

**The Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge**

**(Austin Regional)**

**Description and Rules**

**(Updated November 30, 2018)**

***Mission***

The Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge is designed to offer students, across a wide range of academic disciplines, a better understanding of the policy challenges associated with cyber conflict. Part interactive learning experience and part competitive scenario exercise, the Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge gives students interested in cyber conflict and policy an opportunity to interact with expert mentors, judges, and cyber professionals while developing valuable skills in policy analysis and presentation.

Student teams will be challenged to respond to an evolving scenario involving a major cyber-attack and analyze the threat it poses to state, military, and private sector interests. Teams will be judged based on the quality of their policy responses, their decision-making processes, and their oral presentation to a panel of judges. Along the way, teams will work with coaches at their home institution to develop their policy skills and feedback from expert panels of judges will ensure that all participants have an opportunity to improve their skills, as well as networking opportunities during the competition.

# *Importance of the Rules*

All participants must be familiar with the rules before participating in the event. Because teams will be evaluated based on a combination of written and oral tasks, a thorough understanding of the rules is important to success.

# *Competition Contact*

For any questions about the competition, please contact:

**Ms. Ali Prince**, Research Program Coordinator, Robert Strauss Center, ali.prince@austin.utexas.edu

# *Competition Rules*

## Rule 1. Format

The Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge consists of a cyber-attack scenario that evolves over the course of the exercise, prompting teams to modify their policy priorities and recommendations as part of successive oral presentations (in addition to a preliminary written brief).

**Round 1 — REPORT**

Before the competition begins on January 10th, each team will write a brief exploring and analyzing the key issues and implications related to the cyber incident described in the scenario materials, and policy options to consider in light of the incident. The length of the brief is limited to two single pages (or one double-sided page) in length, with a maximum of 500 words. Be clear regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the options discussed, and be sure to justify a recommendation from among them. Be clear regarding the grounds and confidence levels associated with your analysis. That document must be submitted, via email to ali.prince@austin.utexas.edu, by 5pm Central Time on Friday January 4th (six days prior to the competition itself).

The first round competition itself takes place on Thursday January 10th. It consists of a live “oral policy brief” presentation to a panel of judges, with the first 10 minutes allocated for the team to give an oral presentation and the next 15 minutes allocated to a question-and-answer session in which the panel of judges will press the team with questions about their analysis. Each team also is required to bring with them a single-page (one-sided) “decision document” designed to accompany and support the oral presentation described above. The document should be designed with an eye towards helping busy senior officials to quickly grasp your team’s analysis and recommendations. The judges will be given precisely 2 minutes to read it before your presentation begins; tailor the document with that at the top of your mind.

At the conclusion of the first round, teams will receive feedback from the judges who will score students based on their oral presentations alone (the decision document, as noted above, is an aid to that presentation and will not be scored separately). The judges’ score on the oral presentation will be combined with the team score from the written brief submitted in advance of the competition (see Rule 7 below). Scores from the First Round determine which teams continue on to the Semi-Final Round (though the scores from the First Round do not carryover into the subsequent rounds; at each round, every remaining team starts with a clean slate).

**Semi-Final Round — RESPOND**

Teams advancing from the first round to the semi-final round will be announced at the reception at the end of the first day. At that point, the advancing teams will receive a new intelligence report that alters the original scenario, thus setting the stage for a revised oral policy briefing (this time without any supporting document) to be delivered during the semi-final round the next morning. During the semi-final round oral briefings, each team again will have 10 minutes for an oral presentation followed by 15 minutes to answer direct questions from a panel of judges. The judges’ score on that oral presentation will determine which teams advance to the final round that afternoon; the advancing teams will be announced after lunch that day.

**Final Round — REACT**

The final round, held in the afternoon on day two, will involve nearly-spontaneous reaction and analysis based on a final, updated intelligence report further altering the scenario. Teams will have to respond to questions from the panel of judges with only little preparation, testing their ability to analyze information as a team and synthesize a response on the spot. Judges will deliver a final evaluation, and winners will be selected based on the final round scores.

