2014

Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences Viewbook

Nova Southeastern University

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This is NSU.

From the classroom to the field of technology, every year, our Sharks have gone on to become information technology leaders. Here are just a few to learn more about.
Thank you for your interest in the Nova Southeastern University Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences.

For more than 25 years, our focused, flexible programs in the industry’s most sought after fields have helped students reach their full potential. We are a unique graduate school with renowned faculty members and an alumni network of more than 4,000 working together to ensure your success.

Earning a graduate degree in one of our eight programs requires dedication and ambition. Inside these pages, you will meet some of our accomplished alumni and read about what made their pursuit of graduate degrees worthwhile. You will discover the lessons they learned, the challenges they faced, and the advantages they gained. You will also read about how they benefitted from our flexible program formats, which allowed them to complete their degrees and move forward without interrupting their lives and careers.

The world today is in an era of rapid technological growth, and each new day brings demands for increased proficiencies of those in the computer and information technology professions. Each new day also brings opportunities to learn and grow within the field and to change the way we live and work.

We are here to welcome you, support you, and help you create opportunities for your future success. I am proud to say that I am a Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences alumnus, and I invite you to join me in our community.

Eric S. Ackerman, Ph.D.
Dean and Associate Professor
Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences
Nova Southeastern University
Our Programs

Master of Science (M.S.)
36 credits, 12 courses, available online and/or on campus
- Computer Science
- Information Security
- Information Technology
- Management Information Systems
- Software Engineering

Graduate Certificates
15 credits, 5 courses, available online and/or on campus
- Business Intelligence/Analytics
- Information Security Management

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
A minimum of 64 credits, unique online and on-campus program that allows for no career interruption
- Computer Science
- Information Assurance
- Information Systems
JACOB MAYNARD
M.S. IN COMPUTER SCIENCE (2011)
SENIOR SOFTWARE ENGINEER, CITRIX SYSTEMS, FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA
Jacob Maynard is using technology to improve the way we live. He is currently a senior software engineer at Citrix Systems, delivering and maintaining software that allows employees to work from anywhere using any device.

Establishing a mobile workplace is just one way the 32-year-old is helping our society evolve and move into the future. He also wants to create self-sustainable homes. The innovative thinker dreams of creating smart homes and programs that will decrease our dependency on power sources. “I want to get people off the grid. My goal is to one day create the software that will give families the power to self-sustain their homes.”

With a wife and three children, Maynard knows how difficult it is for families to succeed today.

Maynard, who received his M.S. in Information Security in 2008 from GSCIS, became interested in software engineering and development while he was working at Citrix. In order to move into that area of the industry and move up in his career, he needed a master’s degree in computer science. He chose NSU’s GSCIS both for its location and program flexibility, but also because he was able to transfer some credits from his 2008 master’s degree to the new program.

Using the program’s blended format, Maynard was able to take some of the more challenging courses on campus, while taking other courses online. “Having the option to attend class on campus or online helped me to balance everything on my plate.”

It also meant both Maynard and his wife could continue to attend school at the same time. “Neither of us had to put work or school on hold. If I needed to be on campus or online, she watched the kids and vice versa. I wouldn’t have had that opportunity at another school.”

He credits his ability to successfully balance full-time work, school, and family to the flexible program format at GSCIS. He also gives his wife credit. “She made a lot of sacrifices, but we both knew it was worth it.” Since getting his M.S. in Computer Science in 2011, Maynard has received two promotions. “My application to be a senior software engineer was contingent on completing my degree.”

Maynard hopes to continue to advance his career at Citrix. “I’ve always believed that you are where you want to be. Thanks to NSU, I am on the way to where I want to be.”

“I’ve always believed that you are where you want to be. Thanks to NSU, I am on the way to where I want to be.”—Jacob Maynard
Michael Kozma always knew he wanted to pursue a career in IT. After receiving a National Security Agency (NSA) scholarship to attend graduate school while he was still an undergraduate student, he began researching NSA-approved graduate programs and schools. NSU stood out.

“I looked through NSA’s list, and the M.S. in Information Security program at NSU's GSCIS was the most interesting to me. The curriculum also seemed the most relevant to what I wanted to do.”

Kozma’s instincts proved right. “The transition from classroom life to work life was really smooth. What I learned at NSU immediately translated over to my career.”

