NCL Ethical Behavior and Rules of Conduct

Updated October 2022

Ethics Statement

The NCL aspires to communicate and promote an honor code, ethical values and behaviors that are essential elements of the Information Security workforce. We are not here to help people learn to be Blackhats. Rather, we hope to help develop players to become IT and security professionals who can make a difference in our 21st century information, knowledge and innovation economies.

Rules of Conduct

Eligibility Requirements

1. The NCL competition is open to anyone enrolled in a US high school, collegiate institution, apprenticeship, or academic boot camp. The NCL is currently trialing participation from collegiate institutions in Canada.

2. Students participating in the NCL must be at minimum 13 years of age. There is no maximum age restriction to the NCL.

3. Currently enrolled students who have more than 5 years of professional work experience in a cybersecurity role may participate in the NCL; however, their participation will be unranked as the NCL’s core mission is to help students enter the cybersecurity industry.

   1. Unranked Student Players will have access to the same NCL experience as ranked Student Players, but unranked Student Players will not be listed on the NCL leaderboard, thus not eligible for any performance-based awards.

   2. All part-time employment will be considered as 1/2-time experience. Experiences such as internships, apprenticeships, co-ops, and self-employment will be considered as full-time experience.

   3. This requirement only includes specifically cybersecurity work experience - i.e. IT help desk/support and non-cybersecurity roles, for example, are fine to have and would not impact the 5 year cutoff. (This requirement would not impact students who are transitioning from a non-cybersecurity role into the cybersecurity industry.)

4. There are exceptions to this requirement to align with the NCL’s mission of helping students transition into the cybersecurity industry:

   1. Students transitioning from active duty in the US military within the last 3 years and are not yet employed in a permanent, full-time, non-military cybersecurity role (e.g. DOD SkillBridge would be a non-permanent role).

   2. Students employed in purely non-technical cybersecurity roles (e.g. policy only), without prior experience in a technical cybersecurity role, wishing to transition into a technical cybersecurity role.

5. If you have any questions on whether you are above or under the 5 years of professional work experience eligibility requirement, please do not hesitate to reach out to us for clarification. We want to serve as many students as possible while maintaining our core focus of helping students enter the cybersecurity industry.
Professional Conduct

1. All NCL participants, including players and coaches, are to behave in a manner befitting professional cybersecurity practitioners during all NCL activity including Games, practice and preparation, meetings, etc. Professional conduct is expected throughout all communications with the NCL community of players, coaches, ambassadors, and members of the NCL management team. This includes all Game responses, choice of handles, images, email, voice, chat, surveys, and social media.

2. Policies and regulations for the NCL Platform Provider – Cyber Skyline (aka the NCL Stadium), and other host sites apply throughout the Games and must be respected by all NCL participants.

3. Activities such as alcohol and drug use, swearing, disrespectful or unruly behavior (including online, e.g. communications on Discord or Slack), sexual harassment, improper physical contact, violence, or willful physical damage have no place at NCL events and will not be tolerated.

4. Challenges may intentionally or unintentionally reference real organizations or individuals. You may not call, email, contact, or harass the referenced individuals in any ways.

5. Intentional or malicious violations of the rules, as determined by NCL representatives, may be deemed unprofessional conduct and subject the violators to disciplinary actions.

6. Players behaving unprofessionally may receive a warning from the NCL representatives for their first offense. Players may have a penalty assessed against their individual/team score, be disqualified, and/or expelled from the NCL Game/Season for egregious rule violations or for subsequent violations following a warning. Players expelled for unprofessional conduct will be banned from future NCL Games for no less than 12 months from the date of expulsion.

7. NCL representatives observing spectators, and individuals other than players, behaving in an unprofessional manner may warn against such behavior or ask those misbehaving to leave the physical and/or virtual space entirely.

Individual Game Conduct

1. Players are forbidden from accessing or attempting to access another player’s machine, or account.

2. Players participating in the NCL Individual Game must do so without assistance from anyone, including other players and coaches, from the start of the Game to the end of the Game. All private and public forms of communication (including but not limited to, phone calls, emails, chat, texting, directed emails, forum postings, verbal and non-verbal conversations, requests for assistance, social engineering, etc.) with other players and coaches, that would help the player gain an unfair advantage, capture a flag or solve any of the puzzles, are not allowed and are grounds for disqualification and/or a penalty assigned to the appropriate player.

3. Players are free to examine any target systems. Attacks or other offensive activity against any other player’s systems or the NCL systems is forbidden and will not be tolerated. Any player performing offensive activity against other players’, or the NCL’s systems, will be immediately disqualified and expelled from the Game.

4. If there are any questions or concerns during the Game about whether or not specific actions can be considered offensive in nature, contact the NCL representatives before performing those actions (see Section M for contact information).

5. You DO hereby have express permission to attack any asset designated as an NCL Game “target,” so long as you abide by the Game rules and terms of this rules document.

6. The designated NCL Game targets are hosted by Cyber Skyline, expressly on the domain and subdomains of cityinthe.cloud. No other domains or assets of any variety should be attacked.

