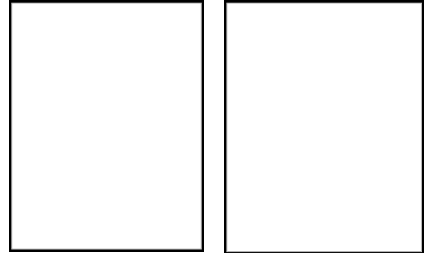




(U//FOUO) Culture Shock: NSA from the Perspective of Summer Interns

FROM: [REDACTED] (left photo) and [REDACTED] (right)
NETA2007 (Summer Intelligence Analysis Program) participants
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(U//FOUO) *Editor's intro: What do college students -- whose views of NSA are based on press reports and Hollywood movies -- experience when they report to work at Fort Meade and see the **real thing** ?*



(U//FOUO) Being idealistic young interns, we were excited about the big find we had just made. We were explaining the trail of SIGINT to our project lead, [REDACTED] so eager to get it all out that we barely stopped for breath between words.

(S//REL) "We found this woman, Nadia Lnu, and she's our target's wife, so we're trying to track his movements that way."

(U) [REDACTED] slowly began to smile as we spoke and finally asked, "Wait... what is her name?"

(U//FOUO) We repeated, "Nadia Lnu, we're not sure if that's how you pronounce it, though."

(U) [REDACTED] burst out laughing and did not explain himself for what seemed like an eternity. We, the starry-eyed interns, just stared blankly at each other, wondering if this longtime NSA-er had finally cracked. All we could say was, "What? What's wrong?"

(U) At last he said, "Spell it."

(U) We responded hesitantly, "L-N-U."

(U) "That means 'last name unknown.'"

(U) We fell quiet and we just hung our heads in embarrassment, knowing the story of our rookie acronym mistake would soon be public knowledge to all of S2I6.

(U) This is just one example of how interns who come to the Agency motivated to soak up all the knowledge they can usually fall flat on their faces on more than one occasion. Acronyms are only one small challenge that interns like us face throughout the 12-week intelligence analysis summer program at the Agency. The NETA2007 Intelligence Analysis Summer Intern program is hosted by the Intelligence Analysis Skill Community (IASC) and the Senior Intelligence Authority (SIA) every year. Twelve undergraduate students are chosen from nearly 800 applicants nationwide, and we spend the summer before our senior year learning about SIGINT tools and working in pairs on real-world analytic projects.

(U) On the very first day we arrived, we were hit with culture shock. For instance, when we stepped onto the solemnly quiet elevator, an older gentleman turned to us and asked if we were new. We answered yes -- we must have been wearing our insecurities on our sleeves.

(U) All he replied was, "The only thing you need to know is we don't talk in the elevators; and the extroverts look at **other** people's shoes." All we could think was **what have we gotten ourselves into?** Since that incident, every intern in the NETA2007 Summer Intelligence Analysis Program has become acutely aware of how noisy we are in the elevators compared to traditional NSA employees.

(U) As members of the Intelligence Analysis Program, we expected to come to work this

summer and have all the facts and figures readily available at our fingertips. We pictured data flying through cyberspace at supersonic speeds, helping us catch terrorists in the blink of an eye.

(S//SI//REL) Little did we know, you cannot simply hack into someone's Facebook account and steal all their photo albums. You also cannot access any Agency tool you want; but rather, there are hours of coursework and multiple government authorizations involved. Open source research is not as effortless as it seems in the outside world -- especially when you are accustomed to the speed of your stylish MacBook at college.

(U//FOUO) We **had** imagined the formidable NSA Police greeting us every morning at the gate with their large submachine guns. So, there was no disappointment there. However, we also visualized work stations with some of the most advanced computer systems conceivable and high operating speeds, which turns out is not quite the case. So, we pretty much expected the entire Agency to look like the NSA/CSS Threat Operations Center (NTOC). After viewing all the popular media that depicts the NSA as the embodiment of Big Brother, we also did not expect regulations on targeting US persons to be so strict. We kept waiting to hear about the **ultra** secret -- a mythological level believed to be above top secret -- product line that is permitted to target domestic communications.

(U) Some interns starting out at the NSA expect to be swallowed up by a spooky Big Brother organization but, instead, we find that we are cheerfully welcomed into the government. And, to our surprise, the welcoming committee wasn't wearing trench coats and sunglasses! Interns at the Agency are provided with an immense support network. From the person who interviewed you for the position to your peer mentor and project supervisors, there are plenty of people to turn to. We also have to admit that we did not expect everyone to be so accessible to young interns and willing to help us learn the ropes. NETA2007 also differs from other internship programs because of the way students are encouraged to work together and interact with one another, even outside of work. The Intelligence Analysis Interns develop a deep sense of camaraderie, which improves our overall experience at NSA.

(U) Unlike other undergraduate internships, we are not just sitting in class and fetching coffee for a higher-up employee all summer long. We expected to be let loose to "run barefoot through the ether of raw SIGINT," as the Angry Lawyer from OVSC1800 ("Legal Compliance and Minimization Procedures") would say. Students in the NETA2007 program are exposed to extremely insightful classes that dispel our misconceptions about NSA and teach us how the SIGINT process really operates. We learn about deep-dive research techniques using both open source methods and cutting-edge Agency tools. We work as intelligence analysts for various product lines of our choosing and make a real contribution to their mission. In fact, any office that felt they could use an intern was able to submit a project for consideration and we make it our job to tackle that problem whole-heartedly.

(U) What we are trying to express is that the NSA can be an intimidating place for a young intern. We were initially overwhelmed with a five-page long list of acronyms, a diverse array of tools with baffling names, and a challenge to overcome our assumptions about what we thought the Agency did. However, it is also an extremely rewarding place to work. With ample room for movement throughout different offices and so many diverse targets, a college student thirsting for knowledge would be hard-pressed not to find something that interested them.

(U) In our opinion, it would be hard to get that rewarding feeling of defending our country anywhere other than the NSA. Sure, we might hide quietly in the background and never be famous, but that feeling of fulfillment from work is hard to replace. And, as [REDACTED] would say, who doesn't love doing the "happy happy joy joy dance of discovery"?

POC: (U//FOUO) NETA2007, Summer Intelligence Analysis Program
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