As part of the scholarship, Kozma worked in a paid internship before starting graduate school. From 2008 to 2010, he attended classes on NSU’s main campus in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. With his NSA scholarship stipend, he was able to focus on his classes and attend year-round.

The Washington, D.C., resident now works as a U.S. government computer scientist, a role he would not have qualified for if it hadn’t been for his master’s degree. “Getting my master’s degree equipped me with the education I needed to really stand out in my career.”

Four years later, the computer scientist is still putting into practice what he learned at NSU. “The program really benefited me. The work I did as a student gives me an appreciation for what I do now. I’m still going back to what I learned at NSU and putting it into practice in my day to day.”

Kozma’s faculty mentor at NSU helped guide him through the program. Because of his experience at NSU, Kozma hopes to one day serve as a mentor.

For now, Kozma has his sights set on a future supervisory position, leading teams on large, global projects and motivating and enabling team members to apply themselves—the way he was motivated at NSU. He also hopes to revisit his favorite destination: Fort Lauderdale. “I still miss it. It’s a gem in South Florida, and a place that I hope to get back to one day.”
ABDULHAYY JOHNSON

M.S. IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2010)
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Abdulhayy Johnson was working for the Department of Natural Resources in Ohio, but dreaming of a career with the U.S. Department of State’s Foreign Service. Johnson knew he would need a master’s degree to be considered for the Foreign Service. In 2008, he enrolled in the online M.S. in Information Technology program at GSCIS. Three months before he graduated, he received an offer to join the Foreign Service. The 38-year-old information management specialist now works at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia.

“Before I even graduated, I saw the advantages of having my master’s degree. It helped me acquire the job I had set my sights on.” Since getting hired, Johnson has seen increases in his salary, which he attributes to the qualifications he earned at NSU. “With the extra income I’ve earned as a result of my master’s degree, the degree paid for itself within one year.”

While getting his degree, Johnson also pursued a concentration in information technology management. He found that the concentration aligned the area of study perfectly with his work, which involves managing IT solutions, projects, people, and resources. “What I was studying was a 100-percent match with my new job. I was learning about IT challenges and the new innovations that will change how we live and work.”

The online program offered Johnson the opportunity to shift gears when he needed. The program’s flexibility meant the busy father and husband could take two courses a semester when time permitted and less if his schedule became more hectic. “With young children and a full-time job, I didn’t always have a lot of extra time to dedicate to school. Having the ability to reduce my course load and take one course at a time really helped when things heated up at work.”

Now on his second Foreign Service assignment, the globetrotting Johnson has no plans to slow down. “I hope to stay with the Foreign Service for a long, long time.” Johnson still stays in touch with the GSCIS classmates who he bonded with over team projects. He dreams of retiring to Seattle, Washington, and establishing an IT consulting business—and making more time for the fun things in life: playing badminton and watching Korean dramas.

“Before I even graduated, I saw the advantages of having my master’s degree. It helped me acquire the job I had set my sights on.”—Abdulhayy Johnson
Beginning fall 2014, the M.S. in Information Technology in Education is offered as a Learning Technology concentration within the M.S. in Management Information Systems.
Moving from the M.S. in Information Technology in Education program at GSCIS to the related Ph.D. in Computing Technology in Education program was seamless for Kevin Pacetti. Through the early admission track, Pacetti was able to begin working toward his doctoral degree before he had even finished his master’s degree. “Two years into my master’s degree, I was accepted into the early admission track of the doctoral program and started taking doctoral-level courses. Because of the early admission track, I will be able to finish my Ph.D. ahead of schedule.”

One deciding factor for Pacetti choosing NSU over other area schools was the online component of the computing technology in education master’s- and doctoral-degree programs. When he was researching graduate schools, he discovered that a lot of schools were teaching about the latest educational technology, but were not using it to deliver their own programs. “At NSU, you are not just learning about educational technology, you are using it as a student.”

Another deciding factor was the faculty. “I wanted professors who were actively involved in research, with published articles, not just teaching in the classroom.”

Pacetti found another NSU advantage in its student-centered culture, which is geared toward helping the online student succeed by keeping them motivated and connected. “The professors promote student connectivity through email, discussion boards, and online conferencing. The professors always got back to you. They were more than teachers—they provided inspiration and motivation. That was critical.”

