



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

# NCITE

NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM INNOVATION,  
TECHNOLOGY, AND EDUCATION CENTER



ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha



**Year 4 Award**  
**DHS OUP Grant: 20STTPC00001-04**  
**Period of Performance July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024**

This report outlines the achievements of the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center in accordance with the Grant Award #20STTPC00001-04 for Budget Year 4, which ran July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

**CENTER DIRECTOR**

**Gina Ligon**  
 University of Nebraska at Omaha  
 6001 Dodge St.  
 Omaha, NE 68182  
 gligon@unomaha.edu

**DHS CONTACT**

**Cory Davenport**  
 Office of University Programs  
 Science & Technology Directorate

The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its education programs or activities, including admissions and employment. The University prohibits any form of retaliation taken against anyone for reporting discrimination, harassment, or retaliation for otherwise engaging in protected activity.

**Read the full non-discrimination statement for the University of Nebraska at Omaha**



For more information, contact the NCITE Center at  
 [ [NCITE.UNOMAHA.EDU](https://ncite.unomaha.edu) ] OR [NCITE@UNOMAHA.EDU](mailto:NCITE@UNOMAHA.EDU)



# CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION**

- 4 LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR  
GINA LIGON
- 5 NCITE OVERVIEW

**ABOUT NCITE**

- 6 NCITE CENTER OPERATIONS
- 8 NCITE CENTER FACULTY

**OUR IMPACT**

- 12 YEAR 4 BY THE NUMBERS

**OUR WORK**

- 15 PUZZLING OUT TERRORISM
- 18 FROM THE BOOKSHELF TO THE WORKBENCH
- 21 BEATING BRAIN DRAIN

**NCITE YEAR-IN-REVIEW**

- 25 ENVISION24 SPARKS  
HOPE, VIGILANCE
- 26 CUTTING THE RIBBON ON THE  
NEXT CHAPTER
- 27 A NEW HOME FOR  
CYBERSECURITY EFFORTS
- 28 LAUNCHING NCITE INSIGHTS
- 29 STARTING THE CONVERSATION

**YEAR 4 PROJECT SNAPSHOTS**

- 31 **THEME 1**
- 31 ANTICIPATING TERRORIST  
TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION TO  
SECURE THE HOMELAND
- 31 CONSPIRACY THEORIES
- 31 MAPPING MILITANTS
- 32 DOMESTIC VIOLENT  
EXTREMIST LANDSCAPE
- 32 MALEVOLENT POTENTIAL  
OF THE METAVERSE
- 33 EXTREMIST MESSAGING
- 33 PROSECUTING TERRORISM
- 33 TERRORIST RECRUITMENT
- 34 ELECTION THREAT-LEVEL MONITOR
- 34 THREATS TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS
- 35 **THEME 3**
- 35 FAMILIES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISTS
- 35 EVENT SECURITY
- 36 **THEME 4**
- 36 TRAUMA IN  
COUNTERTERRORISM  
RESEARCHERS
- 37 COUNTERTERRORISM DATASETS
- 37 TRAUMA IN  
COUNTERTERRORISM  
PRACTITIONERS

- 37 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS
- 38 **EDUCATION AND  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**
- 38 BUILDING CAPACITY AT  
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
- 38 BUILDING CAPACITY AMONG  
BUSINESS STUDENTS
- 38 INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC  
PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCIENCE  
AND SECURITY
- 39 INSPIRING STUDENTS  
WITH WAR GAMES

**OTHER NCITE PROJECTS**

- 40 THREAT ASSESSMENT
- 40 COUNTERING IMPROVISED  
EXPLOSIVE DEVICES
- 40 EVALUATING DHS  
TVTP PROGRAMS
- 41 MANAGING POST-PRISON  
EXTREMISTS
- 41 GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGIES
- 41 NTER OFFICE INITIATIVES
- 42 CHATBOT
- 42 REINTEGRATING FAMILIES OF  
FOREIGN FIGHTERS
- 42 INSIDER THREATS



## DEAR NCITE,

In the hours after a gunman attempted to assassinate former President Donald Trump, I got a request from the head of scientific research at the Department of Homeland Security, Under Secretary Dimitri Kusnezov. What kind of work was NCITE doing right now that might shine the light on this latest violent event in our country?

Well, I thought, quite a bit.

- First, our project examining threats to public officials, headed by Pete Simi of Chapman University and Seamus Hughes of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), has charted a meteoric rise in federally adjudicated threats over the past 10 years. The project shapes our understanding of a broader trend in the U.S. toward polarization and normalization of threats to violence.
- Second, the gunman had explosive devices in his car. A UNO-led team just published a 43-page report on that very subject.
- Third, though the gunman’s motives at publication time are speculative, the assassination attempt raises the specter of political or ideologically motivated violence, and another UNO team is studying the nature of domestic violent extremist activity in the U.S.
- Fourth, within minutes of the shooting, which killed a man and injured two others, conspiracy theories caught fire across the political spectrum. A University College London-Utrecht University team is looking into links between conspiracy theories and support for political violence.
- There’s even more: A University of Central Florida-University of Arkansas team is examining the threat of electoral violence, and other UNO teams are figuring out how to better equip threat assessment teams for outdoor events and strengthen the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Office’s program addressing behavioral threat assessment.

Our list is not definitive on the matter, but the fact that NCITE is on the case, and, the fact that I could quickly respond to our government partner underscores how important and relevant the work we’re doing is. It gives me comfort knowing that our research is vitally important, and I draw purpose and hope from the hard-working, intelligent people across the NCITE consortium.

