Hackers Often Seen As Mischievous Craftsmen
(KAIR/K-State Audio News)--Computer hackers can often be viewed in a negative light, but a Kansas State University researcher says they can also be looked at as being sort of a mischievous craftsman.

Kevin Steinmetz, a criminologist who studies hacker culture, says it's hard to put hackers into just two groups, good and bad. "I'm not really one to use the terms good and bad, but what I can say is there are those who are malicious and predatory. There are those who are socially helpful. There are those who are curious and creative and friendly or any combination thereof. It's hard to essentialize them into different groups."

Despite what appears to be an increase in hacking activity, Steinmetz says he is not that worried about it. Saying that "I have a sense a lot of the threat that we're constantly inundated with...that we're constantly made to fear...is overstated, at least in part. There is a threat, but it's not like there's something waiting in the bushes every moment to technologically victimize us."

Steinmetz is also very optimistic because the hacker community has done a lot that's socially acceptable. He says that "If you enjoy Apple products, well guess what? Steve Wozniak, in particular, was an early hacker. And, even if we're only talking in terms of security, to some degree, there's an argument that hackers even benefit us in security. Some get into this area called penetration testing. Their job is to probe company databases...government databases...and find the security holes."

Steinmetz adds that most people do very little to protect themselves against a hacker, and that the easiest way information is ever compromised is through a weak password. A security system, he says, is only as strong as it's weakest link, and in most cases, passwords can be that link.

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