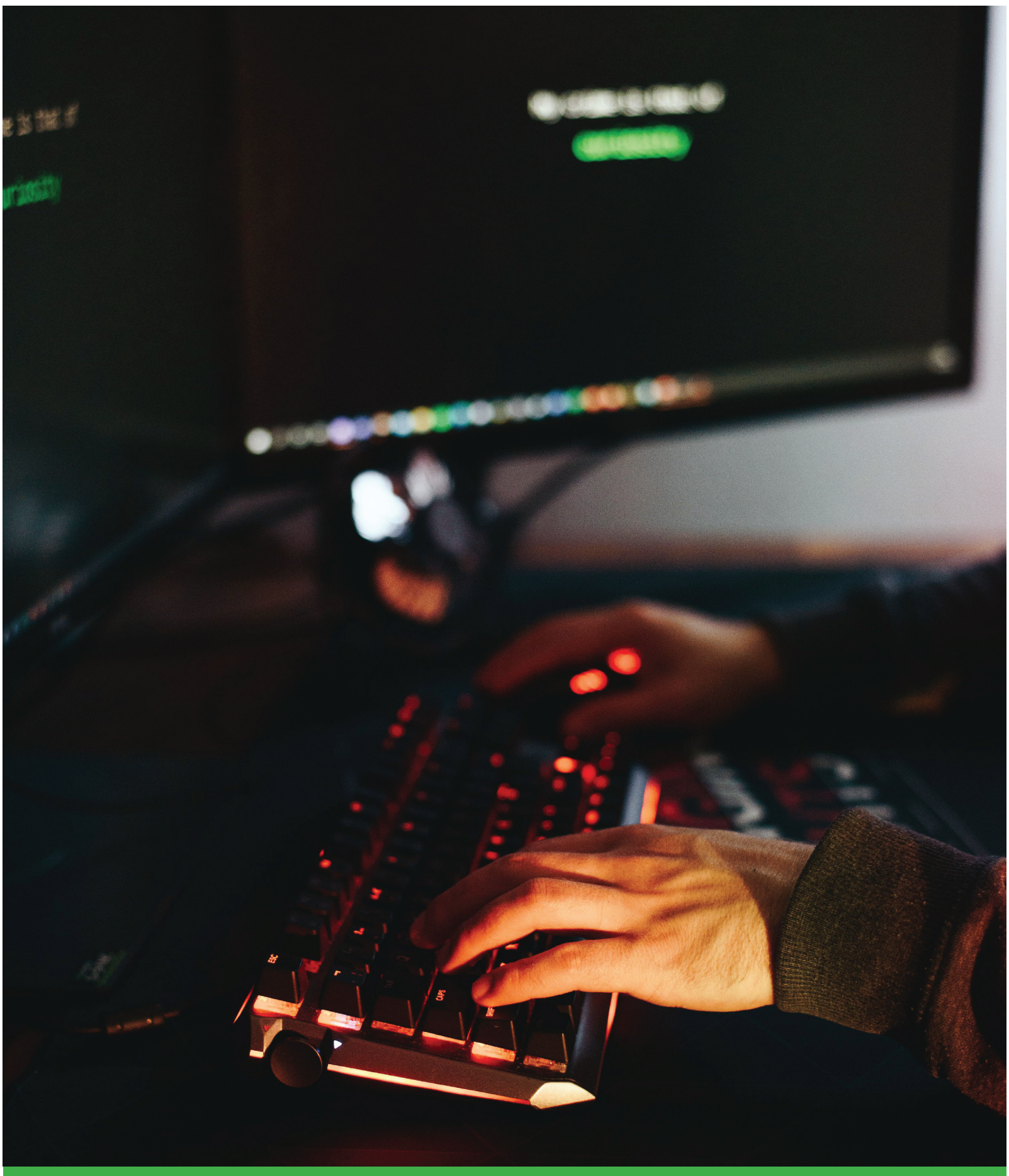
News

UConn eliminates use of text messages for Duo Verification

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Hands typing on a keyboard with two monitors in the background in a dimly lit room. UConn experienced multiple cybersecurity incidents over the last several years.

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The University of Connecticut will eliminate text message authentication through Duo Push on Jan. 4, 2027, requiring students to use the Duo Mobile app or a physical security key.

Duo uses multifactor authentication, requiring users to verify their identities through more than one factor before accessing university accounts. UConn began requiring two-factor authentication in 2022 to combat accounts being compromised, including those resulting from students reusing passwords across multiple websites.

According to UConn's Knowledge Base, "SMS is an outdated authentication method that is increasingly vulnerable to threats such as interception, spoofing and SIM swapping."

The elimination of the text message option follows a 2024 warning from the FBI that hackers allegedly linked to China had infiltrated American telecommunications systems, potentially allowing them to intercept text messages, including authentication codes.

Hackers can also use phishing attacks, sending fraudulent verification messages to trick users into disclosing account information.

Unlike SMS authentication, Duo Mobile supports encrypted communications and push notifications, reducing exposure to certain attacks targeting text messages.

Another vulnerability is SIM swapping, in which a hacker convinces a mobile carrier to transfer a victim's phone number to a SIM card under the hacker's control, allowing them to receive the victim's text messages.

Students who choose the Duo Mobile option must download the application, which does not require access to personal photos, contacts or text messages.

Instead, the application may request permission to send push notifications, access the camera to scan QR codes and use Google Drive for Android account backups.

Duo also collects information about login locations, authentication times and devices used. The geographic location collected is specifically the city and country users log in from. According to its privacy disclosures, this information is generally retained for one year and is not sold.

UConn has experienced several notable cybersecurity incidents in recent years.

In 2015, hackers breached the university's School of Engineering, compromising the school's servers.

In 2023, the hacker group SiegedSec gained access to the UConn Daily Digest email system and falsely announced the death of university president Radenka Maric.

The group, which has described its members as "gay furries," has previously targeted states restricting gender-affirming care.

When asked by the Hartford Courant why UConn was targeted, an individual claiming to lead the group said the attack was conducted for the "lulz," an internet expression referring to amusement.

The hacker later told the Hartford Courant that the absence of two-factor authentication allowed him to access the university's email system.

UConn Health also suffered a major cybersecurity incident in 2018, exposing personal information belonging to approximately 326,000 patients, including names, addresses and dates of birth.

Approximately 1,500 patients also had their Social Security numbers exposed.

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