Team Game Conduct

1. Players on the same team may and are encouraged to help one another during the Team Game. They may engage in all forms of communication and collaboration. This does not apply to players on different teams, even from the same institution or organization. Otherwise the Individual Game rules apply.
School Representatives

1. Each team must have at least one coach available throughout the length of the Team Game to help organize and assist the players. The coach should be a faculty or staff member of the institution the team is representing. In those instances when the team meets in a virtual environment, the coach must also be virtually available in that environment.

2. Once the NCL Individual Game and NCL Team Game has started, coaches may not coach, assist, or advise an individual or their team until the completion of that Game.

3. Coaches must not interfere with any other individual or team.

4. The coach, or any non-team member, must not discuss any aspect of the NCL Game, specifically Game tasks, configurations, operations, or individual/team performance, and must not attempt to influence an individual or team's performance in anyway.

5. School representatives are assigned through the process of coach pairing within the Cyber Skyline platform. Coach pairing must be completed during the registration period. To maintain the integrity of the NCL events, a player's failure to associate with a coach on the Cyber Skyline platform will result the forfeiture of that player's ability to submit an appeal should any incidents arise.

Local (Player & Team) Internet and Site Usage

1. Use of Internet resources such as FAQs, how-to's, pre-existing forums and responses, and publicly accessible company websites, are permitted for Game use, provided there is no fee required to access those resources and access to those resources has not been granted based on a previous membership, purchase, or fee.

2. All Internet resources used during the Game must be freely available to all players.

3. Where allowed, public Internet activity and access will be monitored, and any player caught viewing inappropriate or unauthorized content will be subject to disqualification and/or a penalty assigned to the appropriate individual/team. For the purposes of the NCL Games, inappropriate content includes pornography or explicit materials, pirated media files, sites containing key generators and pirated software, etc. If there are any questions or concerns during the Game about whether or not specific materials might be considered unauthorized, contact the NCL representatives before using those materials.

4. The Game network is publicly accessible, not a protected, isolated environment; as such, NCL representatives are not responsible for the security of any information, including login credentials, which players place on the Game network. It is suggested that competitors NOT use credentials in the NCL environment that are mirrored from any other system.

5. Any local on-site mechanisms that interfere with Game system access or the accuracy or functionality of the scoring engine or manual scoring checks are exclusively the responsibility of the player/team. This includes but is not limited to Internet connectivity, firewall rule, Intrusion Detection/Prevention Systems, Network Access Controls, and other player-side defensive actions.

Scoring System Attacks

1. **DO NOT**, under any circumstance, attack the NCL Game or scoring systems. This includes, but is not limited to, launching automated scans or tools targeted towards the scoring system, attempting injections, altering targets, or attempting to manipulate data stored within the scoring system. Players found manipulating, or attempting to manipulate, the scoring system will be immediately disqualified from the current and future NCL events.

2. If you are ever unsure if your actions will result in an attack against the scoring system, open a support ticket with the NCL platform provider - Cyber Skyline.
Disabling or Altering Challenges or Puzzles

1. DO NOT under any circumstance purposely disable, alter, or damage a challenge/puzzle and/or target in a manner that will disrupt the solution or structure of the puzzle or gameplay. This includes, but is not limited to, changing core system configurations (passwords, firewall rules, services, etc.), manipulating any network settings, and/or altering, introducing, or removing vulnerabilities on the system. Altering public Internet resources related to puzzles is not permitted.

2. Puzzles and targets break, but do not purposefully attempt to limit or disable another player’s ability to complete a challenge.

3. Some challenges require you to make changes to a system (adding files, executing commands, exploiting vulnerabilities, etc.). Players should limit their interaction to the scope of the puzzle - don’t change the way the challenge works.

4. Players found manipulating the puzzles and targets may be disqualified from playing in current and/or future NCL events and/or have their scores altered.

Challenge Artifacts

1. Challenges may include associated data or computer resources necessary for the solving of a challenge (such as images, text log files, network traffic data, code snippets, web servers, computer programs, raw binary data, etc.). In some instances, artifacts may be made available for download. In others, artifacts may be provided directly within the Cyber Skyline platform.

2. Some artifacts may resemble malware or contain information mimicking real cyber-attacks. While these artifacts have been designed to be as inert as possible, artifacts may affect player’s computer environments and may trigger an antivirus response. It is the responsibility of the player to take the proper precautions to interact with challenge artifacts in a safe manner. NCL and its affiliates are not responsible for any damages arising from player’s use of challenge artifacts.

3. When artifacts are provided directly within the Cyber Skyline platform, it is the responsibility of the player to interact with these artifacts in a non-damaging way. Artifacts modified or damaged by the player may or may not be reset at the NCL/Cyber Skyline operation team’s discretion.

4. In some instances, publicly shared artifacts will be automatically reset to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to access the artifacts.

Collusion or Flag Sharing Violation Repercussions and Actions

1. DO NOT provide any other player with answers to challenges and DO NOT accept answers to challenges from any player, coach, or other source during a Game. Questions or artifacts should not be posted during or after a Game.