The 50-year-old Texan and busy father doesn’t ever want to retire. His golden-year dreams are wrapped around his passions in life—teaching, technology, and photography. “I view learning as a lifelong process, and the pursuit and completion of the master’s- and doctoral-degree programs at NSU as a continuation, not conclusion, of my educational journey. The path of my journey is being shaped by the knowledge, experience, and inspiration I have gained at NSU.”

“Because of the early admission track, I will be able to finish my Ph.D. ahead of schedule.”
—Kevin Pacetti
JESSICA SACHS
M.S. IN MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (2007)
IT SECURITY ANALYST, DUKE ENERGY, CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
Armed with a Bachelor of Science degree in Management Information Systems and little experience, Jessica Sachs found it difficult to secure employment in the six months following her undergraduate graduation. “I didn’t have the right experience.” To make herself more marketable to employers and increase her knowledge, she decided to pursue a graduate degree.

During a trip to South Florida to visit her grandparents, Sachs discovered Nova Southeastern University’s Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences. She visited the main campus in Fort Lauderdale and met with Eric Ackerman, Ph.D., dean and associate professor at GSCIS, to learn more about the Master of Science in Management Information Systems degree program. After the meeting, Sachs felt confident she found the right school.

“I liked what I learned about the program, and meeting with Dr. Ackerman really solidified my decision. I still keep in touch with him.” She was so sure that NSU was the place for her that she didn’t apply to any other schools. “It all just seemed like a natural fit for me, and it meant that I would be able to spend time with my grandparents.”

By taking classes in a blended format, Sachs was able to focus on two courses at a time. “Getting my master’s degree took a little more than a year, but I was able to work while I got my degree.”

In addition to increasing her marketability, Sachs’ master’s degree put her above some of the other candidates she was competing against to land her first job. After graduating in 2007 with an M.S. in Management Information Systems with a concentration in the Administration of Information Security, Sachs returned to her home state of North Carolina and landed a position as a SQL programmer.

“What I learned in the classroom gave me the knowledge I needed to delve into my job.” While completing her degree, Sachs also took advantage of the school’s National Security Agency-certified curriculum and earned a Graduate Certificate in Information System Security.

Since graduating, Sachs has received promotions and salary increases and is now an IT security analyst. She’s sure it will lead to additional promotional opportunities, especially because her employer values education and the commitment it takes to get an advanced degree.

“This is a path I never thought I would take, but I am so happy that I did. I wouldn’t have the job I have now if it wasn’t for my master’s degree.”

“I wouldn’t have the job I have now if it wasn’t for my master’s degree.” —Jessica Sachs
DONALD LEMMA

PH.D. IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS (1999)

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER AND ASSOCIATE DEAN, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL, NEW YORK, NEW YORK
Despite having a master’s degree in public administration and serving as chief information officer, Donald Lemma knew that a computer-related master’s or doctoral degree was the only sure way to further his IT knowledge. Not one to shy away from a challenge, the adventurous mountain climber decided to pursue his Ph.D.

“With a Ph.D., you bring more to the table than someone with just a working knowledge of IT.”

Over the years, Lemma had also become keenly aware of the kinship that was shared by his terminally degreed coworkers. “I worked a lot with scientists and researchers. Without a Ph.D., you were on the outside looking in. I didn’t want to be on the outside anymore.”

Lemma knew he wanted to get his Ph.D. as quickly as possible. While researching schools, he was left wondering if he could get his degree while working or if he had to give up his full-time job. “NSU solved that problem for me. The Ph.D. in Information Systems program at GSCIS catered to working executives, like me.”

After two years of online classes and regular visits to NSU’s main campus, the highly focused Lemma took only one additional year to finish his Ph.D. While on campus, he enjoyed partnering with his fellow students, who had the same technical and research mindset. It was also during his campus visits that he struck up a friendship with GSCIS faculty member Sumitra Mukherjee, Ph.D. “We were both business minded, so we were kindred spirits. We really enjoyed each other’s company.”

Mukherjee served as Lemma’s faculty adviser. “He kept me motivated. He provided incredibly focused responses to my drafts and ideas, always urging me to consider a few new angles I hadn’t thought of.”

In addition to the responsive and dedicated faculty members, Lemma also found that GSCIS’ dissertation process helped keep him on track with his Ph.D. “GSCIS broke the dissertation process down into defined steps, so it was manageable. You knew what you needed to do for step one, step two, and so on. They gave you the tools you needed to finish your Ph.D.”

