

FBI raids home of prominent computer scientist who has gone incommunicado

Indiana University quietly removes profile of tenured professor and refuses to say why.

DAN GOODIN – MAR 30, 2025 3:41 PM |  311



Credit: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

 TEXT SETTINGS

A prominent computer scientist who has spent 20 years publishing academic papers on cryptography, privacy, and cybersecurity has gone incommunicado, had his professor profile, email account, and phone number removed by his employer, Indiana University, and had his homes raided by the FBI. No one knows why.

Xiaofeng Wang has a long list of prestigious titles. He was the associate dean for research at Indiana University's [Luddy School of Informatics, Computing and Engineering](#), a fellow at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and a tenured professor at Indiana University at Bloomington. According to his employer, he has served as principal investigator on research projects totaling nearly \$23 million over his 21 years there.

He has also co-authored scores of academic papers on a diverse range of research fields, including cryptography, systems security, and data privacy, including the protection of human genomic data. I have personally spoken to him on three occasions for articles [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

“None of this is in any way normal”

In recent weeks, Wang's email account, phone number, and [profile page](#) at the Luddy School were quietly erased by his employer. Over the same time, Indiana University also removed a profile for his wife, [Nianli Ma](#), who was listed as a Lead Systems Analyst and Programmer at the university's Library Technologies division.

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As reported by the Bloomingtonian and later the Herald-Times in Bloomington, a small fleet of unmarked cars driven by government agents descended on the Bloomington home of Wang and Ma on Friday. They spent most of the day going in and out of the house and occasionally transferred boxes from their vehicles. TV station WTHR, meanwhile, reported that a second home owned by Wang and Ma and located in Carmel, Indiana, was also searched. The station said that both a resident and an attorney for the resident were on scene during at least part of the search.

Attempts to locate Wang and Ma have so far been unsuccessful. An Indiana University spokesman didn't answer emailed questions asking if the couple was still employed by the university and why their profile pages, email addresses, and phone numbers had been removed. The spokesman provided the contact information for a spokeswoman at the FBI's field office in Indianapolis. In an email, the spokeswoman wrote: "The FBI conducted court authorized law enforcement activity at homes in Bloomington and Carmel Friday. We have no further comment at this time."

Searches of federal court dockets turned up no documents related to Wang, Ma, or any searches of their residences. The FBI spokeswoman didn't answer questions seeking which US district court issued the warrant and when, and whether either Wang or Ma is being detained by authorities. Justice Department representatives didn't return an email seeking the same information. An email sent to a personal email address belonging to Wang went unanswered at the time this post went live. Their resident status (e.g. US citizens or green card holders) is currently unknown.

Fellow researchers took to social media over the weekend to register their concern over the series of events.

"None of this is in any way normal," Matthew Green, a professor specializing in cryptography at Johns Hopkins University, wrote on Mastodon. He continued: "Has anyone been in contact? I hear he's been missing for two weeks and his students can't reach him. How does this not get noticed for two weeks???"

In the same thread, Matt Blaze, a McDevitt professor of computer science and law at Georgetown University, said: "It's hard to imagine what reason there could be for the university to scrub its website as if he never worked there. And while there's a process for removing tenured faculty, it takes more than an afternoon to do it."

Local news outlets reported the agents spent several hours moving boxes in and out of the residences. WTHR provided the following details about the raid on the Carmel home:

Neighbors say the agents announced "FBI, come out!" over a megaphone.

A woman came out of the house holding a phone. A video from a neighbor shows an agent taking that phone from her. She was then questioned in the driveway before agents began searching the home, collecting evidence and taking photos.

A car was pulled out of the garage slightly to allow investigators to access the attic.

The woman left the house before 13News arrived. She returned just after noon accompanied by a lawyer. The group of ten or so investigators left a few minutes later.

The FBI would not say what they were looking for or who is under investigation. A bureau spokesperson issued a statement: "I can confirm we conducted court-authorized activity at the address in Carmel today. We have no further comment at this time."

Investigators were at the house for about four hours before leaving with several boxes of evidence. 13News rang the doorbell when the agents were gone. A lawyer representing the family who answered the door told us they're not sure yet what the investigation is about.

This post will be updated if new details become available. Anyone with first-hand knowledge of events involving Wang, Ma, or the investigation into either is encouraged to contact me, preferably over Signal at DanArs.82. The email address is: dan.goodin@arstechnica.com.



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Dan Goodin is Senior Security Editor at Ars Technica, where he oversees coverage of malware, computer espionage, botnets, hardware hacking, encryption, and passwords. In his spare time, he enjoys gardening, cooking, and following the independent music scene. Dan is based in San Francisco. Follow him at [here](#) on Mastodon and [here](#) on Bluesky. Contact him on Signal at DanArs.82.

311 COMMENTS

STAFF PICKS



jonah

See what's sad is that there could be real national security reasons for the FBI/DOJ actions, but because the pattern lately has been un-uniformed randos detaining people in the streets (and then disappearing them), I'm fresh out of benefits of the doubt for the government here.

If they're the subject of a criminal investigation, say so. If they're not, then explain why nobody has heard from these people in seemingly weeks. Are they green card holders? US citizens?

March 30, 2025 at 7:47 pm

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