A unique and groundbreaking collaboration between SUNY Orange, SUNY Ulster, SUNY Rockland and SUNY Sullivan has created the OURS Consortium, merging the four colleges’ emergency services and first responder degree programs in a true regional approach to education.

Technology and ingenuity are the two biggest advantages the United States has in preserving its homeland security and fighting the many faces of terrorism during the coming months and years, according to Michael Chertoff, director of the nation’s Department of Homeland Security.

It is those two traits that are at the foundation of the OURS Consortium, a cutting-edge, four-college collaboration involving SUNY community colleges in Orange, Ulster, Rockland and Sullivan counties. Through the consortium, students throughout the Hudson Valley will be able to take classes and receive degrees in emergency management, fire protection science, paramedic services, human services and cyber security. Graduates will be able to seek jobs with professional
fire departments, police departments, emergency service organizations, and in private industry as emergency management specialists in the Hudson Valley and in the metropolitan area.

The consortium, announced in September 2006, is the product of the creative collaborative visions of each of the participating colleges’ presidents, the strong support of the region’s state legislators (John Bonacic, Bill Larkin and Thomas Morahan) and the yeoman, behind-the-scenes legwork of numerous faculty members and administrators.

For SUNY Orange, taking the lead in developing the consortium’s cyber security program allows for a unique partnership that carries numerous advantages.

“Our graduates will be ready to take leadership roles in major fire, police, emergency service and security departments throughout the region,” asserts Dr. William Richards, SUNY Orange president. “They will have a background in management, understand the principles behind providing emergency services and be able to apply their knowledge in the ‘real world’ in the most dangerous situations.”

“What is special about this consortium is that, from day one, everyone was aware that we needed to collaborate and not compete. It’s about working together, and I think that the leadership involved in the consortium is doing a wonderful job,” comments Dr. Sue Deer, associate vice president for the health professions. Deer represents the College on the Consortium Executive Committee, joining vice presidents Dr. Catherine Chew (academic affairs) and Dan Bloomer (administration).

“Independently, each of the four colleges offers very good programs, but together we can jointly offer tremendously viable programs,” Deer adds.

Marianne Collins, consortium coordinator, hails the partnership as “groundbreaking” and admits many within the SUNY system are watching, which means the consortium’s organizational structure, management and fiscal efficiency could become a pilot for future groups to follow.

She adds, “The consortium grew out of a recognition that every community in the Hudson Valley has a need for well-educated and well-trained first responders. The community college system has been a key part of that training for many years.”
By utilizing video teleconferencing and online study, along with traditional classroom work, students in Orange County will be able to complete first responder-specific degree programs at the other three colleges without having to commute to those campuses. An initial $4 million dollar start-up grant acquired by Bonacic, Larkin and Morahan has supported the creation of the consortium and the initial technological upgrades necessary to facilitate video teleconferencing on the four campuses.

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By merging their ingenuity with advanced computer skills, students throughout the Hudson Valley can build a rewarding career in cyber security thanks to SUNY Orange’s emerging program, or they can utilize the OURS Consortium to become a valued member of one of the varied emergency management and first responder professions that will be critical to securing our homeland in the future.