

04 April 2008

Prof. [REDACTED]
Chair, Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

[REDACTED]

Dear Prof. [REDACTED]:

I am writing you today since Oracle Corporation actively recruits top Computer Science graduates from [REDACTED]. As Chief Security Officer of Oracle, I am responsible for Oracle's secure development program. One of my key responsibilities is the assurance – that is, the demonstrable security-worthiness – of our software. As such, I am keenly aware of the high costs to Oracle and to our customers of avoidable, preventable defects in our software.

We at Oracle have found that many security vulnerabilities can be traced to a relatively few types of common coding errors; e.g., failure to check whether data written to a buffer will fit within that buffer or will overflow it. We have also determined that most developers we hire have not been adequately trained in basic secure coding principles in their undergraduate or graduate computer science programs. We have therefore had to develop and roll out our own in-house security training program at significant time and expense.

Security flaws are widely recognized as a threat to national security and to the privacy and financial well being of individual citizens, in addition to the costs they impose on us and our customers. Therefore, we are working with other leading software vendors and the US Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense to ensure that basic security training is incorporated into the accreditation standards for Computer Science academic programs. Moreover, we are supporting the efforts of the SANS™ Institute, a non-profit security research and training organization, to develop examinations for computer science graduates that measure knowledge of secure coding principles and practices. We believe that the ability to recognize and avoid common errors that can result in catastrophic security failures should be a core part of computer science curricula and that the above measures will foster such change.

We strongly recommend that universities adopt secure coding practices as part of their computer science curricula, to improve the security of all commercial software, and ensure that their graduates remain competitive in the job market. In the future, Oracle plans to give hiring preference to students who have received such training and can demonstrate competence in software security principles.

Yours Truly,

Mary Ann Davidson
Chief Security Officer
Oracle Corporation

Cc: Dean [REDACTED]