

Dr. Greg Thomas

From Organized Crime to GEOINT

Mindy: [00:00:00] Welcome to Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. It's like coffee with an analyst, or it could be whiskey with an analyst reading a spreadsheet, linking crime events, identifying a series, and getting the latest scoop on association news and training. So please don't beat that analyst and join us as we define the law enforcement analysis profession.

One episode at a time.

Jason: Thank you for joining me. I hope many aspects of your life are progressing. My name is Jason Elder, and today our guest has 26 years of law enforcement analysis experience with an additional 12 years of Teaching. On top of that, he is currently the director of Geospatial Intelligence at Penn State University, and he was the Intel Analyst supervisor with the Pennsylvania State Police.

He has a PhD from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania in administration and Leadership studies. He is also currently the journal editor for IALEIA's in Telescope Newsletter. Please welcome Dr. Gregory Thomas Greg, how we doing?

Greg: Good. [00:01:00] Good. Thanks Jason. Thanks for having me back. It's always great getting a chance just to chat with you and to maybe talk about some old, old stories and old topics and cover some new issues that are facing analysts today.

So I'm looking forward to it.

Jason: Yeah, and for the listeners, Greg is not a stranger to the show. He was part of the IALEIA at 40 series that we've done, believe it or not. I think that was three years ago that, we did that. , But I will put a link in the show notes for those that may be interested in that series.

But it is great to have you back on the show today, Greg.

Greg: Well, like I said, it's, it's good to be here. Looking forward to the conversation.

Jason: Alright, well let's start from the beginning. How did you discover the law enforcement analysis profession?

Greg: Well, I started as an intelligence analyst back in 1988.

And that, that was at a time where there weren't many intelligence analyst positions, especially not at the [00:02:00] state or local level. But just sort of to back up a little bit I, I got my bachelor's degree in criminal justice. And, and again, at that time there were not degrees, you couldn't go to college for intelligence analysis.

So it was criminal justice and, I went another year and got my master's. I wasn't ready to get a full-time job yet, so I went full-time and, and got a, a master's and, and after I got out of my master's, I, I knew I wanted to get into law enforcement, into the criminal justice area, and I, didn't want to so much do the patrol officer, the uniformed officer on, the street.

I, I liked after, especially after my master's, I liked the idea of doing the research, digging in and looking for information doing that, the, the reading and writing. And so I didn't exactly know that there were these intelligence analyst positions out there. I started applying to different agencies and the one that I started, my first, my first job as [00:03:00] an intelligence analyst was with the, it was an agency called the Pennsylvania Crime Commission, and it was a state agency.

And its mandate was to investigate organized crime and public corruption in, in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There were there were special agents who were sworn officers and they were doing a lot of the investigative work, and then there was a small group of intelligence analysts, and that's really where I, I, it just fit right in.

I didn't know that, that that position was out there, but it fit right in with, with my background, with what I wanted to do. And it really just. It sparked my interest in in the whole profession and really jumpstarted my career. So doing the investigations of organized crime, it was really enlightening, really interesting in Pennsylvania.

There a, a long history of, of organized crime and we were really, our, [00:04:00] the crime commission was not, it was an investigative agency, but we were not a prosecutorial agency. Our, our mandate was to report to the state legislature on the status of organized crime to make recommendations, maybe policy changes, maybe new laws, see what's been effective, what hasn't been.

They were really at the time really looking into all aspects of organized crime corrupt organizations criminal entities. So that really got me interested. I was reading all I could on, on organized crime, and it, and it, back then, it's organized crime still an issue. And, and it's, it's not just the traditional organized crime, we were looking at the non-traditional all aspects of, of organized crime.

So we're really breaking some new ground. But also, like I said, Pennsylvania had a long history of. Organized crime. There were traditional organized crime families there, active and looking at not only in Pennsylvania, but impact of organized crime from other states were, were coming [00:05:00] into Pennsylvania, but at, at that time though, we were still using some of the same analytic tools that analysts are using now.

Just different, I would say the same techniques, but different tools are being applied now. So I was really doing a lot of, training learning on my own, learning from other analysts. So that was really how I got into the intelligence analysis field and my, my first job. And it was really like I said, it really just sparked that interest in it.

It became more of a, not just a career job, it was something that I really wanted to continue doing.

Jason: What a fantastic first analyst gig, right? So you mentioned the non-traditional organized crime. What, what were some examples of that?

Greg: The outlaw motorcycle gangs, they were very active in, in the Commonwealth.

We were looking at different Hispanic organized crime. The at the [00:06:00] time, there were a lot of different Asian organized crime groups. Chinese triads, the Japanese Yakuza there was there was also a lot of drug trafficking organizations that were really involved in a lot of violence, a lot of turf wars and everything going on.

So we were looking at those also just trying to think of those were some of the, the, the prominent ones that, that were active at that time? Oh, the, well, there was the the Russian organized crime. It was really starting to make a, a, a presence in, in Pennsylvania and in other parts of the country also.

Yeah. And, and some of these groups that I, that I mentioned to, like I said, these groups, they weren't just active in Pennsylvania. So I was interacting with analysts in other agencies, other organizations. And I think to sort of tie into this

I, I became a member in IE the International Association of, law enforcement intelligence analysts early on in my career, I think I started ilead like the year next year, 1989. [00:07:00] I was, that was wow. When I started my membership. And so that really expanded my network, not only of the other analysts that were out there doing these kinds of investigations, but starting to, to get more training through the organization and that networking and seeing best practices and what worked and what didn't work from other analysts.

So my, my career as an analyst and, and lea sort of have, have gone hand in hand together.

Jason: So since you were a research function, trying to make recommendations on policy and as opposed to being a task force dedicated to dismantling. These organizations, do you feel that that made it easier or harder to do your job?

