

UNM set to launch new master's program in security

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Dr. Emile Nakhleh, director of the Global and National Security Policy Institute, sits in his office on Jan. 27, 2017.

Graduate students from across the country will soon be able to earn a degree from the University of New Mexico directly related to global and national security.

Last week UNM's Global and National Security Policy Institute secured the next step in launching its master's degree program. The program was approved by deans throughout the University as part of a multi-step process for establishing a graduate-level program.

The GNSPI acts as an umbrella institution, covering all global and national security-related courses and research throughout UNM's campuses.

GNSPI Director Dr. Emile Nakhleh said reception of the program has been positive.

"We expect the process to be very smooth, and I expect final approval by summer," he said.

Nakhleh served as a senior intelligence officer with the CIA and has worked as a

research professor focusing on Islamic radicalization and terrorism in the Middle East. As director of GNSPI, he oversees the institute's academic affairs within the University.

The GNSPI currently offers an undergraduate certificate in global and national security through the University College. It also offers online graduate-level courses, on which it hopes to build the master's program. These courses cover a range of national security issues, including topics like food and water security.

Nakhleh said earning a degree through GNSPI will help students who are interested in global and national security find employment in that area.

"Our students who take this degree can easily find jobs in the intelligence community, in the federal government, in the diplomatic corps, global NGOs, the United Nations," Nakhleh said. "In other words, this degree on top of your BA would really open the way for you."

The proposed master's program would not discriminate based on a prospective student's undergraduate degree.

Nakhleh said no matter what bachelor's degree a student earned, as long as they are passionate about their field, interested in security-related subjects and other cultures, the master's program will consider them.

The GNSPI has two advisory boards that aid in the process of acquiring the master's program. One is external and comprised of senior leadership from national security entities around Albuquerque and New Mexico, including directors from Los Alamos and Sandia National Labs. The other board is internal and made up of UNM deans, chairs and senior professors.

Dr. Edl Schamiloglu is a professor of electrical and computer engineering and serves on the internal advisory board. He also teaches one of the graduate-level classes that GNSPI currently offers.

"Our master's and Ph.D. students take mathematical, very, very technical courses, and (the course I teach) is interesting, because it forces them to think about policy, about ethics, about human consequences," Schamiloglu said.

He said his course is focused on directed energy that can be either high-powered microwaves or high-energy lasers aimed at a target. This course is paired with a class on cybersecurity as part of a module that offers a broad understanding of technology as it relates to cybersecurity.

The courses are interdisciplinary, meaning anyone is eligible to take them, even without a background in technology, Schamiloglu said.

"Given a lot of the complexities when it comes to national security, I think it's important to be able to give more than hard science and engineering to leaders in the national labs and government agencies," Schamiloglu said.

Mark Orgeron, executive vice president for academic affairs under the provost, has taken the course about directed energy and cybersecurity. He currently holds a master's degree in sports administration but said he hopes to pursue a master's in global and national security to compliment his current graduate degree.

"A lot of the things I started looking at in sports were more security-related in terms of facility safety," Orgeron said. "With things like the Boston Marathon bombing that got me thinking about, 'Okay, what are we really doing to protect athletes, spectators?'"

The GNSPI courses are built around the idea that the students taking them are likely working full-time jobs — classes are structured as eight-week courses and come in pairs to accommodate students.

Orgeron said this format suits his needs. He said he believes due to the support from the national security industry in New Mexico, the master's program will be successful.

"We have a unique situation here with the labs and the air force base," Orgeron said. "I think this is a perfect situation for this institute to grow and thrive."

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