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U of T Mississauga prof wins prestigious cryptography award

Tuesday, March 1, 2011 - 9:59am

Alain Latour

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The word cryptography is likely to conjure images of spies busily sending each other coded messages that might just save the world. In reality, most of us resort to cryptography every day. We resort to it when we withdraw money from an ATM, type our credit card PIN at our local grocery store, send an email or even open certain web pages—all of these transactions depend of the effective use of cryptography to ensure our privacy and the safety of our personal and financial data.

At U of T Mississauga, one man has long busied himself with advancing the field of cryptography. His name is Professor Charlie Rackoff, and last week he was presented with the prestigious 2011 RSA Conference Award for Excellence in the Field of Mathematics in recognition of his innovation and ongoing contribution to the important field of cryptography.

I feel very honoured to have received this award, said Professor Rackoff in a telephone interview, adding that a great deal of the credit goes to his co-workers.

Despite his modesty, Professor Rackoff is no stranger to awards. In 1993, he co-won the Gödel Prize for his role in co-originating the interactive proofs and zero-knowledge proofs concepts. His research interests lie in computational complexity and he heads a Centre for Communications and Information Technology (CITO) project called Fundamental Issues in Computing.

In addition to cryptography, Professor Rackoff specializes in security and security protocols. I am delighted that Professor Rackoff received the 2011 RSA Conference Award, said Professor Konstantin Khanin, chair of the U of T Mississauga Department of Mathematical and Computational Sciences. [He] is one of the best experts in the field and has been a long time.

Other award recipients in the history of RSA Conference include professors from MIT, Stanford University, University of Washington, Princeton University and the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne.

Named after a cryptography algorithm which is used worldwide to secure Internet, banking and credit card transactions, the RSA Conference is regarded as one of the world's leading information security-related conventions. It is held annually in the San Francisco Bay Area, where it started in 1991 as a forum for cryptographers to share the latest advancements in Internet security.

Among the issues discussed at this year's conference were cloud security, cyber warfare, mobile security and emerging threats from social media.

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