Greg: Well, , from my perspective, my personal perspective, I liked that because . I was always, I guess maybe, like I said, my background in education, but I was always looking at the [00:08:00] big picture, the taking a strategic focus in instead of a, a tactical outlook. And then I can talk more about more of the tactical side when I talk about what I was doing with the state police in Pennsylvania.

But making these recommendations and trying to look at the long term impacts or implications of organized crime. What are they doing, where are they active? That was really of interest to me. And, and I think it was a value to the Commonwealth for a while, until it wasn't.

That, that's a whole other story of how the, the crime commission no longer came into existence. I think we did our job too well in some aspects, but anyhow. But, but getting to that, like I said, I looked liked looking at the strategic analysis and that big picture and that that organization really, that was their focus.

Jason: All right. What do you think about. When you think back in terms of what you were able to accomplish?

Greg: Well, we, a couple things that we did, we would, one of our, the mandates of the organization was to put out an annual report [00:09:00] on the status of organized crime.

, This was a published document that was presented to the state legislature and it was made available. I can remember to prepare that we would name, names

and identify people. And we had to be very thorough in our documentation of what we found, what we were saying.

There was a strict guidelines on what we could say, how we could say it. And there was a legal review. There was a team of lawyers that were going over the information with us. But once that information was out there and published, like I said, it was documented. And I still have copies of all of the publications of the Crime Commission and, like I said, people were named in there that typically they, they were known criminal elements. So a lot of times it wasn't a surprise, but it was just the, the, the, the thoroughness that, than the detail that was was involved in, in that kind of a process that was a little bit different.

I mean, doing criminal [00:10:00] investigative work and, and for prosecution, there's still a lot of detail. You still have to go through the, the legal review is basically the, the trial and the court system. So but it, it really was just those are some takeaways that I had from that agency,

Jason: man. Yeah, we need to, get the group back together.

Maybe maybe take on the Epstein files or something like that.

Greg: That'd be while. It's interesting if you Yeah, if you've looked at those files. I think there were some some interesting link charts that were done using some different software at, at the time, whenever I started talking about link charts, we were using the templates with the to hand draw a lot of these link charts.

And and like I said, the, analytic techniques are pretty much the same, but there's just different tools out there, different tool sets doing telephone toll record analysis that was looking at you were looking at long distance phone calls basically because that's all the phone company captured at the time.

Yeah. And and it was just [00:11:00] because they were billing people for those minutes and those that wherever they were called. Now it's. A whole different aspect or, or when you're looking at phone records now it's, it's every call, every text, every every data point basically is captured.

But back then it was a little different and we were using spreadsheets to try to to capture that data and analyze it. Now there's, again, different software out there, but it was the same techniques that we're using now.

Jason: No, that's, that's wild. Hmm. All right. So from there then take us through the path that you took.

Going from the commission to the Pennsylvania State Police?

Greg: Yeah, it was actually at, at one point the, the crime commission was no longer funded. Mm-hmm. And so the analysts and, and, and staff that worked there were basically transferred into another agency. And for a while, a another interesting side of my my career, I was a a welfare fraud investigator for a [00:12:00] brief time and working in, in Philadelphia in, in some of the best neighborhoods of Philadelphia when you're talking about welfare fraud and, and doing those kinds of investigations.

So, mm-hmm. I transferred in there for a while, and that was a, a different experience. It was more of a like the street investigative kind of work. It was really digging into to data and records. But then eventually I, I was able to transfer into the Pennsylvania State Police and. Another interesting story about that was that prior to myself and several other analysts starting at the Pennsylvania State Police, and I believe that was in probably around 1996 that I started with the state police.

But up until that point, the state police was using sworn officers, troopers in the analytical role. And they were they would realize they would get some an or some, some troopers in there who had some investigative experience and they would get them trained get them to start working as ants, but then in a [00:13:00] couple years they would get promoted or transfer out.

So they were looking to try to get more civilians in there. And I can remember the one sergeant, I guess he was a corporal at the time, he contacted me and he asked, do you still have those job descriptions from those intelligence analysts at the Pennsylvania Crime Commission? Mm-hmm. And I was like, well, yeah, I, I probably have them in my file somewhere.

And so they use some of that initial information from the, those analyst positions to. Staff, the intelligence analysts as civilians at the state police. So I was one of the first civilian intelligence analysts at the state police. And again, this was back in the, in the late nineties. And we had a small group of, of analysts that were working a lot more tactical work of obviously investigative support, still looking at the the, the from my perspective, the analysts were still looking a lot at, at the, conspiracies, the criminal organizations. And we were starting to get [00:14:00] into more of the domestic extremist groups and, and things like that. And then by the time of when nine 11 happened, everything just

really expanded with the profession and the field. And we were like I said, there was a small group of us as analysts working at that time.

And within a year we had doubled. And then we were tripling our, our size and, and we put up a, became the Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center. And we were working around the clock staffing this intelligence center. And it's still in operation today. And at that point I became an, an analyst supervisor and was starting to train, hire analysts.

Train analysts, and, and get them familiar with the, the positions and. We were really growing and expanding, not just with our compliment, but we were outgrowing our space. We were, you know putting together new facilities and within, within the headquarters and [00:15:00] getting new equipment, and again, new software, new tools to use.

So that was really a lot of growth and, and it just, I, I think that sort of mirrored what was happening around the country also. Mm-hmm. As far as the intelligence analysis profession several reports came out that data was not being analyzed or it was, it was there, but it just wasn't being looked at.

And so there was a big push to, to hire more intelligence analysts. And I was on the, the forefront of that bringing them in. And I guess this could be a good time too, to talk about not only was I training the analysts. At the State police, but also through IALEIA. IALEIA realized that there was, I, it wasn't just IALEIA at the time, but several organizations realized that, that, that these analysts were coming on board and they needed some of that basic training.