Of course, that talent was on display in Omaha at the end of June, when we gathered our consortium partners and government stakeholders together to discuss pressing research topics and findings from our fourth research year. Our ENVISION24 conference was a success, not just due to the science we shared but also because of

the commitment our consortium has shown to building relationships, trust, and understanding across the divide between academia and government. Thank you for that.

As you’ll see in the following pages, the fruits of the science and relationships are growing. Our research portfolio expanded last year to include a special push to grow international expertise in counterterrorism. We moved into – and celebrated with 200+ guests – new research, lab, and office space that pulls together students, faculty, and staff and provides a comfortable and safe place to bring distinguished guests and host events. We’ve grown our communications efforts to continue making our work more accessible. We started a podcast, *NCITE Insights*, to respond to events of the day with our experts. We started a regular webinar series. And we’ve grown our library of research materials housed on UNO’s Digital Commons.

Perhaps most importantly, we graduated yet another cohort of NCITE students who will enter their chosen career fields with a grounding in national security awareness and an appreciation for the interdisciplinary skills they cultivated while working alongside researchers from various fields.

As we write this fourth annual report, we know that the turbulence of our times will continue. We also know we are ready to meet the moment with the experts, research, and drive to share life-saving findings with our communities. Examples of these are found in these pages. Please check out stories about Nadine Frederique, a Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate champion who helps strengthen our social science efforts; Austin Doctor, NCITE’s head of counterterrorism research initiatives who is leading research efforts on emerging threats with his drone and geospatial projects; and Lauren Zimmerman, who exemplifies the workforce pipeline we are creating.

These individuals capture the essence of NCITE and shine a light on the good work our Center has done in Year 4!

**Gina Ligon, Ph.D.**  
NCITE Center Director

# NCITE OVERVIEW

NCITE is the nation’s leading academic center for the study of emerging and novel terrorism threats.

## MISSION

Produce actionable research through a user-inspired approach, which combines social science, business, and technology for the security of the homeland.

## VISION

To be the premier U.S. academic provider of counterterrorism research, technology, and workforce development.

## What does NCITE study?

All NCITE work centers on counterterrorism goals outlined in the DHS Strategic Plan for FY 2020-2024. These goals fall under the following themes:

- 1 COUNTERING** Terrorism and Targeted Violence
- 2 BOLSTERING** Suspicious Activity Reporting
- 3 IMPROVING** Prevention Efforts
- 4 STRENGTHENING** the Homeland Security Workforce

NCITE was named a Center of Excellence by DHS in 2020 and launched the same year with a 10-year grant that established NCITE as DHS’s trusted partner for counterterrorism research from the DHS Office of University Programs. NCITE has since tapped into other DHS funding streams to increase research capacity.

The NCITE consortium includes more than 60 researchers at more than 30 partner institutions. In Year 4, the Center expanded its influence internationally, adding partner research teams in Europe and elsewhere by establishing the International Academic Partnerships for Science and Security consortium, a worldwide network of researchers.

## NCITE’S VALUES

- 1 INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION**
- 2 GROWTH MINDSET**
- 3 STAKEHOLDER FOCUS**
- 4 TRANSFORMATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**
- 5 EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY**
- 6 GROUNDING IN DATA AND SCIENCE**



**GINA LIGON**

**NCITE Director**

Ligon has a distinguished career as a researcher and educator. An industrial-organizational psychologist, she has proven counterterrorism expertise.



**ALEX BRUENS**

**Research Fellow**

Bruens contributes to scientific review of all funded work from NCITE consortium researchers, identifying outputs for stakeholder engagement. They additionally manage the compliance and approval process for NCITE cooperative agreement projects and assist with reporting.



**ERIN GRACE**

**Director of Strategic Communications and External Relations**

Grace is NCITE’s chief storyteller. She aims to build a pathway beyond the DHS grant to achieve sustainability and build external partnerships.



**MACKENZIE HARMS**

**Research Fellow**

Harms contributes to scientific review of all funded work from NCITE consortium researchers, identifying outputs for stakeholder engagement.



**SCOTT JORDAN**

**Coordinator of Operations, Special Projects, and Events**

Jordan manages NCITE’s daily operations — including space and technology needs — and assists in organizing center events.



**JEN KALVODA**

**DHS Engagements Project Manager**

Kalvoda manages center work funded under NCITE’s cooperative agreement with DHS. She also oversees consortium metrics and DHS reporting.



**TIN NGUYEN**

**Senior Research Associate and Technology Transition Lead**

Nguyen studies business innovation, as well as malevolent forms of creative behavior. Additionally, he identifies strategic roadmaps and commercial opportunities for transitioning NCITE-funded technologies to market.



**BETH STINEBRINK**

**Grants and Contracts Manager**

Stinebrink manages the center’s budget and financial activities. She also leads many of NCITE’s business operations efforts.



**BLAKE URSCH**

**Strategic Communications Manager**

Ursch manages the center’s daily communications, which include overseeing NCITE’s website, social media presence, and graphic design efforts.



**SARA VETTER**

**DHS Engagements Project Manager**

Vetter manages center work funded under NCITE’s basic ordering agreement (BOA) with DHS. She also assists with center operational needs.



*NCITE undergraduate and graduate students come from a range of disciplines: criminology, psychology, IT innovation, political science, and more. They serve in a variety of roles, including as graduate assistants, junior research associates, and hourly student workers.*



**MATT ALLEN**

**Head of Business Strategy**

Allen is an assistant professor of management in the College of Business Administration. He specializes in strategic human capital research in personnel security contexts.



