

People

CSI Classroom: Adrian Wagner's Cybersecurity Quest

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An unidentified body is pulled from the Hudson River, clutching a drenched cell phone. What to do?

Analyze the device using the high-level math, computer, and crime scene investigative strategies that many New York City students are developing, thanks to KPMG's **Adrian Wagner**.

The Manhattan-based manager of Electronic Data Discovery in the Office of General Counsel is the chief architect of a computer forensics* and cybersecurity course offered by the country's largest school district.

Sponsored by the [Justice Resource Center](#), which promotes law-related educational programs, the class breaks educational barriers while introducing youngsters to potentially lucrative careers.

CSI and Such

"The kids first come around age 14 because they like crime shows. But once they're involved, they realize there's something here for them and they find they can do this," notes Wagner.

The lessons encompass everything from computer operating systems to criminal law to sophisticated hacking; crime-solving strategies that reach many youngsters right where they live.

***Computer forensics is the process of identifying, preserving, analyzing, and presenting digital evidence in accordance with what is legally accepted in a court of law.**



Wagner mentoring two of his high school students through the Justice Resource Center.

"A lot of these kids have had, or know others who've had, encounters with the legal system," observes Wagner.

By interesting a new population in forensics, he hopes to take a first step in addressing the lack of diversity facing many urban police departments. Just as powerful, he intends to familiarize youngsters with fields where demand is high, wages are solid, and labor supply is low. From 2010 to 2014 alone, cybersecurity-related job openings doubled.

Volunteer work

Wagner credits growing up in a working class Pennsylvania town, the son of local college professors, with making him "empathetic very young."

As a volunteer, he had already worked with a local women's shelter and other social justice organizations before finding JRC. But when they sought his advice in devising instructional materials for forensics courses, he found the resources sorely lacking.

"There were no textbooks and no materials to work with. Nothing. So I just sat down and started writing," he says.

The resulting 20-unit curriculum fosters many skills new to high schoolers, including the ability to recover the contents of a submerged cell phone.

"I learned early not to lecture to high school students in NYC. So I engaged them through stories, using the same narrative style of television shows. They're so eager to solve

crimes they don't worry about the difficult math or the computer science," says Wagner.

Thankfully, he can draw countless anecdotes from his own experiences.



Some of Wagner's former students participated in the International Moot Court competition, held every two years in The Hague. The students acted as public prosecutors and defense attorneys, arguing a fictional case before the International Criminal Court at the Peace Palace.

Wagner studied art history at Princeton, won a fellowship to New York's Whitney Museum, pursued an NYU master's in museum sciences and worked at a law firm to pay the bills, where he found surprising parallels between forensic and curatorial work. Fascinated, he switched gears, became a licensed private investigator, and set to work.

From Curation to Crime

Among other highly visible projects, Wagner helped gather evidence at the World Trade Center after 9/11.

When a recruiter suggested joining KPMG, he was intrigued by the prospect of new and different problem-solving challenges. He arrived in 2011 and joined OGC in 2014, quickly earning praise.

"Adrian translates complex technical data in a way that makes people comfortable and creates better understanding. He has the perfect knowledge and personality to do this work," says **Ronald James Etinger**, Advisory Legal & Compliance executive director and Adrian's PML.

JRC educational director Carolyn Morway agrees, saying, "I wish we had more experts like Adrian to help improve students' educational experience."

But Wagner says he is the fortunate one.

"This is a dream come true. I love the work and the values at KPMG and I love working with kids; helping them focus, establish goals, and gain a new sense of empowerment. I am so lucky."

written by Sue Treiman



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