And that was whenever IALEIA, along with the law Enforcement Intelligence Unit, LAIU, the National White Collar [00:16:00] Crime Center and the the risk projects, the the different regional information sharing system. We sort of got together, formed a consortium, and that's when we started to put together the, the foundation of this, the Fiat,

Jason: mm-hmm.

Greg: The foundations of intelligence analysis training program that was being run by this consortium. And we thought, oh, this is a good way to, to get a lot of analysts trained initially, and and see how this program develops and progresses. And, and to my surprise, I guess it shouldn't be to my surprise, but this, this foundations of intelligence analysis training is still being tied.

It's still going strong mm-hmm. Throughout the, the country. And it's being taught internationally also. And as a fellow of fiat instructor, I'm sure you can attest to the value of that, program and that training. And like I said, I, was surprised that it lasted that long and it's gone through several iterations

and I was just happy to be a part of that and, and see it's still going [00:17:00] so strong.

Jason: Yeah, and I think that's where we met actually. I want to say we did a fiat together. Was it in New York? Pa?

Greg: Well, there

Jason: was one in, or maybe it was Harrisburg.

Greg: Harrisburg. There was, there were a couple done in Harrisburg.

Yes. I think that's where that's, you're right. We put together one there. Yeah. But that was again, again to, to try to get the analysts, these basic skills that they need and these tool sets that, that are very valuable and still being taught today.

Jason: Now, and I always think back because my career started exactly two weeks before nine 11. Okay. My, I, I was hired on at Haida, Washington, Baltimore Haida exactly two weeks. Oh, okay. Before nine 11. So that's my only experience. Pre nine 11 is two weeks, my only comparison is it's like buying a house in a neighborhood, like before it gets really popular.

Like you got in, you got in early, and then five, 10 [00:18:00] years later, there is just so much more expansion that you would've never thought of when you first started. You talked about the hiring of analysts, so many positions being created, and then you also talk about the training that goes hand in hand with that, that it would be nothing for you to easily go through a week of training every other week if you, were given the opportunity.

There was just so much training out there. Most, and a lot of it was free. Right? Right. There was just so many grants, so many opportunities to network, share information, and learn the craft.

Greg: Yes. Yes. And that was not the case prior to that. I mean, there, there was training for analysts, but it was, it was pretty sparse.

There were several federal agencies that had some training programs and there were some private companies that were doing training, but, it was not as, definitely not as available as it is today.

Jason: So as, as a supervisor you talked about the [00:19:00] rate of change and how quickly it.

, Build up from your perspective as a supervisor, talk about the, the challenges that, that you faced and how you overcame them.

Greg: Well, it was several challenges, and this is any, I think any first level or or mid-level supervisor, you're getting pressure from above to, produce and then you're getting pressure from the people you're supervising.

So you're, that middle man, that middle person. And that can be, there can be just, just inherent challenges in that, but, in the law enforcement, the analyst field. I guess because I had the experience prior to all this big change and, and all these, these things going on, I was sort of not necessarily so much a voice of reason, but a sort of a counterpoint to, to what was going on.

I would try to maybe like let's slow down and let's think about these things. Let's put together a a process and mm-hmm. And let's try to be, [00:20:00] be, be an analyst, try to analyze how we're gonna put this Yeah. Together, how we're gonna work this. And yeah. And I think I mentioned before that my initial experience was always more in that strategic perspective, and I always tried to bring that in, even when you're trying to, to work that next case or that next critical incident.

I always fought or, or tried to advocate to get, let's just have some analyst that can, can look at this big picture or look at take a strategic evaluation of, of what's going on in the Commonwealth in Pennsylvania and look at the, the data and the information. And so I was, was always trying to be sort of a, a counterbalance, I guess to the, to the, to the rush of everything that was going on.

I mean, there, there was definitely the need and, and there were a lot of incidents that analysts got put into and really were valuable. But I always liked, like I said, tried to, to be that, to, to balance it out with some more strategic overviews.

Jason: And I think it's interesting [00:21:00] when, when you think about it and you think about the civilian versus sworn.

And just the, some of the rapid growth that we've mentioned in the aughts analysts coming in, being fairly new and also developing standards. I mean, that's, when you think about the sworn side, they're taught stuff that's been in place for hundreds of years, right?

I mean, right. It's their, their, their standard operating procedures get tweaked, but the most of the, the core sworn concepts have been taught for generations. And here you have this generation of analysts with this huge hiring boom, this huge training boom. And a lot of police departments gave the analysts the keys to say, okay, develop your own standards and your own processes .

And they, I feel because of that, this adapting to change [00:22:00] for analysts and civilians, there's a easier path for them as opposed to the sworn side that people criticize for not being, being maybe a little bit reactive instead of proactive.

Greg: Right, right. I, I think you have a point there too.

And, and there was a lot of, it was good and bad because we were developing new processes and new procedures on how to do this. Mm-hmm. And, and we were being looked at as, as what, what is going on? What is your analysis? What, what is your assessment of this? But there, there still needed to be, and you, you, I think you.

You brought it up too, the, these standards of these guidelines to, to follow to so that so especially not only just within your own organization, but when you're comparing across other organizations mm-hmm. And agencies and what their data is and what their reports are and, and what their analysis is.

So that's, that's another thing I wanted to bring up is back in, in 2003, there was a a document put out called the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan. [00:23:00] And this was as a result again of the the aftermath of nine 11. And it started to, to put together some guidelines , on criminal intelligence sharing.

And one of the results of that was that IALEIA was asked to. Develop standards for law enforcement analysts and it was a request through the National Criminal Intelligence sharing plan. And so in 2004, IALEIA put out a publication called the Law Enforcement Analytic Standards, and it was really. I mean, IALEIA is, it's a nonprofit professional organization.

It didn't have any vested interest in this, but it tried to put together best practices and tried to set some standards. What, how much training should an analyst

have? How much professional development should they have? What, what should the basic elements of a an entry level training be?

