carnegie Foundation Basic Classification system (and/or other independent body to measure CD) or written justification as to significant Cyber Defense research)

The criteria include:

- Demonstration of CD Research initiatives (faculty and student), publications, graduate-level production and research funding (See CAE-R Criteria)

## **NSA/DHS CAE-CD Focus Area (FA) (Optional)**

All CAEs have the option to apply for one or more CAE-CD Focus Area designations, but the institution **must specifically identify** the Focus Area(s) of intent.

The criteria include:

- Successful mapping of the institution’s curriculum to all of the KUs identified in the Focus Area
- Demonstration that a student can reasonably complete the necessary course of study to include all KUs identified in the Focus Area.
- The institution must provide student certificates to those that complete the FA course of study. The certificates must clearly identify the specific Focus Area achieved

Optional Focus Area designations:

- Provide valuable differentiation among institutions for marketing purpose
- Allow students who wish to study in a specific area the ability to make an informed decision
- Prove hiring managers the ability to recruit from institutions more efficiently to find skill needed for their line of business
- Foster and encourage further development of strong IA focused education and research depth at US institutions

## **Available Tools**

The following tools are available to assist in gathering the information needed to map to the following KU sets:

1. Two-year Core KU matrix and reviewer checklist
2. Four-year Core KU matrix and reviewer checklist
3. Optional KUs
4. Focus Area KUs
5. National Cyberwatch Center’s KU Mapping Guide

These tools are useful to identify the topic/objective/week/session/project/lab/etc numbers (whatever is used in the syllabi/course outline) that covers each of the KU topics and/or outcome elements. The spreadsheets consolidate mapping information which expedites entering it in the CAE application website. Many also find the spreadsheets useful in determining what is actually being taught in their /other department(s) - an overall picture so they can see overlaps, gaps, ensure updates are made to all courses covering same topic (such as adding new law/access control method), etc. The checklists can be used by the institution to double-check the KU mapping before the application is officially submitted. The Cyberwatch document is a step-by-step resource guide for the mapping process.

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## **Program Evaluation:**

- Institutions will be evaluated by Subject Matter Experts with assistance from CAE Program staff. The last phase of the criteria *may be* an on-site evaluation focused on course content, course relevance, laboratory facilities, and faculty involvement.
- The Program Office may request additional documentation regarding a submission. It is incumbent upon the institution to answer any additional requests in a timely manner, usually within seven calendar days.

## **Application Schedule**

- The application cycle is mid-September through 15 January of each calendar year. No applications will be accepted after 15 January.
- Designees will be notified as soon as their application is reviewed. Feedback will be provided upon notification.
- Official designation ceremony for successful applicants will take place in June of the submission year.

## **Knowledge Unit, Focus Area, and Criteria Update Process**

- Anyone may propose updates to the KUs, FAs, and CAE Criteria at any time.
- Updates may be proposed to the CAE program office at: [AskCAEIAE@nsa.gov](mailto:AskCAEIAE@nsa.gov).
- KU review is on-going. Please review and submit comments through the CAE Community portal: <https://www.caecommunity.org>. This process is only open to current CAE institutions.

Please direct CAE-CD program questions or concerns to [AskCAEIAE@nsa.gov](mailto:AskCAEIAE@nsa.gov).