**ERIN BASS**

**NCITE Business Strategy**

Bass is a professor of management with previous experience in the energy sector. She specializes in strategic planning and leadership analysis.



**MICHELLE BLACK**

**Lead of Security Innovation  
Academic Programming**

Black is an associate professor of political science with previous military experience. She specializes in deterrence analysis and adversary decision-making.



**ARES BOIRA LOPEZ**

**Research Specialist**

Boira Lopez is responsible for developing tools to evaluate the short-term outcomes of violence prevention programs. Her research focuses on online extremism, leadership, and creative problem-solving.



**KELSEY CIAGALA**

**Research Associate**

Ciagala supports various research projects involving threat assessment, soft target protection, and teamwork in the security space. Her own research interests involve a variety of workplace issues including teamwork, diversity and inclusion, and workplace culture.



**AUSTIN DOCTOR**

**Head of Counterterrorism  
Research Initiatives**

Doctor is an assistant professor of political science. His work focuses on militants, terrorism, and emerging threats.



**JOEL ELSON**

**Head of IT Innovation  
Research Initiatives**

Elson is Head of IT Innovation. He specializes in the design, development, and evaluation of collaboration technologies for benevolent and malevolent actors.



**SEAMUS HUGHES**

**Senior Research Faculty  
and Policy Associate**

Hughes is a senior research faculty member who specializes in international and domestic terrorism involving American citizens.



**SAM HUNTER**

**Head of Strategic Initiatives**

Hunter is a professor of industrial-organizational psychology who specializes in malevolent and malign innovation, leadership, and emerging threats.



**ERIN KEARNS**

**Head of Prevention Research Initiatives**

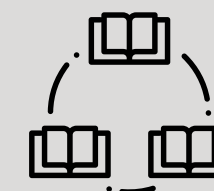
Kearns is an associate professor of criminology and criminal justice with a focus on terrorism prevention. Her research analyzes the relationships among terrorism, media, law enforcement, and the public.



**AMANDA MOELLER**

**Research Associate**

Moeller works on a project examining the U.S. domestic violent extremism landscape, applying the study of industrial-organizational psychology to the changing problem of domestic extremism.



*NCITE has oversight from an external board of directors composed of DHS professionals and other government officials. Additionally, NCITE regularly communicates with an internal advisory committee of UNO leaders.*

## NCITE CENTER FACULTY



### KAT PARSONS

Research Associate

Parsons is responsible for a range of duties supporting the Threat Assessment BOA.

Her own research focuses on the relationship between extremist ideology and political violence.



### ERIN PLEGGENKUHLE-MILES

NCITE Business Strategy

Pleggenkuhle-Miles is a professor of management with previous experience in the finance sector. She specializes in strategic planning and execution.



### SYDNEY REICHIN

Research Associate

Reichin is responsible for a range of duties supporting BOA projects on soft targets,

CP3 program evaluation, and threat assessment. Her own research focuses on the relationship between dark traits and counterproductive workplace behaviors.



### NOAH TURNER

Research Associate

Turner supports two NCITE projects focused on reintegrating federally incarcerated extremists and evaluating targeted violence and terrorism prevention grant programs.

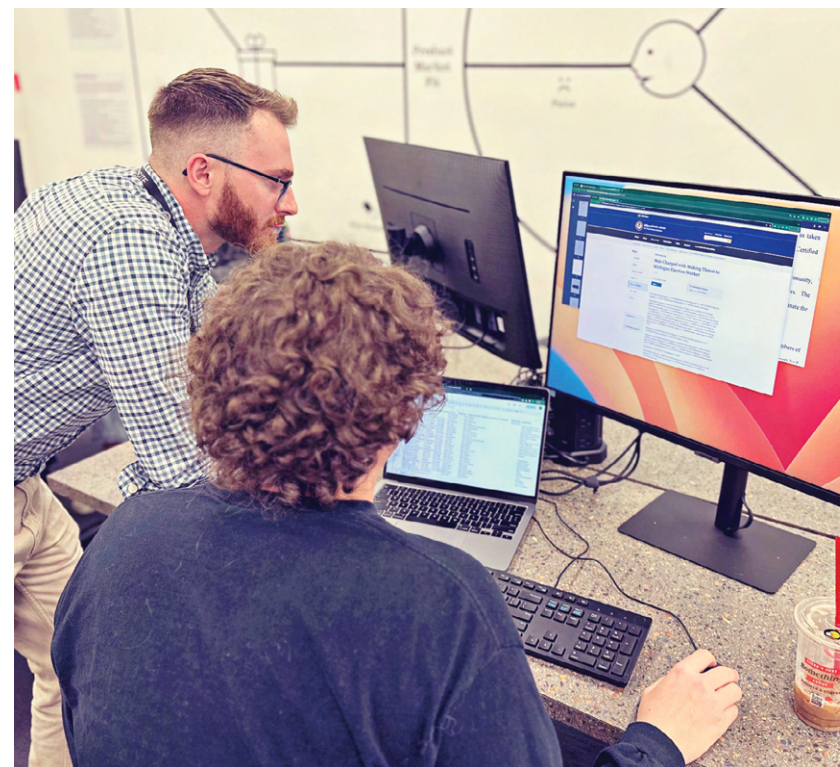
His own research focuses on the intersection of extremist beliefs, criminal behavior, and the criminal justice system.