What, what should agencies look for when they're hiring analysts? Mm-hmm. So we put together this, [00:24:00] do I IALEIA, put together this document in 2004, and it was updated in 2012 to add some, just to, to refine some things. And I, I'm on a project right now with IALEIA. We're in the process of updating these analytic standards again, and we're really trying to.

Do a couple things. Initially it was, it was a law enforcement analytic standards, and it was geared primarily towards what's happening in the United States. Mm-hmm. Well, now we've seen how analysts have been are being used all over the world. And, and I, Lea is an international organization, so we're trying to add the international perspective into these standards.

And we're also trying to broaden it beyond the just the law enforcement realm. I mean, it'll cover law enforcement, but other homeland security, public safety, private industry involved in analysis. So we're, really updating these standards. [00:25:00] So that, that publication should be coming out later this year.

But Oh,

Jason: good.

Greg: It's just again IALEIA is trying to stay on the forefront of what's going on, and this was something that we saw that that that could be updated and expanded on. So.

Jason: Yeah. And I'll, put in the, show notes links to the ones that are out there.

So,

Greg: okay.

Jason: Listeners have a, have an idea, can get more information on that and be on the lookout for the update coming out later this year.

Eliann: This is Dr. Eliann Carr from the Ellensburg Police Department here to talk about the first of its kind, the Crime Analyst Census survey. This is an opportunity for crime analysts from around the world to be able to share information on the demographics that make up the field, be able to look at the relationship between commission, non-commission, and how we navigate that

relationships in our career field, and also to look at training opportunities and development that will help us foster the opportunities for [00:26:00] growth and development both personally and professionally.

If you're interested in taking the survey, you're welcome to go to the link in the show notes below, sure that your voice is heard and included in the data.

Jason: All right. So this brings us to your decision to go get a PhD. I. So let's talk about that transition from the state police to going back and getting your PhD.

Greg: Well, while I was still at the state police I decided I was going to go back to school again. So this was after I had been out of college for 25, 26 years. And I would always joke, well, occasionally joke with my wife, I think I'm gonna go back to school.

I think I'm gonna go back to school. And then one year I just said, I'm gonna go back to school. It was, it was just time for me to not necessarily move on, but I wanted to pursue something different. Mm-hmm. And so while I was with the state police, I was taking classes and it was night classes and working through my [00:27:00] dissertation and all that, that was another, I guess, five or six year process to actually get.

Accomplish that and to get my PhD. And even at that time, I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to do with, with my PhD, but I had also been teaching part-time at some different colleges, and I had been doing some teaching with Penn State University. They have an online program, so it, it really fit in well.

I was, I was teaching a class online for them and I was just finishing up my PhD and they had just opened up a position, a full-time job at, at the university. And it just sort of fit right in with, with where I was professionally and personally. And so I sort of just transitioned, transitioned into to the position of teaching geospatial intelligence analysis for Penn State and, I even told them at the time my background was not in [00:28:00] geography or GIS or making maps. And, and I do remember at the interview they said, well, we, we have people who can teach how to make the maps and how to use the GIS. We need to teach how to analyze those maps and make sense of that information.

And because of my experience as an analyst and, and doing the intelligence work that, that's what I, that's the value I brought into the program. And I've really tried to stress that. I, I I say we don't just teach the geospatial intelligence. We teach the geospatial intelligence analysis component of it.

So I, I try to bring in the, the the analytic tools and techniques, the intelligence process into the coursework that we're, that we're teaching here at, at the university now.

Jason: Before we get into the, geospatial. You talked about, the idea of wanting to go back to school and get your PhD.

Talk a little bit about your decision on your, topic for your dissertation [00:29:00] and, what you concluded in your dissertation.

Greg: Well, yeah, and, and my, my PhD was the, the, the program was in administration. Mm-hmm. And so it, it wasn't it, my, my my, my master's degree was also in public administration, so.

Mm-hmm. But having that, that PhD, it was really, the, I was looking at, I, I tried to focus it on, on policing law enforcement. When you're, when you're doing the dissertation you have specific classes you have to take, you have to go through that. But when you're in your dissertation, you have a lot more freedom to, to really pick your topic along with your advisor and your committee.

So my, my focus was on the influence of Homeland Security, on policing, on how these how law enforcement agencies might have changed or their, their techniques or their focus might have changed because of this influence or the, the, well, I guess, yeah, the influence of homeland security. The, just the, the focus it seemed like law enforcement really shifted its [00:30:00] focus for a while anyhow, on, on homeland security, looking at terrorism, looking at the threats.

So I wanted to really study that. And my dissertation was. Half of my six years was just doing that. Mm-hmm. And it was doing the research, collecting data, doing a survey analyzing, doing the statistical analysis of the results. And, and then again, that, that was actually, the fun part for me, and I think it is for a lot of analysts, is digging into the data and, and starting to make sense of it.

And then you have to report it and write up the findings of it. So that was, that was the, the dissertation process. But the, findings were that Yeah, because it's a dissertation. You wanna take off like one small chunk of this area so my, my survey was all of the police departments in, in Pennsylvania and.

Pennsylvania has 67 counties, but it has 1200, well, I guess at the time I think 11 or 1200 police [00:31:00] departments. Holy cow. And some of them are one man, one person police departments, but there were a lot of police departments

in Pennsylvania. So, so that was my sample. It was a survey of all the police departments in Pennsylvania and, and there were some interesting results.

There were some influences of how things have shifted, how not so much policy shifts, but , the focus of, of law enforcement. You, you could see that there was that shift towards more homeland security initiatives and efforts. And I think now, and this was again back in by 20 14, 20 13, whenever I was doing my research,

Jason: mm-hmm.

Greg: And I think a lot of those sort of have become embedded in. Operations now with policing and law enforcement.

Jason: Yeah. Well and back to the aftermath of nine 11, the, the Patriot Act went into some of those, and the commissions did find that they needed a pathway of communication between local, state, and federal [00:32:00] agencies.

