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Alumni Profile

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Hacking the hackers

As a Linfield College English major, Brian Hussey '00 took some ribbing by friends with other majors more career-oriented. But Hussey has the last laugh.

Now a digital forensic analyst in Washington, D.C., he's found his English degree and liberal arts education critical to success in the computer world.

"While there are a lot of technical people in my field, it's absolutely essential to be a good communicator," he said. "It's a skill set that a lot of the highly technical people don't have. I'm grateful to Linfield for that."

Hussey, an analyst with Harris Corporation, supports federal law enforcement, including the FBI, by investigating network intrusions, botnets, international cybercrime and malware. He leads a specialized unit that provides analysis for FBI field offices and law enforcement partners, generally working high profile cases.

"Our goal is to determine the who, what, where, when and why of digital crime," said Hussey, whose team provides special agents in the field with information to capture and convict criminals. Analysis can range from a week to a few months, depending on the case.

"It's all recoverable," he added. "When you delete a file it's not actually deleted, just like everywhere you go on the Internet, every email you send or emoticon you post to Facebook can be recovered from your computer's hard drive."

Hussey uses his communication skills on a daily basis, writing complex technical reports and speaking publicly. He trains cyber agents throughout the world, teaches computer forensics at George Mason University and

frequently speaks at computer forensics and hacker conferences. He occasionally testifies as an expert witness, including for a case in Oregon against a Russian cyber-criminal responsible for stealing millions of dollars' worth of credit card numbers via point of sale server hacks.

"Linfield helped me develop a deep intellectual curiosity," said Hussey, who was influenced by a number of Linfield faculty, including Lex Runciman, professor of English. "I followed what I loved, and the skill set I learned along the way taught me to think critically, analyze thoroughly and communicate clearly. That's made all the difference."

Originally from Alaska, Hussey visited schools throughout the Pacific Northwest before choosing Linfield. "It was an easy decision," he recalls. "I liked the friendly, open feel of the place, and the accessibility to professors."

He studied in England and Bolivia, and participated on the lacrosse team, the Linfield Activities Board and the speech team. The broad array of experiences prepared him well for the work he does now, particularly public speaking and making presentations engaging for his audience.

With his Linfield English diploma in hand and an interest in law enforcement, Hussey spent three years teaching in Japan through the JET program and contemplating his future. That's when he discovered computer forensics.

"It was a brand new and fascinating field," said Hussey, who also met and married his wife, Hiroko, while in Japan. They now have two children, Denali, 6, and Aurora, 4. "I knew I wanted something investigative related, but I wasn't sure where it would lead. The path just kind of laid itself out before me."

Hussey returned to the U.S., working as a technical writer to put himself through graduate school, and earned a master's in high tech crime investigation from George Washington University.

For the past decade, he's tackled cybercrime, and looks forward to developing his expertise as the field grows.

"Every case is different," he said. "I like the chance to do good and to put bad guys in jail when they hurt others. Every case challenges me to learn something new."

—Laura Davis

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