### ANDREA WALKER

Research Associate

Walker serves as deputy principal investigator of a project that evaluates federally funded violence prevention programs. Her research interests include criminal law and procedure, ethics, and sex offender reentry and treatment.



# OUR IMPACT YEAR 4 BY THE NUMBERS

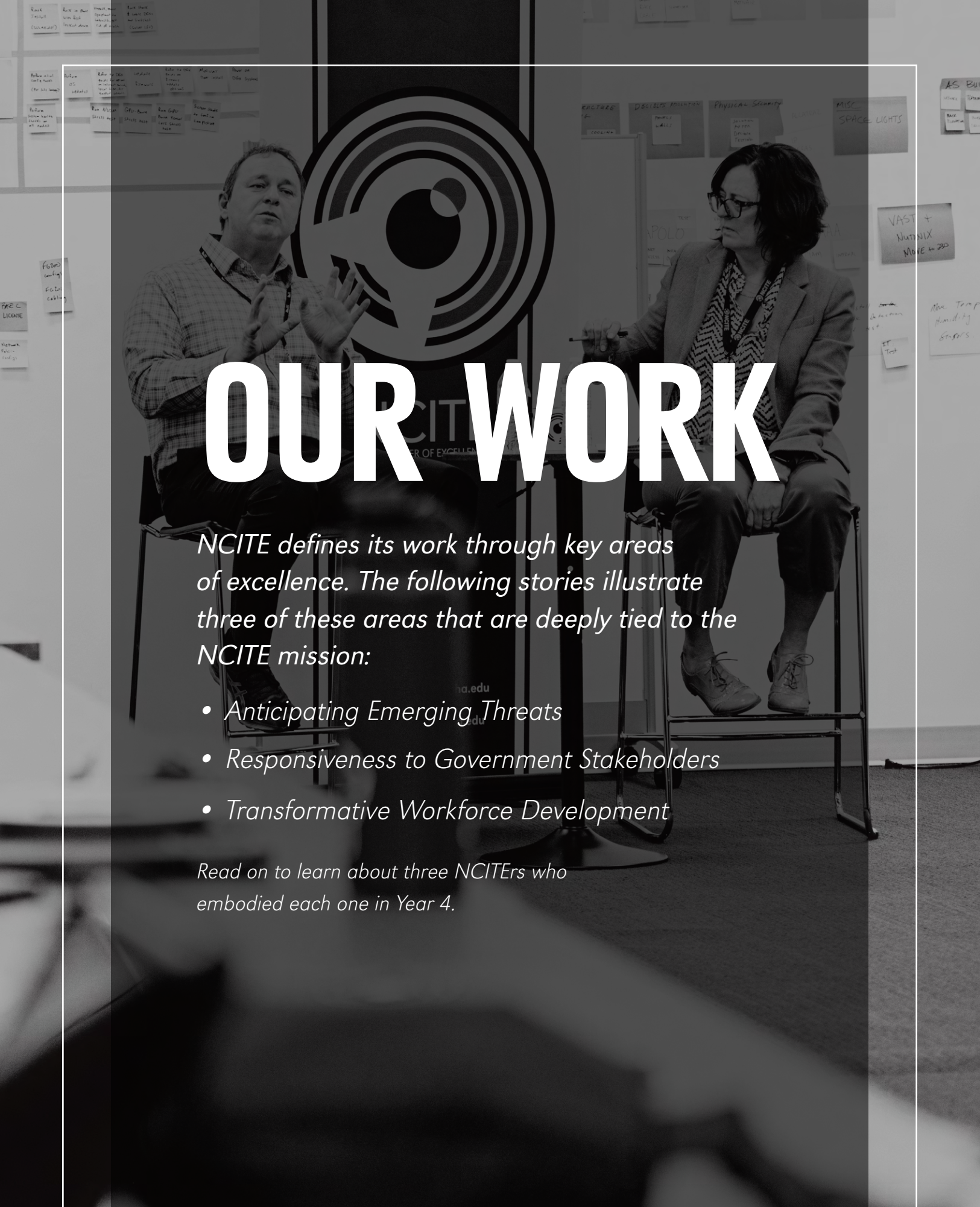


In its four years combined, NCITE received nearly **\$40 million** in federal grants and contracts to conduct **38** research projects involving over **60** researchers from **31** partner institutions in three countries. During this time, NCITE has publicly shared **84** deliverables that, in total, have been downloaded over **17,000** times.

We share our findings in other ways. Last year alone, NCITE researchers gave **214** presentations, appeared in news outlets **151** times, answered **76** requests for assistance, and offered three expert testimonies. Our researchers were featured in **33** peer-reviewed or professional academic publications. We reached over **2,900** people in workshops and seminars.

Our reach is growing on social, where we now have **3,224** followers on X, and **3,126** on LinkedIn. We have launched a new podcast, *NCITE Insights*, which to date has **13** episodes and more than **400** downloads. In June 2024, we opened the doors to our new headquarters and welcomed **200** people for a ribbon cutting event.

Our ENVISION24 conference drew about **150** in-person and more than **200** online guests. Our impact is growing, most especially with students. Across the consortium we engaged with over **450**, mainly through enrollment. Of that figure, we funded **88**. At UNO, NCITE students feature prominently in the work we do. Since 2020, NCITE has funded **72** student positions.