That wasn't. Believe it or not, wasn't there before. Like even if somebody who knew something or heard something, there wasn't a clear path to where, what they should do with this information.

Greg: Exactly. The best, the best way was sometimes through I can remember the law enforcement intelligence unit, LEIU, they were sharing information to member agencies on organized crime members.

IALEIA you could, something that's been invaluable for me in my career is that that membership directory of IALEIA, you could now it's online, you can just type in a person's name. You can get their contact information and, and it's a person who's already in the, in the, in the field, in the discipline and you can start to reach out that way.

But it was a lot more informal than the structure, than the the fusion centers and the intel centers and the real time crime centers that are out there now. Hmm.

Jason: Definitely. Well, let's, , let's move on then to geospatial projects because you already mentioned the, the interview process and, and whatnot, and I did, I did [00:33:00] find it funny on your CV that it is the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences that you fall under.

Correct. So, not, not only are you not a geographer that, I'm guessing, that you're not a geologist either.

Greg: No, no, that would be accurate. And again, the way the, , the program developed the, there has always been a strong GIS and geospatial analysis program at Penn State University.

Mm-hmm. And it it'ss really the online program that I'm teaching in has been around for 26 years. They've been doing this online teaching. They have a really, a good process and a good system in place for teaching online. It wasn't something that just came about because of, of COVID. Everybody switched to we're gonna be teaching online now.

But this is really asynchronous remote teaching and instruction. And so they always had this strong program and there were a couple faculty members that had some [00:34:00] prior military experience and wanted to get into more of the. The intelligence the applied intelligence and, and the, the combination of geography and, it was, it, it initially started out and a lot of focus was on the federal government, the, the intelligence community. There's a couple big agencies there's the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, and so the, those were a lot of I think our. Students initially, but when I came in, again, I, I think they, they saw the value and, and what I could bring in and providing more of that, an analytical aspect.

And so it sort of evolved. It's, it's still a small niche within the whole portfolio of, of the program that is offered online with our geospatial courses. But we do have several courses that, that focus on geospatial intelligence analysis. Students will learn the foundations of, of geospatial intelligence how it fits into the intelligence [00:35:00] community, the military, homeland security, law enforcement emergency management, emergency preparedness.

There'll be some courses on using. Geographic information systems. The, the, the GIS that's out there we, we put together some, some interesting new courses too that we have one course that is sort of like, I call it spatial Social Network analysis. Network analysis has become a really strong technique that analysts use and, and our program just brought in that spatial element because even in a network, there are still locations where things happen, where people are, even if you look at a cyber network, there are still these nodes, there are these physical locations.

There is a. The location where the, attack initiated, where the target is. It, there are still these physical components of these networks. So we really bring that in. And I I should back up that these are all graduate level courses, so mm-hmm.

We're teaching a lot of times there are [00:36:00] practitioners, people who are already in the field in some way in the discipline. And one of the final courses they take is a capstone course where they are actually using the tools and techniques that they learn throughout the program and applying that in a real world situation where they come up with a research problem and are out there finding data sets and using the tools that they learn.

So it's, it's really an applied program. And I think sort of bringing this back around that I have seen, and I, I think others have also noticed that a lot of the intelligence analysts now are using. That spatial component. I've, I've seen job descriptions and postings out there now where some experience in, in GIS and specific GIS software is, is listed on the the job posting, you know?

Mm-hmm. It's, it's not required, but it's preferred to have that kind of experience or, or education already. So I don't think it's a stretch to say that a [00:37:00] lot of the intelligence analysts out there are using geospatial analysis, and I would argue that law enforcement has been using geospatial intelligence before it was even called geospatial intelligence.

When you think of the, the precincts that would have the maps on the wall with the different color push pins, you know? Yeah. That's, that's looking at what happened where and, and using that to try to anticipate or predict what's gonna happen next. That's the, basically some of the foundations of geospatial intelligence analysis.

So,

Jason: yeah. And I, and I mentioned in the prep call the other day, it is interesting 'cause I, I feel that GIS and law enforcement has gone through these . Ups and downs in terms of its popularity. It's definitely been a situation where it's like analysts were spending a lot of time geocoding manipulating data, and then a lot of it became automated and I think there was kind of a less [00:38:00] activity with GIS but I feel that it's even now become a new high given some of the tools and techniques and computer.

Power that we, now have and are able to use. So it is a, I feel that it isn't a little bit of a renaissance, even though that might sound odd to some of our timers. This has only been like 30 years. Right?

Greg: Yeah. Well, the other, you are right though the, the power of, of the, the software and the hardware has really changed the, the tools that are out there, but also the data, the sources of data now so much data out there, it has this, this location information in it or, or even if it's not there, I mean, looking at, I can looking at investigative reports now some of them if you do traffic stops anymore, it, the latitude and longitude is put right there or the, the address of where it happened.

Or you can do free text searches on data now and find [00:39:00] location the streets or towns or cities or states you can use that. There's even tools out there. Now we're starting to get into artificial intelligence and machine learning. But they can identify just by looking at a picture where that picture was.

And so that, that location information is, is, is really embedded in a lot of the different data sources now. And I think analysts are realizing that it can be valuable or invaluable in some cases.

Jason: Yeah. Now, so with your work at Penn State, is it primarily just academic focus or do you get assigned tasks and projects that go beyond academics?

Greg: A a lot of it is academic. I was brought in to, to teach. Mm-hmm. I do some research projects with some. Some of the different, like I said, different federal agencies that mm-hmm. That we have students that, are in our program and we've done [00:40:00] some research with them. Some of my other colleagues are definitely more involved in the research component.

But I, do a lot more of the, the teaching side. And well, the teaching side and, and I guess we're always looking for new ways to teach and new ways to implement these, these tools into our teaching. So there is some research involved there, but it's not the applied research that you're probably thinking of.