## Rule 2. Registration

To be considered for the competition, interested teams must submit all registration materials, including CVs and all team information, by the registration deadline. After all registration materials have been received, teams selected to compete will receive invitations and competition materials. Teams registering late may be considered at the discretion of the Competition Director, space permitting.

**Rule 3. Eligibility**

All students currently enrolled in an undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, professional, or law program on the date of the registration deadline are eligible to compete. There is no explicit major, coursework, or prior experience in cyber conflict necessary to compete, but successful applicants will have a strong link between cyber conflict policy and their current academic interest.

Students with an interest in cyber conflict and policy from around the world are invited to apply to compete. However, the Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge cannot guarantee any funds to support team travel and accommodation expenses. Applicants are encouraged to inquire about funding from their home institutions.

## Rule 4. Team Composition

Each team must include at least three and no more than four students. There are no requirements for team composition based on the majors or education level of team members. Each team must also recruit a faculty member to act as their team coach and mentor. While coaches are not required to take part in the competition event, their participation is necessary to ensure that all teams have access to assistance in crafting their responses.

## Rule 5. Pre-competition Preparation

Background information (“Instructions and Intelligence Report 1”) for Round 1 will be distributed at on December 3, 2018. This information will be distributed to all teams after participants have completed registration and selected teams have been notified. For Round 1 of the scenario exercise, teams will prepare both written and oral policy briefs based on a response to the initial scenario intelligence report (see Rule 1).

## Rule 6. Team Selection and Notification

## Teams will be selected based on registration materials submitted in accordance with Rule 3. Selected teams will be notified via e-mail of their invitation to the competition.

## Rule 7. The Scenario Exercise

The competition will focus on a cyber-attack scenario described through various intelligence reports. The exercise encompasses tasks, both written and oral, that challenge students to respond to the political, economic, legal, technical, diplomatic, and security challenges created by the evolving scenario. At all stages of the competition, scenario information and tasks will be distributed in a manner that ensures all teams have an equal chance to prepare.

##

## Rule 8. Structure

The competition will focus on a single cyber-attack scenario described through various intelligence reports. The exercise encompasses tasks, both written and oral, that challenge students to respond to the political, economic, and security problems:

*Round 1*

Teams will be provided with a detailed scenario background packet that sets the scene for the fictional cyber-attack. Teams have three tasks for Round 1:

**1. Written Policy Brief (due no later than 5pm Central Time on Friday, January 4th via email attachment sent to** **ali.prince@austin.utexas.edu****)**

Your first task is to submit a written brief **(500 words maximum)** explaining the key facts and issues the scenario raises and identifying and assessing policy options the U.S. government might pursue. Be clear regarding the advantages and disadvantages of those options, and be sure to justify a recommendation from among them. Be clear regarding the grounds and confidence levels associated with your analysis.

**2. Oral Policy Brief (Day 1)**

On the morning of the first day of the competition, all teams will participate in separate oral presentations to panels of judges. The aim of these presentations is for your team to articulate your policy options and justify your recommendations, and above all to show depth of understanding and professionalism in responding to what likely will be a large number of questions from the judges. Do not expect to simply hold forth without interruption; the way you handle those questions is the most important element of the oral policy briefing. *Note: You may not use PowerPoint or any other presentation aids apart from the “decision document” mentioned below.*

**3. Decision Document (Day 1)**

As part of the opening round, each team must submit a single-page (one-sided) “decision document” designed to accompany and support the oral presentation described above. The document should be designed with an eye towards helping busy senior officials to quickly grasp your team’s analysis and recommendations. Indeed, the judges will be given precisely 2 minutes to read it before your presentation begins; tailor the document with that at the top of your mind.

*Semi-Final Round*

After the advancing teams are announced, participants will receive another intelligence report. This intelligence report will describe some change in, or escalation of, the original scenario and entail new problems for the actors involved.

* *Oral Cyber Policy Brief*
	+ Teams will be given 10 minutes to present their response regarding further changes to their policy recommendations, followed by 15 minutes to answer direct questions from a panel of judges.

