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Students become master fighters of cyber crime

[Melanie Swan](#)

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Dr Ibrahim Baggili says master's students at Zayed University this year will look closely at the iPad and BlackBerry, just two of the small digital devices posing questions and challenges to cyber security.

Pawan Singh / The National

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ABU DHABI // Students are responding to a growing need for cyber security experts by flocking to a master's degree programme at Zayed University. The first cohort of the master's degree in cyber security, which graduated in March, had just 11 students, all from Abu Dhabi Police. The latest batch, the fourth, has 27 students.

A total of 95 students, all of whom have full-time jobs and study part time, have either graduated from or are in the programme. They come from Abu Dhabi Police, Dubai Police and private organisations. Dr Ibrahim Baggili, who specialises in small digital devices such as the iPhone and BlackBerry, said the course has to constantly evolve. "The course is continuously changing because every day there are new devices coming onto the market like the iPhone 4, the iPad and so on.

"This year the students will look at the iPad and will be looking closely at the BlackBerry because of the situation we have now in the UAE." He says research into the BlackBerry device, which may be banned because of security concerns about the device's encryption technology, must be in-depth for authorities to know the extent of the risk it poses compared with other means of internet communication.

"My only concern is right now we're trying to block off the BlackBerry messaging and e-mail services because we can't get data from it. The Government needs this data to be able to track criminals but the internet has other services like Google Mail, which is encrypted. "Even on Google Mail chat it's encrypted, which is the same concept as a BlackBerry. A BlackBerry is with you all the time though so is more susceptible to being used in a criminal situation."

Since launching the programme in 2008, he has done research which has found that between 2008 and 2009, there was a 60 per cent increase in cases related to cyber crimes in Abu Dhabi alone. Of 120 people surveyed, 22 per cent said they kept their credit card pin number on their mobile phones and 23 per cent said they accepted Bluetooth files from people they did not know, while 82 per cent used no anti-virus software on their mobile devices.

Muna Bader, 36, is doing her master's thesis on iPhone forensics. "It's really an evolving field, so small-scale digital devices are interesting because everyone has those devices. It's an everyday part of life and accumulates a lot of data that can be of great benefit in cases of security breaches and cyber crimes." Major Faisal al Shamari, the chief information security officer at Abu Dhabi Police, was one of the first graduates in March.

It was his second master's degree but a qualification, he says, is vital for developing state security. "All types of crime are evolving now to have a digital face," he said. "Everything now relates to the computer; documents on a machine can show planning of a crime or show evidence storage. You will deal with a computer at some point during an investigation." Education is vital for organisations such as police forces, whether in combating

financial crimes, high-tech crimes or homicide, he said. "You'd utilise your capacity either by aiding an ongoing investigation or you might face a case that's an online case from the beginning."

Khalifa University's new MSc in information security aims to create local experts. The university's Information Security Research Group is looking at issues such as mobile and wireless security, while courses covered in the master's include digital forensics and network and system security. Andrew Jones, the programme chair, said that since the course launched at the Sharjah campus last year with 10 students, it has steadily grown along with demand, especially from telecommunications and infrastructure-based firms. This year, when they expand to Abu Dhabi, they expect a batch of about 14 students.

"For business and governments, there is a growing demand for people who understand technologies such as cryptography, the technology of encrypting and decrypting messages," Dr Jones said. "People are starting to understand the need to secure systems and the need to have someone to either put your security policy in place or manage security within your organisation." With the UAE's rapid take up of new technologies such as the latest iPhone and iPad, much more research is needed. [Next page](#)

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