# OUR WORK

*NCITE defines its work through key areas of excellence. The following stories illustrate three of these areas that are deeply tied to the NCITE mission:*

- *Anticipating Emerging Threats*
- *Responsiveness to Government Stakeholders*
- *Transformative Workforce Development*

*Read on to learn about three NCITers who embodied each one in Year 4.*

## ANTICIPATING EMERGING THREATS

# PUZZLING OUT TERRORISM

*Not One to Shy Away from a Challenge, NCITE's Austin Doctor Keeps His Eye on Emerging Threats*

BY BEN BATTAFARANO  
NCITE Student Communications Specialist

Just inside a doorway of an NCITE office suite, a group of people huddle, arms folded, around a large touchscreen. They shift their weight and mutter, heads cocked, eyebrows knit. Hands dart forward. *Tap. Tap tap tap.*

One exhales, eyes raised to the ceiling. Another leans back, hands pressed to the small of their spine. Analyzing the nation's weightiest threats is exhausting, and they're grappling with an obstacle far more complex than terrorism: *New York Times* word puzzles.

**"THAT'S PART OF WHAT DREW ME INTO THIS FIELD. I LOVE CHALLENGES, AND I LOVE COMPLEX PUZZLES."**

They open a new game to find its answers chock-full. Exasperated sighs. "Austin got here first," someone says. In his office, the culprit, Austin Doctor, Ph.D., shrugs with a small smile.

"That's part of what drew me into this field," Doctor said. "I love challenges, and I love complex puzzles."

## THE TRADITIONALIST

His bookshelf draws the eye. *Non-State Warfare. The Taliban Reader. How Terror Evolves.* A print from the photography collection *We Came From Fire*, documenting Kurdish resistance against the Islamic State during the Iraq and Syrian war, is framed on the wall.

Doctor is NCITE's resident political scientist and head of counterterrorism research initiatives. Surrounded by psychologists, IT innovators, and criminologists, he is NCITE's link to counterterrorism's traditional approach.

"Political scientists are naturally interested in, 'what does this individual, group, movement, society want and what are they willing and able to do to accomplish that?'" he said. "That's where we work best."

Doctor is a consummate academic. It's not uncommon to find him examining a problem with one arm folded to his chest to prop up the other, hand pressed to his mouth. His students affectionately note his frequent use of words and phrases like "sensemaking," "problem set," and "violent non-state actors." A favorite is, "maybe we can noodle on that," when Doctor is intrigued by a new finding.

His NCITE colleague, Sam Hunter, Ph.D., said that Doctor brings a crucial talent for predicting problems in the terrorism space.

"The lens through which he sees the world is fairly wide," said Hunter. "His training lends itself particularly well to grasping the global nature of the threat."

Opposite Doctor's desk, a white board details tasks for his latest project which examines terrorist exploitation of geospatial technologies. Much of Doctor's research requires him to look beyond the immediate, assessing the threat landscape 10-15 years in the future. The geospatial project fits under this category, known as "emerging threats."





Emerging threats can generally be characterized as having evolving or novel aspects. For example, drones with geospatial mapping technologies are nothing new but are becoming increasingly affordable and user-friendly in the commercial market. This makes it easier for terrorists to efficiently source, weaponize, and navigate them to targets.

Combined with novel capabilities like sophisticated coordination (drone swarms) and the ability to travel further distances, the scale of potential malicious use is huge.

---

**“THIS WORLD IS SO INTERESTING AND COMPLICATED. JUST GETTING TO THE TRUTH OF SOMETHING, APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING, THOSE ARE THINGS THAT HAVE GOTTEN ME OUT OF BED FOR A LONG TIME.”**

---

Doctor’s research, like other NCITE projects, doesn’t stay in the ivory tower; it’s meant to be useful in the hands of the government workforce. Studying emerging threats through this applied lens can be sobering, Doctor said, but it’s exactly the space he is trained for.

“Studying government and constraints related to institutions, that’s where political scientists can provide some relative value,” he said. “How does this fit into what I know about existing procedures with regard to countermeasures? To what extent are they (agencies) equipped to carry this out? Am I just sharing out research that’s actually dead on arrival?”

## THE EXPLORER

With an early education emphasizing writing and reading the classics of Western literature, Doctor considered journalism and law before completing a bachelor’s degree in history at Covenant College in Georgia. He later went on to receive his doctorate in political science at the University of Georgia.

As newlyweds, he and his wife took a gap year working in Alaska before his graduate studies. While there, he studied coding manuals, teaching himself Python and R in his free time while reading heaps of fiction.

“The stack of books next to my bed was pretty wild that year,” Doctor said.

---

**“IF YOU FIND SOMETHING THAT IS NOVEL, HE’LL JUST ADD MORE TO IT, AND IT MAKES YOU WANT TO GO FIND MORE.”**

---

Ryan Vilter, one of Doctor’s graduate students, said that Doctor’s curiosity is infectious.

“If you find something that is novel, he’ll just add more to it, and it makes you want to go find more,” Vilter said. “Being exhaustive in your work is something I’ll take away from working with him.”

Doctor lives a life of many pursuits: soccer, fishing, music. On one of his shelves, a model motorcycle, a Kawasaki KLR 650, leans against its kickstand. Nearby sits a book by a fellow avid motorcyclist – British archaeologist and army officer T. E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia. Doctor’s life-size bike, a Royal Enfield, sits just outside in the parking lot.

“This world is so interesting and complicated,” he said. “Just getting to the truth of something, applying critical thinking, those are things that have gotten me out of bed for a long time.”

