

User Story:

How Cybersecurity Instructor Venkata Bhavana Repalle uses **ACI Skill Labs** with her students at Indian Hills Community College

As a graduate student, **Instructor Repalle** experienced the labs firsthand. She saw how a well-designed virtual environment could bring Cybersecurity skills to life. When she joined Indian Hills as a cybersecurity and systems administration instructor, she brought that experience with her. **"I saw how they are so useful for students,"** she says. **"So I implemented them in my courses."**

She teaches network security, ethical hacking, advanced networking, TCP/IP fundamentals, and security fundamentals — and ACI Skill Labs runs across all of them.



The Challenge:

Making complex tools accessible for students

Cybersecurity instruction is full of tools that are challenging to explain and harder to demo in real time. Splunk is a prime example. Instructor Repalle taught it in her security fundamentals course, but the dashboard, the log structure, the way it all fits together — some students weren't connecting with it from lecture alone.

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Some students were not able to quite catch it," she says. "So I used the ACI lab which has the Splunk concept in it — how Splunk works, what the dashboard looks like, how they can see the logs of an activity.

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Assigned as independent lab work, it gave students time to sit with the tool, move through it at their own pace, and actually observe what a log looks like in context. "That actually gave students an idea of how the Splunk tool looks and what I mean by the logs," she says. That kind of reinforcement — lab as an extension of lecture — is how Instructor Repalle integrates Skill Labs--mapped to course objectives, making sure what students are doing in the virtual environment directly supports what they're learning in class.



The Solution:

A safe place to get hands-on

For courses like ethical hacking, the virtual environment isn't just convenient — it's necessary. Students need to work with real tools: network scanners, packet analyzers, exploit frameworks. The question is always where to do it responsibly.

Instructor Repalle sees the labs as that answer. **"It's a safe place to play around,"** she says, **"and it's legal — preventing students from doing something unethical outside the classroom. We don't want that."**

The labs integrate directly with Blackboard, making grading automatic. Instructor Repalle also uses the dashboard actively — tracking time spent, checking screenshots, and using the masquerade feature when she needs to view a student's progress directly.



Results:

Students who become problem-solvers in real time

Student feedback at Indian Hills has been positive. What students mention most is that the labs don't just walk them through steps — they explain the tools, the context, and the purpose of what they're doing. That clarity makes the labs useful beyond the assignment itself. One student put it plainly: some challenges were easier, some were harder — but the harder ones made them actually think about how to solve the problem.

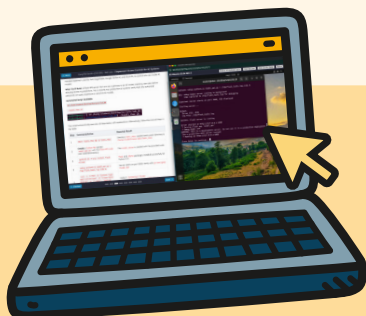


Looking Ahead

Instructor Repalle is already reviewing the AI labs for the coming year — foundational and applied AI, SecAI+, the upcoming advanced security labs — as the next logical extension of her curriculum. It's the same instinct that brought her to ACI Skill Labs as a student: find the tool that makes the concept real, then put students in it.



It's not easy to explain each and every tool every single time," she says. "So you have something as a reference, or you can open the virtual lab whenever you want and experiment. That's what makes it valuable.



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