2. A proprietary algorithm and method for determining flag sharing may be employed by the NCL. Participants agree to accept the judgment and findings of the Commissioner as to whether flag sharing has occurred. These findings will become final and binding after the available appeals process has been exhausted.

3. If a player is identified as sharing flags or for rule violations, post-Game adjustments will be made. This may result in point deductions for the player or team in question, relegation of the player or team into an unranked bracket (disqualifies the player/team for any prizes, scouting report, or certificate of participation), or a ban from NCL.

4. Again, during NCL Team Game, players from the same team are encouraged to work together to solve the challenges.

Laws

1. DO follow the laws in your area and the United States.
2. **DO NOT** under any circumstance violate any laws or the terms you've agreed to in this Rules document.

3. Violations of Local, State and National laws will be reported to law enforcement.

4. **DO** follow all institutional policies, including your institution's honor code.

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**Scoring**

1. Scores will be maintained by the NCL representatives and will be shared as soon as possible after the Game. The NCL will do its best to periodically update a leaderboard with running totals provided during the Game. Any (individual or team) action that interrupts the scoring system is exclusively the responsibility of that individual/team and will result in point penalties/disqualification. Should any question arise about scoring, the scoring engine, or how they function, the Team Captain and/or School Representative should contact the NCL representatives. Leaderboard scores are subject to change after the end of the competition based on analysis of results.

2. In the spirit of learning for the NCL competition, players and teams should use critical thinking and independent research to solve the challenges. Players and teams may **not** brute force the answers as a scoring strategy. Players and teams found to be brute forcing answers or otherwise attempting to circumvent the NCL Rules of Conduct may be deemed as unprofessional and unsportsmanlike conduct and may be subject to a penalty or a point deduction at the sole discretion of the NCL. If you have any questions about a particular conduct, you are welcome to open a support ticket for a clarification.

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**Questions**

1. Prior to the Games, team captains and/or coaches are encouraged to work with NCL officials to resolve any questions before the Game begins or before any other deadlines to allow time for resolution steps. All questions can be submitted as a Support Ticket within the Cyber Skyline platform.

2. During the Games, players may not conduct social engineering attempts against NCL officials or support staff. Players may ask clarification questions in which a clarification may be provided at the sole discretion of NCL officials or support staff. To ensure a fair competition environment, players asking questions in a form that utilizes the support system as an oracle to pre-check answers will constitute a social engineering attempt. Players will be provided a warning notice, without penalty, after an attempted social engineering event against NCL official or support staff, further violations of this rule after the warning notice may be subject to a penalty or a point deduction.

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**Nondisclosure**

1. The NCL management team strives to make being part of the NCL community an enriching experience. All members of the NCL management team are open to feedback, suggestions for improvement, and conveying areas of concern or dissatisfaction.

2. Participants are forbidden from publishing, posting on the Internet, or publicly communicating details of the competition. This includes the disclosure of puzzles and their respective artifacts and solutions for both individual and team play as well as the gym.

3. Participants are forbidden from publishing, posting on the Internet, or publicly communicating speculation on the content of the NCL Gym, Individual or Team Games, nor speculation of the performance of any other individual or team, nor speculations concerning different possible outcomes.

4. Institutions may publish, post on the Internet, or publicly communicate news stories of a general nature about the NCL, and may also enumerate participating individuals, teams and winners.
Appeals & Due Process

1. To process an appeal, individual(s)/team(s) must have a coach from the beginning of the season. Otherwise the right of appeal is forfeited. Appeals by any individual(s)/team(s) must be presented by email to the NCL Team (appeals@nationalcyberleague.org) within 48 hours of notification, and must include your coach’s name and email.
   - It is possible that an appeal during an event could have some initial solution that might prevent or allow continued play by a player or team.
   - If a player or team is allowed to continue after an appeal, any further violations will accumulate and may result in a point penalty and/or disqualification.

2. The NCL will act on the appeals within five (5) days of initial individual/team appeal.

3. Individuals/teams might appeal:
   - Accuracy of a ruling.
   - Introduction of new information about the case. Appealing party must provide data to support their contention.
     NCL representatives will be the final arbitrators for any appeals or questions arising before, during, or after the Game.

4. Rulings by the NCL representatives and Game results are final after the appeals process has been exhausted.

5. In the event of an individual(s)/team(s) disqualification, the player(s)/team(s) must leave the Game environment immediately and will be barred from re-entry.

6. Disqualified individuals/teams are ineligible for individual/team awards, certificates of participation, Scouting Reports, scholarships, etc., as defined by the NCL.

Sanctioned Schools Policy

The Sanctioned Schools Policy is NCL’s last resort in dealing with schools with repeated major Rules of Conduct violations. A school may avoid becoming sanctioned if their faculty refers the major Rules of Conduct violations to their student honor enforcement office. The outcome determined by the honor enforcement office will have no bearing on the NCL Sanctioned School Policy. Sanctioned schools will have their players unranked during the NCL Games for the duration of their sanction.

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