# LEARN MORE: HOW NCITE IS STAYING ON TOP OF EMERGING THREATS

---

## What Happens to New Technology in the Wrong Hands?

NCITE’s Year 4 research portfolio included several projects that examine emerging trends in terrorism. These included projects led by:

- **Gary Ackerman (SUNY University at Albany):** This project is developing a tool that government analysts can use to identify what new technologies could be used by violent extremist groups.
- **Sam Hunter, Joel Elson (UNO), and Scarlett Miller (Penn State):** This project examines how terrorists could misuse extended reality ‘metaverse’ technology and new artificial intelligence tools.
- **Erin Kearns and Joel Elson (UNO):** This project aims to develop an intelligent chatbot that could help people report suspicious activity to authorities.
- **Matthew Jensen, Shane Connelly, and Hairong Song (University of Oklahoma):** This project examines how extremists use online platforms, including social media, to share messaging.

## Making Sense of Oct. 7

Following the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on Israel by the terrorist group Hamas, NCITE experts quickly rallied to make sense of the situation in state, local, and national media. Notably, NCITE Director Gina Ligon spoke about Hamas for CNN’s “The Whole Story,” hosted by Anderson Cooper.

The NCITE consortium has continued to lend important context to this complex and evolving situation as the conflict has spread throughout the Middle East.

## RESPONSIVENESS TO STAKEHOLDERS

# FROM THE BOOKSHELF TO THE WORKBENCH

### *DHS's Nadine Frederique Lends Practical Expertise to NCITE's Academic Projects*

BY CHARLIE MAAS  
NCITE Graduate Assistant

In December 2012, a recent doctoral graduate in criminology watched the news about Sandy Hook Elementary School like the rest of America – with shock and horror.

In response, Nadine Frederique, Ph.D., answered the call from federal agencies to academia to help stop future tragedies like Sandy Hook, where a mass shooter killed 20 students, six teachers, and his mother. Her initial research gave her a unique perspective on the relationship between school climate, the process of radicalization, and the pathway to domestic terrorism.

Frederique, now lead of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Social Science Technology Center, has continued to pursue academic research with an eye toward national security. As a government practitioner, she has been one of NCITE's most engaged end users throughout the Center's first four years.

As an NCITE stakeholder, Frederique engages with the Center's products,

collaborates with its researchers, and promotes its mission to other professionals. She specifically values NCITE's ability to integrate academic work with practical application.

"Practitioners and academics can complement each other in these useful, wonderful ways," she said.

Frederique began her path to DHS as an undergraduate. While studying criminology, Frederique performed research tasks as a student worker at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), based at the University of Maryland.

Her first position after attaining her doctorate from the University of Maryland in 2011 was at the National Institute of Justice within the U.S. Department of Justice. There, Frederique investigated school safety and school climate – the factors that contribute to or detract from the culture of safety in a school.

As an NCITE stakeholder, Frederique regularly attends the Center's end-user working groups, panels of researchers and practitioners that review preliminary research deliverables produced by the NCITE consortium. These groups connect professionals from various disciplines and agencies, which Frederique believes sparks new research ideas and novel research applications.

NCITE delivers high-quality research to its end users, Frederique said, which fosters an atmosphere of collaboration and learning.

"The opportunity to see the inside of early research results really helps build some connections," she said.

Frederique is also a committed attendee of ENVISION, NCITE's annual conference, which aims to bring together academics and government practitioners.

At the conferences, Frederique learns about the current state of the field from presentations that make research feel

tangible and applicable to the boots-on-the-ground national security workforce. Frederique believes gatherings like this are crucial for staying up-to-date on current threats and strategies and techniques to address them. Much like the dialogue encouraged by the end-user working groups, Frederique recognizes the usefulness of the ENVISION conference in connecting researchers directly to practitioners. She said practitioners can benefit more from one-on-one discussions about new research than from reading published findings.

"Practitioners really value relationships, and NCITE has a great way of capitalizing on those relationships with diverse stakeholder groups," she said.

ENVISION aims to showcase NCITE's most relevant research to practitioners by building those personal connections.

As a researcher who has sometimes dealt with difficult and disturbing material, Frederique is particularly interested in projects that benefit practitioners who are often exposed to similar content.

NCITE researcher Daisy Muibu, Ph.D., worked with Frederique on an NCITE-funded research project that included a systematic review of peer support training programs to reduce the effects of secondary exposure to violence for practitioners who are exposed to traumatic material as part of their work.

As a stakeholder, Frederique provided input throughout the life of the project and attended a workshop for government practitioners that the research team held at American University in Washington, D.C., in April 2024.

"She's just a really good conduit between researcher and practitioner," Muibu said of Frederique. "Her level of passion also translates into helping us as researchers better design our studies, contextualize our findings, and communicate our findings to audiences."

Frederique approaches her work with passion and dedication. Her research benefits both the national security community and the American public. Without input from academics, she said, practitioners may struggle to adapt to the rapidly changing field.

Similarly, the academic research process may propose ideas that lack practicality. Through close connections between academics and practitioners, Frederique hopes the academy can ensure that research stays relevant, and practice stays adaptable.



## LEARN MORE:

# HOW NCITE ENGAGES WITH GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

### Protecting Our Elections

In May 2024, NCITE hosted election representatives with the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office. As part of the visit, the Center unveiled a new web page showcasing NCITE's election-related research projects and spotlighting government resources for ensuring safe and secure elections.