The high-ranking executive credits NSU for helping him achieve his long-term career goal of serving as CIO for a Fortune 500 company. “The program enabled me to achieve my career ambitions. Before my Ph.D., I was CIO at a small company. After, I was CIO at a large company, with an IT staff of more than 1,500 and an IT budget in excess of a half-billion dollars.” Now, the CIO and associate dean at Columbia University’s Business School is doing what he enjoys the most and making time to continue his quest to climb the highest points in each of the 50 states.
DUNG MAI
PH.D. IN COMPUTER SCIENCE (2011)
SOFTWARE ENGINEER, BOEING, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

When software engineer Dung Mai was considering graduate schools for his Ph.D., he realized there were only two schools for him in the United States that offered a Ph.D. in Computer Science. He chose NSU’s Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences, even though the school was more than 3,400 miles away from his hometown of Seattle, Washington.

“NSU’s program was accessible, even though I lived so far away, and the cluster sessions gave me the opportunity to have one-on-one time with my professors.” — Dung Mai

Four times a year, Mai attended three-day weekend cluster sessions on NSU’s main campus in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. During those sessions, he was able to connect with fellow students and faculty members. “NSU’s program was accessible, even though I lived so far away, and the cluster sessions gave me the opportunity to have one-on-one time with my professors.”

“I could have attended a school much closer to where I was living and working, but I would have had to quit my job to be on campus,” said Mai. Leaving his full-time job with Boeing wasn’t an option for Mai, especially since Boeing was contributing to his Ph.D. “I needed a program that was flexible, one that would let me keep working.”

Mai feels confident his Ph.D. will continue to take him to new heights. “Having my Ph.D. will open up more opportunities for me in the future, whether that is advancing within a company or securing a position at a new company.”

Working while getting his Ph.D. meant Mai could take the innovative techniques he was learning and apply them directly to his work. “The classes were relevant, and I was able to go from the classroom on Friday to the office on Monday and use what I had learned.”
Beginning fall 2014, the Ph.D. in Computing Technology in Education is offered as a Learning Technology concentration within the Ph.D. in Information Systems.
For U.S. Air Force veteran Wayne Brown, getting a Ph.D. wasn’t about title or prestige. As vice president of a California university’s IT department, he had both of those when he began the Ph.D. program at GSCIS in 2002. Brown’s Ph.D. pursuit was personal.

“As vice president of IT, I was working with a lot of terminally degreed deans and senior administrators. But because I didn’t have a Ph.D., I felt like I was never really part of the club,” said Brown, who also holds an M.B.A. degree and is now vice president for extended education at Excelsior College.

A high school dropout, Brown also wanted the challenge of a Ph.D. and a chance to prove to himself he could succeed. For two-and-a-half years, the 52-year-old IT executive, who is married with seven children and four dogs, spent his weekends in a garage office. “I knew that the hardest part of any Ph.D. was finishing the dissertation. I wanted to finish my degree in three years, so I needed to stay focused.”

Brown’s blended program meant he spent one week each semester on NSU’s main campus. While there, he cultivated relationships with his fellow students and his faculty adviser, Trudy Abramson, Ed.D. Brown was starting to feel the pressure to interest a faculty member in his dissertation subject when Abramson reached out to him.

“During one class, she invited students to come and speak to her about their research projects, so I did. Later, she agreed to be my faculty adviser for my dissertation.”

Abramson’s impact on Brown was so substantial that he set up a scholarship at NSU in her name. He hopes the scholarship affirms to Abramson that her work helps students succeed. “The hours were long and the coursework was hard. But, the faculty members were on your side and supported you. Because of my faculty adviser, I was able to finish my Ph.D.”

Brown’s doctoral research project eventually led to him establishing a nonprofit foundation that continues his research on the effectiveness of higher education chief information officers.

“Through my research, I learned that IT administrators and chief information officers may not be prepared for the future demands of their roles. They may not have a mentor, and that’s a key component in developing and preparing them for the challenges they’ll face.” The nonprofit also provides students with scholarships, such as the one at NSU in Trudy Abramson’s honor, something Brown hopes will continue to expand.