Jason: And you mentioned AI and, i've talked to a lot of different folks now getting their perspective on, ai, and I'm, I'm just curious to get your take and in terms of , how it's being handled in the classroom. How is it be, is it being embraced? Is it kept at arms length?

How are you seeing it there at the, university?

Greg: Well, there, there are, and, and again, these are the, the program I teach in is. Is primarily, well, it's all graduate students. Yeah. And so they have a little

bit different perspective. I, the, the, there is a challenge within [00:41:00] the, not only Penn State, but other universities mm-hmm.

How it's being implemented, how it's being used by students in the classroom. Mm-hmm. And I think there's also a push for faculty to be incorporating or embedding it into the coursework mm-hmm. So that students are encouraged to use it, but in a different way. And, and this involves some change in you know.

You can't, if you're assigning a, a, a, a, a research paper for a student to write. Mm-hmm. AI can really be useful in that for a student, but you have to provide, make the research project in a way that students can use ai but not have it be written by ai. Yeah. And also in taking quizzes and exams, AI can be used for that too.

So you have to get away, you have to look at different ways to evaluate and assess students realizing that they're going to be using AI and also to be using ai, [00:42:00] incorporating it in. And we have some, we have incorporated into some of the classes that, that are in our program, especially the GEO program.

We talk about analysts should be using ai. But there are limitations, there are restrictions. There are, ethical issues on when and how to use ai. So we, we focus more on that. I, the, the classes that I teach or that are in our program aren't the like the programming types of courses on, on the how to implement ai, but how and analysts should be using it and the, the, how to incorporate it into some of these techniques.

If you're looking at for example, doing link analysis, you can use AI for that. Mm-hmm. You can use AI to do the communication analysis looking at, at phone records and things like that, but there still has to be that analyst, that human component that, that human interaction.

Jason: Yeah.

Hey, when in doubt go back to pen and paper. Right,

Greg: right. [00:43:00] Well, I, some, some teachers are having their students. Hand write their a short essay or something. Yeah. And then they scan it and, and submit it. There's a PDF or something, or as a Yeah. As a, an image file. But there's still it's a handwritten kind of document or, or they have a, I, I don't know if too many are going back, but some if multiple choices, they'll hand out the paper and then they'll have to grade them again.

But I think, I think the smarter thing is to look at different ways to assess and evaluate the students using ai. And, and now in, in the field I'm in, they're talking about geo ai, geospatial, artificial intelligence. Mm-hmm. So using AI in, in mapping and using it in GIS. So that's a whole other area that, that we're trying to incorporate and, and embed into our program.

Jason: Yeah. It's interesting. I'm gonna give Mark Cuban credit. I think I heard him say this, that. He [00:44:00] said that , there's going to be such a need for companies to hire staff to implement programs based on what AI recommends. And that, that, that, the idea is that I think his recommendation for college students would be.

Embrace it with ai, with, in combination with knowing a discipline, knowing finance, , knowing criminal justice, knowing government, for instance, and then be able to marry those two, being able to come into an organization, use ai, implement programs that AI is recommending, but know enough about the do's and don'ts and the history of that discipline and that combination is going to be valuable for decades to come.

Greg: Oh, I, I agree. And, and yes, and I think intelligence analysts, if, if they're going to [00:45:00] training or looking for further education, I think, getting some familiarity with artificial intelligence and the how to use it, how to incorporate it, but also some of those, some of those programming skills using the different software applications to do this.

The 'cause the programming will help you with your queries, your searches. Mm-hmm. How to organize the data. It, it, it's, it's not anymore where you're using just spreadsheets and, and databases. It, it, it, it, it's, it's become a lot more advanced. The, the profession in the field has.

So I think analysts today should be looking at, at programming and using artificial intelligence and machine learning. I think those are gonna be valuable skills now, but I still think also that some of the old, the, the the skills that I can remember. Incorporating into the analysts that I was training, you know at the state police the, the critical thinking.

Jason: Mm-hmm.

Greg: The just that thought process, the the the [00:46:00] writing skills, the briefing skills, those are never going to change in, in our profession, in our field. And they're, they're always going to be important.

Jason: Yeah. Well, you have to be, able to catch mistakes. Right, and 'cause I could, ask chat GPT right now to write me a paper on geospatial intelligence to hand over to you.

But I would probably have no idea whether any of what the output was, was right or wrong, unless it was really obvious. But you would get that and laugh at me because I'm like, whoa, there's a lot of mistakes here. Because , it has the potential to make a lot of mistakes. So you, it does have to have that barometer that be able to take the temperature of what is right.

And that's where that other discipline comes is so important.

Greg: Definitely, definitely. And, and, and I, and I've seen, I've used chat GPT and other tools to, to test it out and, and it is getting better and smarter, but some of the responses are still very generic and, and off [00:47:00] base.

So, like you said, yeah, you still have to be able to check it and look at it. I actually had a, one of the assignments in one of my classes is to, to write a paper and compare and contrast these three different authors. So we give them the, the reference to the, to the, to the, the journal article that they have to compare and they have to read it.

And, and so I, I just put that assignment into chat, g chat GPT or one of them. And I asked it to write me a thousand word paper on this topic, and it, it sent it back. And again, it was pretty general in nature. It, it didn't really get into the, to the depth. And that's where I said when you're giving these assignments, make it have some depth or, or have some, the analyst has to provide some recommendations or opinions.

Analysts should do that anyhow. But mm-hmm. But then what I did is I copied that. Response and sent it back into to the large language model. And I said, did, did you write this? And it said, no, it [00:48:00] was written by some other author somewhere. So yes, there is deception in, in the ai and it needs to be fact checked and and evaluated.

Jason: All right. All right. So I, I think this is a, would be a good way. I wanna segue into the advice section and then, I'll come back and finish up with IALEIA. So , let's talk about advice for our listeners and this, could be analysts trying to get into the field, new analysts or experienced analysts.