### Welcoming Distinguished Visitors

NCITE regularly opens its doors to share research and capabilities with partners in government, academia, and industry. In Year 4, the Center welcomed many, including:

- Ian Moss, Dexter Ingram, and Chelsea Cohen from the U.S. State Department
- U.S. Sen. Pete Ricketts (Nebraska)
- U.S. Reps. Don Bacon and Adrian Smith (both Nebraska)
- Celia "CC" Durall, executive director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)
- Mike Yanney, chairman emeritus of Burlington Capital



## TRANSFORMATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

# BEATING BRAIN DRAIN

*Former NCITE Student Lauren Zimmerman Finds Success as a Data Analyst in Nebraska*

BY PENJANI BANDA

NCITE Communications Intern

On the third floor of the Scott Technology Center, visitors to NCITE's offices are greeted by a striking display – a series of photos and news headlines, each highlighting NCITE's counterterrorism efforts in Omaha and beyond.

The first panel, a reproduction of a 2021 *Washington Post* article, includes a photo of a student staring intently at a laptop screen.

Lauren "LZ" Zimmerman was an apt choice to serve as the face of NCITE for the *Post's* readers. For more than four years, she worked at the Center as a graduate student, helping to build it from the ground up into one of the nation's most prominent academic centers for the study of terrorism and targeted violence.

In the summer of 2024, Zimmerman, a Ph.D. student studying IT Innovation at UNO, left NCITE to take a full-time job in Nebraska as a data analyst at defense firm MITRE. Her story illustrates NCITE's commitment to building the next generation of national security professionals – especially at home in Nebraska.

Though she feels a touch of bittersweet nostalgia, Zimmerman shared her excitement to start her new role and continue pursuing her passion for research.

## THE EARLY DAYS

Zimmerman first met NCITE director Gina Ligon, Ph.D., in an undergraduate course on terrorism in 2016. With Ligon as her professor, Zimmerman, then studying political science, quickly developed a fascination for terrorism research and began to explore her curiosity by working on side projects with Ligon.



Before long, a mentor-mentee bond was formed and quickly evolved into a close working relationship that would span nearly a decade.

In 2019, following the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) announcement that it would establish NCITE as a Center of Excellence at UNO, Ligon invited Zimmerman to join the consortium as a junior research associate. She gladly accepted.

"Lauren is as an exceptional individual who represents interdisciplinarity for both NCITE and UNO," Ligon said.

---

**"LAUREN IS AS AN EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUAL WHO REPRESENTS INTERDISCIPLINARITY FOR BOTH NCITE AND UNO."**

---

"She started in the political science field and successfully branched out into IT and innovation – a diverse skill set that'll open up career opportunities wherever she decides to go."

Having started out as a junior research associate, Zimmerman's role was diverse, allowing her to utilize her unique blend of skills. She helped to manage projects in the NCITE consortium, with responsibilities that included organizing events and creating slide decks for NCITE partners. The position also allowed her to sit in on meetings with high-ranking government officials.

---

**"I GOT TO WORK ON SCIENCE COMMUNICATION, WHICH I FEEL REALLY STRONGLY ABOUT, AND ENJOYED DOING QUICK-TURN PROJECTS."**

---

"It was a lot of really fun things," Zimmerman recalled. "I got to work on science communication, which I feel really strongly about, and enjoyed doing quick-turn projects."

Later, Zimmerman was promoted to a research specialist role in which she worked closely with IT students in the Security Operations Center (SOC) and Cyber Threat Analysis Laboratory (CTAL), both based in the Scott Technology Center.

Zimmerman's time at NCITE helped her understand the value of academic research from the perspective of government

practitioners. In one project, which focused on helping parole officers identify potential signs of radicalization among parolees, Zimmerman highlighted the importance of supporting parole officers and connecting them with peers.

## THE NEXT CHAPTER

Joel Elson, Ph.D., Zimmerman's master's thesis advisor and head of information science and technology research initiatives at NCITE, said she has been pivotal in designing some of the consortium's research studies.

"Lauren has grown into a capable researcher with the ability to execute her own research from concept formation all the way to analysis and publication," he said.

As she moves forward in her career, Elson offered her the following advice:

"Continue to be who you are, never lose that spirit of inquiry or the desire to help and lift others up," he said.

In June, Zimmerman began a new job as a data analyst with MITRE, a research-and-development firm that supports the U.S. government in several areas, including aviation, health care, and cybersecurity. In her new position, Zimmerman spends her time working on integrated deterrence and supporting the mission of the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). The job allows her to remain based in the Omaha area.

Through her continued ties to Nebraska, Zimmerman serves an important example of combating the college graduate "brain drain" that has plagued the state in recent years. Although she originally planned to leave, the Nebraska native now advocates for Omaha's potential as a national security hub.

---

**"THERE'S A SENSIBILITY THAT MIDWESTERNERS BRING TO THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY."**

---

"There's a sensibility that Midwesterners bring to the intelligence community, and I want to help foster that here in Omaha," she said. "I want to show that we can still have these jobs in national security outside of the Beltway."

# LEARN MORE: NCITE'S EFFORTS IN TRANSFORMATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

---

## Supporting Early-Career Researchers

One of NCITE's key priorities is providing professional development for early-career researchers – new academics within 10 years of obtaining or finishing a Ph.D.

The Center hosts regular lunch-and-learn workshops for NCITE students at the Scott Technology Center. Previous guests have included author John Waters and Pete Simi, professor of sociology at Chapman University and principal investigator on NCITE's project examining threats to public officials.

At ENVISION24, NCITE held a networking session with professionals from government and industry. The Center also hosted a student poster contest, allowing students from throughout the consortium to showcase their research projects to visiting scholars and government practitioners.