“The hours were long and the coursework was hard. But, the faculty members were on your side and supported you. Because of my faculty adviser, I was able to finish my Ph.D.” —Wayne Brown
Beginning fall 2014, instead of entering computer information systems, new students will enroll in either computer science, information systems, or in the new Ph.D. in Information Assurance.
“The skills you develop while getting your Ph.D., such as project and time management, become habits that you carry over to your work. Employers value that kind of work ethic.” —Michael Makovoz

Finding a Ph.D. program in New York’s tristate area that would fit into Michael Makovoz’s busy lifestyle proved difficult. “The programs in my area were not the right fit for me, either because they required me to be a full-time student or because the curriculum was not a good match for what I wanted to study.” With a family depending on him, leaving his job to become a full-time student wasn’t an option for Makovoz.

He soon discovered NSU’s Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences. There, he found what he couldn’t find elsewhere: a Ph.D. program that was tailored to his interests in artificial intelligence and that would allow him to attend part time.

Through NSU’s blended format, Makovoz, who is currently vice president of program trading for the world’s fifth-largest investment bank, only had to fly to NSU’s main campus twice a semester. During those on-campus visits, he connected with his fellow students. “Those visits were true learning experiences. In addition to taking classes, we also learned about the other Ph.D. candidates’ research projects. Each visit was like attending a mini-conference.”

The Wall Street executive also discovered that he was not the only career professional among his fellow students. “The Ph.D. students at NSU are a different type of student. A lot are working professionals. They are motivated, they know what they want, and they know why they are getting their Ph.D.”

Makovoz discovered another advantage at GSCIS—the opportunity to select his own dissertation topic. “At other schools, your dissertation might be based on what the faculty adviser wants it to be about, and not what you are interested in. Your adviser is there to help, but getting a Ph.D. is your fight. So, it is important to select a topic that interests you.”

He believes his Ph.D. helped put him ahead of other candidates for the vice president role at Barclays. “The skills you develop while getting your Ph.D., such as project and time management, become habits that you carry over to your work. Employers value that kind of work ethic.”
GSCIS by the numbers

1985
created the first electronic classroom

10 ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

1975
started the graduate computer science program

2014—CELEBRATING 25 years of excellence in computer and information sciences graduate education

77°F
average temperature year-round in South Florida

4–7 YEARS—average time to complete Ph.D. program

2 YEARS—average time to complete master’s degree program

more than 300 CLASSES ONLINE

more than 4,000 ALUMNI
Accreditation and Nondiscrimination

Nova Southeastern University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate’s, baccalaureate, master’s, educational specialist, doctorate, and professional degrees. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of Nova Southeastern University. Nova Southeastern University admits students of any race, color, sexual orientation, and national or ethnic origin.

National Center of Academic Excellence

The National Security Agency (NSA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have certified NSU’s curricula in information security for compliance with the requirements of NSA national training standards. As a result of this recognition, federal agencies may sponsor civilian and military personnel to take the school’s certified graduate courses, and the school is authorized to issue certificates to students who complete such courses.

Location, Location, Location

The Nova Southeastern University main campus is an architectural and intellectual feast, with cutting-edge research and learning facilities at every turn. Encompassing 314 acres on the western edge of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, NSU is the modern-day embodiment of Thomas Jefferson’s vision of a university as society’s intellectual and cultural hub.

Outstanding Faculty Members

Our faculty members are nationally and internationally recognized scholars who work in diverse fields within the computer and information sciences field. All faculty members hold a doctorate degree from regionally accredited institutions across the world. Our professors are experienced professionals, experts in their fields, and excellent teachers. We invite you to learn more about them by downloading our faculty viewbook at www.nova.edu/publications/scis/faculty-viewbook.

Facilities to Support Hands-On Instruction

Students learning to build mobile applications can do so in the Mobile Computing Laboratory (MCL), where research is conducted in various areas of mobile computing with an emphasis on designing software applications for mobile devices, including Android and iOS. The Distributed Systems (CLOUDS) and Secure and Robust Distributed Systems (SARDIS) laboratory conducts research in various areas of distributed systems with an emphasis on designing, implementing, and evaluating systems, protocols, and middleware.

Home to Florida’s First Computer Museum

The GSCIS Computer Museum exhibits trace the development of computer technology through the ages. It currently houses various computers, computer peripherals, and game consoles. Visitors are welcome to visit the museum on the fourth floor of the Carl DeSantis building on NSU’s main campus.

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