What, what advice do you have for us?

Greg: , There are, degrees out there, college degrees now on intelligence analysis and criminal analysis. Those are, are definitely, valuable when you're getting into the field. Some agencies, some organizations do look for other kinds of educational backgrounds though.

So but I think getting a a, a good college degree in a relevant field is definitely going to be valuable. I think getting internship experience, practical experience. It might not be. Your, your first [00:49:00] job, even if you're in an agency or an organization, might not be that intelligence analyst position that you want, but mm-hmm.

Getting some and, and getting some experience in another area is not necessarily a bad thing. Anyhow. But getting your foot in the door is important and again, through through internships or, or doing some experiential work while you're in college that's always important. And then doing some showing initiative and, and doing some training or getting some experience on your own to volunteering for different things.

If, if you're in the field already and you're looking to advance, obviously getting some advanced training, taking on new responsibilities volunteering or offering to, to get into some of these more difficult assignments or different projects. Sometimes analysts, I think, and I did see this when I was at the state police, some analysts just get into, they get pigeonholed either.

Themselves or their supervisors just, oh, you've been doing this [00:50:00] for so long why don't you keep doing this? You're doing a good job on this topic area. And I think they just don't have that show the initiative to, to focus on different topic areas that you want to help with investigations or learn new tools and techniques.

I think that's always valuable. And, and if you're so inclined, take on that supervisory, even if it's not a formal official supervisory role try to be that, that team leader or that mentor, those are always valuable skills that will help you advance in one way or another. And I think you mentioned about IEI.

Would like to segue into that because as I, I, as I said before my professional career in the different jobs I had sort of went hand in hand with IALEIA because , I signed up as a member early on. I became involved in, in the local chapter became a president of the chapter, and then I got on the board of directors for [00:51:00] IALEIA and, it really helped me professionally. I got exposed to so many more perspectives. I got to do a lot more travel. I got to go to training and professional development, but then I also got to help participate

in the training, like I mentioned, helping to develop the fiat course and other professional development.

Alea has a professional certification program. Mm-hmm. I was involved in that, helping to, to work through that. There's, Alea has mentoring programs. Alea has , the professional journal that we mentioned that I'm the, editor of. So another plug I'm always looking for. , The journal for IALEIA is, it's really a sort of a bridge between the practitioner and the professional. Mm-hmm. We, we look for that academic research, but we want those practical techniques that analysts are doing , and using. So we're always looking for articles to the, and if you're, interested in.

Learning more about it. We [00:52:00] have a website the Elea Journal website or you could contact me. But we are looking we get academics who are submitting articles. We do get practicing analysts who have best practices or develop new skills. So that's another way to develop professionally.

And it, it, it shows that advancement too. But Ilea has really, like I said, given me a lot of opportunities. So I, I would definitely encourage a new analyst or young analyst get involved in a professional organization and not just as a member, but start to participate and attend things.

Jason: Yeah. For the article I think there's a lots of. Almost every analyst that's probably been around for five plus years is going to have a lessons learned opportunity. Right. A story to tell. , In the intel scope, is there a, a minimum in terms of number of words, or is there a length in involved?

I mean, there is, or is this, these are [00:53:00] opportunities to have something that could be as small as just a couple of paragraphs up to maybe a couple of pages. Right.

Greg: Well, well, yeah. Well, IALEIA has a, a newsletter that comes out. Mm-hmm. And so those are good for, for the smaller, mm-hmm. Articles you know.

Yeah. Best practices an example of different things. Mm-hmm. But the journal is more, it is more a scholarly, you know? Mm-hmm. We don't want anything more than, than like 25 or 30 pages. Yeah. And it should have some, some research maybe if you're not doing the the, a survey kind of thing mm-hmm.

The literature review and, and documenting what you found and, and how it's being applied. But it is a little bit more scholarly than just a,

Jason: Okay.

Greg: Just a, just a newsletter article. But, but, but, but IALEIA does have that also as an opportunity for,

Jason: yeah. So there's definitely a couple different oppor opportunities.

Maybe that would be something that somebody in your similar situation, like maybe they're thinking about going to get a PhD [00:54:00] and getting on a project that is more of a academic level. Paper might give them enough taste to either say, Ooh, yeah, this is for me, or No, this isn't for me.

Greg: Right, right. Well, even, some grad students who have like I said, we have a, what's called a a capstone course. Other grad students might do more of like a thesis kind of thing.

Jason: Mm-hmm.

Greg: That could be the thesis would probably be too big for, for a one of our articles, but it could be paired down and, and tailored to, to fit our publication.

So there, there, there probably are a lot of examples out there that, of, of analysts who have already done something like that, that could be published.

Jason: Good. I you already mentioned the analytical standards. , Was there anything else that you wanted to mention for regarding IALEIA?

Greg: No, those were the main things.

Talking about the, the opportunities that are out there, the annual training events that we have. Mm-hmm. There's there's different training opportunities. Those were the main things I wanted to go over. [00:55:00]

Jason: Okay. So I, I did pluck something off your CV and I'm curious to get maybe an, an update take on what you've written.

, You co-authored a chapter from a, from an ilea book, applications and Intelligence led Policing where theory meets reality and the, the chapter is intelligence led Policing and privacy issues. Right. And this is, this is 2018 that this was published. And so this is the idea of. Of law enforcement and privacy has, has only become more popular today.

So I, I'm curious just to get your take on, based on what your perspective was in 2018 and if it's the same or has changed here in 2026.

Greg: I think it has changed. I think well, I, I don't think the issue has changed. Mm-hmm. There, there is still the need for, for privacy , and security of information.

But [00:56:00] I think there has been a trend towards either people expecting it or accepting less privacy of their personal information. Whether it's because of breaches that have occurred or because of, practices that are being implemented now and, and, and being conducted. But I think it's always still a, a concern I that I would, I think back then when we wrote that and that was a, we took, took an international perspective too because we had some co-authors that were from other countries.

