CSRA College Hiring Pipeline for NOSC Stand-Up

CSRA

VALUE / SCOPE **80+ cleared analysts hired**

SITUATION

While serving as a senior leader at CSRA (later GDIT), I was responsible for standing up two major Network and Security Operations Centers (NOSCs) in Bossier City, LA and San Antonio, TX. We faced an immediate challenge: we lacked the volume of cleared cyber and network talent needed to staff both facilities. Traditional hiring channels were not producing qualified candidates fast enough, and attrition in the region was high due to competition from defense contractors and commercial companies. Without a creative hiring pipeline, we risked falling behind on SLA obligations and delaying full operational capability.

TASK

I needed to design and execute a scalable, repeatable pipeline to source, evaluate, hire, and develop next-generation cyber talent in proximity to the NOSC locations. The solution had to reduce hiring cycle time, meet security clearance requirements, and create a reliable influx of entry-level engineers who could grow into long-term contributors.

ACTION

I created a university-integrated talent pipeline strategy. My first step was to establish a formal partnership with Louisiana Tech University (LA Tech), which had a strong Cyber Engineering program and was located only 45 minutes from the Bossier NOSC. I proposed the creation of a capstone cyber war-gaming final exam, jointly designed by my senior SMEs and LATech faculty.

Built a full-scale, real-world cyber war-gaming final exam

To properly assess candidates, I directed senior CSC/CSRA Cyber SMEs to build a capstone war-game scenario simulating real NOSC/SOC events:

- DDoS attacks
- privilege escalation threats
- malware propagation
- network segmentation failures
- forensic triage under time constraints
- log correlation and SIEM analysis
- defensive and offensive countermeasures

The students were evaluated on:

- technical depth
- teamwork
- stress performance
- communication
- ability to escalate and respond

• adaptability to new threats

This gave us visibility into talent before hiring them.

My SMEs built offensive and defensive scenarios based on real-world SOC conditions, including simulated ransomware attacks, DDoS events, log triage under time pressure, and threat-hunting exercises. They also coached students before and during the event, which allowed them to observe technical aptitude, teamwork, and leadership under stress.

This effort led LATech to invite me onto their Cyber Engineering Education Advisory Board, where I advised on curriculum improvements—including encouraging them to incorporate CISSP prep into their final-year coursework to enhance graduate readiness.

Senior SMEs scored the students and helped identify the top candidates. Across several cohorts, we hired 10 new cyber analysts, all of whom chose to remain in the region and were eager to begin cleared cyber careers. This created not only immediate staffing, but an annual repeatable pipeline the NOSCs could rely on.

RESULT

The NOSCs reached operational staffing targets on schedule, with incoming analysts who were already familiar with SOC workflows. Attrition dropped significantly among new hires because they were local, invested in the work, and connected to the team through the war-gaming experience. The success of this program ultimately created a sustainable, repeatable, annual talent pipeline for CSRA/GDIT—something the organization leveraged for years afterward.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES DEMONSTRATED

• Hire and Develop the Best — built a university-integrated early-career program with real technical vetting.

• Invent and Simplify — used war-gaming and advisory board collaboration to evaluate talent more accurately and efficiently.

• Dive Deep — personally guided curriculum and technical skills alignment with NOSC mission needs.

• Think Big — converted a one-time event into a repeatable annual talent supply chain.

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