*Final Round*

After the advancing teams are announced, participants will receive the final intelligence report detailing further changes to the scenario and will be provided with a very short amount of time to use the new information to revise their policy responses.

* *Oral Cyber Policy Brief*
	+ One at a time, each team will meet with a panel of judges. The teams will present a 10 minute presentation of their reaction regarding further changes to the scenario and their policy recommendations, followed by to 15 minutes of questions from the judges.

## Rule 9. Permissible Assistance and Cheating

Before the competition, teams are encouraged to seek outside help to develop their policy briefs. Teams are expected to rely on their coaches in particular to help develop and revise their policy ideas for the competition.

During competition events, when teams are presenting or answering judge questions, no outside assistance is allowed for teams. This includes a prohibition on assistance or involvement by coaches during those sessions. However, teams may confer with their coaches during the breaks between rounds and stages.

Teams will not be allowed to use electronic devices such as cellular phones and computers during the competition events when teams are presenting or answering judge questions. However, teams may use electronic devices such as cellular phones and computers during the breaks between rounds. Paper notes are highly encouraged at all times during the competition.

Cheating during the competition will not be tolerated and will result in the immediate disqualification of a team. All teams are expected to comply by the rigorous standards of academic honesty in place at their home institutions. Any team suspected of cheating may be subject to immediate disqualification. The home institutions of disqualified teams will also be notified of the disqualification.

## Rule 10. Judges

Each round of the competition will be judged by a panel of three cyber policy experts. To standardize scoring and encourage consensus, all judges will score the teams based on a common grading scorecard in accordance with Rule 13. Judges may vary between sessions and rounds subject to their availability.

## Rule 11. Observers, Media, and Broadcasting

A limited number of observers may be present at the event. Every effort will be taken to ensure that they do not disturb or assist any of the participating teams in the competition.

The Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge reserves the right to partner with the media to provide live coverage of the event via broadcast or internet livestream. Additionally, members of the press may be present to cover the event in person. All participants in the event and observers in the event are expected to conduct themselves in a responsible and professional manner.

## Rule 12. Timekeeping

Competition staff will manage a clock to keep track of time limits for the presentations. Teams will be kept advised of the time using a “green-yellow-red” system of cards. At the five-minute mark a staff member will display a green card to the team; at the one-minute mark a staff member will display a yellow card; and at the expiration of time, a staff member will display a red card. A penalty will be assessed for teams exceeding the time limit.

## Rule 13. Team Evaluation and Scoring

All teams will be evaluated based on five main dimensions of their responses: *understanding of cyber policy; identification of key issues; quality of analysis in developing policy-response options and making a recommendation among those options; communication skill; and originality/creativity*. These dimensions will be scored based on a common grading scorecard and instructions shared by all the judges. The resulting numerical scores will be used to determine the winners of each round.

At the conclusion of each round, teams will be provided specific, detailed feedback on strengths and areas of improvement for their policy and presentation skills.

Grading scorecards and guidelines will be distributed to all teams in advance of the competition.

## Rule 14. Elimination

In the event a team is eliminated, they are invited to stay engaged in the rest of the competition as observers. Eliminated or not, all teams are welcome and encouraged to take part in the networking functions, speeches, and other events accompanying the event. Please note that eliminated teams are still eligible for some of the prizes and awards to be offered (see Rule 15).

## Rule 15. Prizes and Awards

In addition to the main prize of the competition, the Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge will, at its discretion, award additional prizes for outstanding achievement during the course of the competition. The categories of prizes to be offered will be announced before the date of the competition. Teams will also be eligible for awards based on their final standing in the competition.

## Rule 16. Notification of Rule Changes

The above rules are provided for planning purposes only. The Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge reserves the right to alter the rules based on logistical and technical considerations. In the event of changes to the competition rules, a new version of this document will be posted and distributed to teams before the start of the competition. All participants must be familiar with the rules before participating in the competition. As teams will be evaluated based on a combination of written and oral tasks, a thorough understanding of the rules is important to success.