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## For Immediate Release

# NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE AWARDS GRANT TO NEW YORK RESEARCHERS TO ASSESS INFORMATION SECURITY AT AMERICA'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

## Columbia University Based Research Project Will Examine Current Security Levels and Develop Safeguards for the Nation's Infrastructure

NEW YORK, February 15, 2005 -- America's colleges and universities are plagued with increasingly frequent and severe information security breaches. Incidents ranging from identity theft and data tampering, to organized criminal and terrorist activity, are quickly establishing academic institutions as the weakest link in America's chain of critical infrastructure security. To address this critical lapse in security, the US Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice (NIJ) awarded approximately \$200,000 to ISAI, a New York-based research team ([www.infosecurityresearch.org](http://www.infosecurityresearch.org)), to investigate information security in academic institutions. The team will analyze current information security levels and provide practical recommendations for improvement. This 18-month research project, conducted through Columbia University's Teachers College, will integrate policy from federal agencies such as NIST with universities' pressing issues to develop a wide range of solutions that will raise the bar for information security standards.

Survey and interview data will be collected from over one hundred IT directors of colleges and universities across the United States. Three universities' networks will be monitored for forensic analysis. This data will be integrated with federal policy and best practices to create recommendations and implementation options.

"Our goal is to strengthen the information security policy and practice of America's universities," said Dr. Steffani Burd, Executive Director of the project. "Academia's open culture that fosters research, experimentation and emerging technologies is invaluable. However, universities are highly vulnerable to security breaches that can readily disrupt our nation's critical infrastructure. We will create practical, flexible, scalable, and forward-looking approaches to developing safeguards commensurate with the nation's security needs."

The research will also analyze how academia's unique threats impact public safety and homeland security. "Higher education is home to sensitive information ranging from pioneering government-sponsored research to information sharing for DHS programs like US-VISIT and SEVIS to social security numbers, billing information and private health records for millions of students and faculty," said Scott Cherkin, Director of Strategic Development for the project.

Due to the national and economic aspects of the project, the team will reach out to industry for inclusion and sponsorship of the project. For information, contact Dr. Steffani Burd at [sburd@infosecurityresearch.org](mailto:sburd@infosecurityresearch.org).

*National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is the research, development, and evaluation agency of the US Department of Justice. NIJ provides objective, independent, evidence-based knowledge and tools to meet the challenges of crime and justice.*

*Teachers College, an affiliate of Columbia University, is the largest and one of the leading graduate schools of education in the United States.*

*Columbia University is one of the top academic and research institutions in the world, conducting pathbreaking research in medicine, science, arts, and humanities. It includes three undergraduate schools, thirteen graduate and professional schools, and a school of continuing education.*

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