So that was, that was very interesting. I, I I think people should still be, and, and even in law, law enforcement should still be very concerned about how information is being disseminated and used. And, and, and that is really critical also when you're talking about intelligence information, because intelligence information has, has not been vetted as like, like it hasn't gone to court and in mm-hmm.

It hasn't been introduced in, in a trial or in a case. It can still be damaging. And I [00:57:00] think one of the things that's coming out that we're real seeing it right now is this the data, the, the files that are coming out from the Epstein investigation. I mean, a lot of that is private information.

It shouldn't be released the way it is. So I, I, I, maybe this is like just another example, like I said, of it, it being more accepted that it's coming out, that that kind of privacy information is being released.

Jason: Yeah. , It is interesting. I, I even just think about just the cameras.

Like like, I just think that it is just, there's just gonna always be more and more cameras and pretty soon you're not gonna be able to go out your front door without being recorded from the time you're on a public street all the way to wherever you're going.

Greg: Exactly. Exactly.

Jason: I mean,

Greg: and when you're, and when you're out in public, there is not that expectation of privacy either.

Jason: Yeah.

Greg: So, and maybe people don't realize that you anywhere you walk down a block, you're probably being recorded [00:58:00] somewhere by something. Yeah.

Jason: And it's just, I, I don't know. It's, and I think that's just gonna be more. Of the, the, the norm. And you're just gonna have, just like what we've talked about here with all the different data points that we have in geography, you're gonna have all just the same level of opportunities of budding law enforcement up against privacy.

There's just gonna be so many, many more data points and so many questions that need to be answered.

Greg: Yes, yes, definitely. Definitely. So, oh, well talk about the license plate readers, you know? Yeah. That's another example of they're capturing that while you're out there traveling, there's no expectation of privacy, but what can be done with that?

What can be used how, how it can be used. So

Jason: yeah, and it's kind of interesting some states. Will allow it on private property if the property owner gives the blessing, but they won't allow it on the public streets for, for that. So it's, right. It's kind of a little bit odd , some of the rules on [00:59:00] license plate readers.

Greg: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, one of the things I, I can remember used to do as, as an analyst was look at when you had a criminal suspect, you wanted to try to find out what they were doing, who they were associating with, where they were going. I mean, the, the whole pattern of life analysis now has changed, or, or it's just opened up as far as what you could capture on a person.

Jason: Yeah.

Greg: So.

Jason: Hmm. All right. Well let's finish up with personal interest then, and so you are a fly fisher.

Greg: Well, yeah, and I told you this could be a whole other podcast, but yeah, when I moved up to to the state college, Pennsylvania area I had fished when when I was in high school and everything.

Mm-hmm. But I didn't get into fly fishing and moving up into this area. I would say, and I think other people would agree that this area has some of the best, small streams for fly fishing in the country. They're, they're natural springs and small creeks that I, I, I, I really [01:00:00] got into fly fishing several years ago, and I find it very interesting.

I could be out there in the water, just you're obviously trying to catch fish, but it, it's really a chance to, to just maybe forget about some things or, or, or to some other ideas will come into my head I might be working through a problem and just having that escape to be out there in the water for a little bit in a different environment.

, And then some new ideas pop into my head or, some solutions come to mind or sound, or if I sounds, yeah, somebody sends me an, an email. And they want a response. And I don't respond right away. I'll go out into the creek and maybe they'll start to think about, all right, how am I gonna frame this response?

You know? And so I, I really have enjoyed fly fishing as an escape. More of a hobby now. And it's, it's,

Jason: yeah. Well, I, I will say this. You are born and raised in Pennsylvania. I am a little bit disappointed you're calling, you're saying Creek and not C Creek?

Greg: Oh, no. Well, that, that's, I'm not from that part of [01:01:00] Pennsylvania.

Jason: Oh, man. No, I,

Greg: so yeah, if anybody ever wants to come up fly fishing, I have some good five. I'm five minutes from a. A a creek that never freezes over and it's fishing, catch and release year round. So I can be out there anytime.

Jason: All right. Very good. Alright. And Greg, if somebody wants to contact you, what's the best way to contact you?

LinkedIn, or is there an email or address or social media you wanna get out? I

do

Greg: have LinkedIn. I can be reached at well through Penn State. That's not a problem.

Jason: Mm-hmm.

Greg: I have a, an email there. It's gt5@psu.edu and also if you're interested in anything with IALEIA or the journal I'm the editor of the journal, so it's just, journal@ilea.org is that email address, so I can be reached either way.

Jason: Yeah, and we'll put both of those email addresses plus his LinkedIn page in the show notes. [01:02:00] So check those out. Greg, this has been great. Thank you for your time and perspective here today. , This has been really great, catching up and hearing your story,

Greg: so, oh yeah, it's been interesting.

I hope, hope somebody finds it may be interesting and I look forward to any, any feedback or any comments anybody has.

Jason: All right, so our last segment of the show is Words to the World, and this is where you can promote any idea that you wish. Greg, what are your words to the world?

Greg: Well, I, I think your work as an analyst is important and, and you should be passionate about your job and what you do, but you should also be able to find enjoyment outside of work.

Make sure you have that work life, home balance and, and find a hobby. Like, like I said, with fly fishing, that's, that's one for me. But find something that, something else that you're passionate about and interested in. But definitely have that passion and interest in your work, but be able to separate it out.

Jason: Very good. Well, I leave every guest with, you've given me just enough to talk [01:03:00] bad about you later, but I do appreciate you being on the show, Greg. Thank you so much. You be second.

Greg: Yep. Thanks for having me.

Mindy: Thank you for making it to the end of another episode of Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. You can show your support by sharing this in other episodes found on our website at www dot podcasts.

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