## Building an International Network

Year 4 included the launch of the International Academic Partnerships for Science and Security (IAPSS) consortium. Led by NCITE and the U.K.'s Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), IAPSS aims to build an international network of terrorism scholars.

IAPSS held its first meeting in London in March 2024. The meeting involved more than 60 guests from 17 research centers across 12 countries. For two days, they worked together to outline shared research priorities and a vision for the consortium's future.

Since then, IAPSS has hosted a regular seminar series and has begun accepting proposals for its next international meeting, to be held in 2025.

# NCITE YEAR-IN-REVIEW

*NCITE's Year 4 was defined by innovative research, distinguished guests, and lasting connections. Check out a selection of our favorite moments.*



## ENVISION24 SPARKS HOPE, VIGILANCE

ENVISION24, NCITE's annual conference held on the UNO Scott Campus, brought together NCITE's consortium of academics and government officials to address some of the most urgent challenges in terrorism and violent extremism. Held from June 25-27, the event attracted nearly 150 in-person attendees and over 200 online participants.

The conference was marked by significant milestones, including the official opening of NCITE's new headquarters at the Scott Technology Center. It included keynote remarks from Jen Daskal, deputy homeland security advisor at the White House, who emphasized the growing threats posed by both international and domestic extremist groups, and Nick Rasmussen, counterterrorism coordinator with DHS, who pointed to today's toxic politics as a homeland security weakness.

Throughout the three-day event, participants engaged in discussions on modern terrorist threats, the impact of emerging technologies, and strategies for building a resilient counterterrorism workforce. NCITE Director Gina Ligon highlighted the importance of maintaining scientific rigor and a focused commitment to the counterterrorism mission, reaffirming NCITE's role as a vital resource in the ongoing fight against terrorism.

As the conference concluded, the message was clear: NCITE and its consortium of experts stand ready to confront the evolving threats facing our nation.



## CUTTING THE RIBBON ON THE NEXT CHAPTER

On June 25, NCITE celebrated the official opening of its new headquarters at the Scott Technology Center. The ribbon-cutting ceremony, which launched the ENVISION24 conference, was a moment to reflect on the collaborative spirit that drives NCITE's mission. Six students, representing a diverse range of academic disciplines — from political science to psychology — cut through the red ribbon, symbolizing the united effort required to tackle the complex challenges of terrorism and violent extremism.

The event featured remarks from key university leaders, including Jeffrey Gold, president of the University of Nebraska System, and Joanne Li, chancellor of UNO. NCITE Director Gina Ligon invited attendees to envision a world free from terrorism, acknowledging that while this vision is not yet reality, the work of NCITE and its partners is crucial in making communities safer.

U.S. Senator Pete Ricketts emphasized Nebraska's role in national security, highlighting the state's commitment to collaboration, communication, and cooperation.



## A NEW HOME FOR CYBERSECURITY EFFORTS

In Year 4, NCITE moved from its previous home in Mammel Hall and Maverick Landing into permanent office space at the Scott Technology Center on UNO's Scott Campus. The new offices offer ample research and collaboration space for the Center's faculty, staff, and students.

In collaboration with the University of Nebraska Information Technology Services (NUITS), NCITE has helped establish a student security operations center (SOC) and Cyber Threat Analysis Lab (CTAL) at Scott Tech. In the SOC, technology students identify cybersecurity threats to the University of Nebraska System Network. Students and faculty involved with CTAL then analyze those threats to place them in a broader national security context.



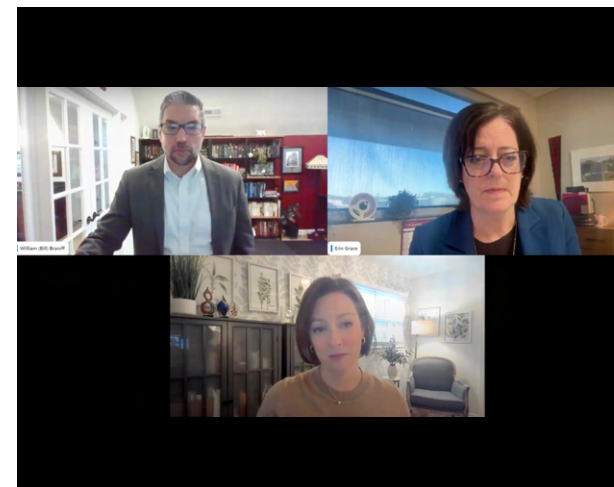
## LAUNCHING NCITE INSIGHTS

In February, the NCITE communications team launched the Center's new podcast, *NCITE Insights*.

On each episode, host Erin Grace interviews an NCITE expert on how their research relates to the news of the day. Past episodes have covered:

- **A drone strike in Jordan** (Austin Doctor)
- **Malevolent use of artificial intelligence** (Sam Hunter)
- **The terror group Islamic State-Khorasan** (Amira Jadoon)
- **The modern face of white supremacy** (Pete Simi)

You can watch *NCITE Insights* on YouTube or listen on major podcast platforms, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Podbean.



## STARTING THE CONVERSATION

At the beginning of 2024, NCITE launched a new webinar series which covers homeland security topics with experts in government and academia. So far, the series has covered:

- **The Public Health Approach to Terrorism and Targeted Violence Prevention** with Sarah DeGue (senior scientist, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and Bill Braniff (director, Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships)
- **Removing Barriers to What Works in Prevention** with (individually) Cynthia Miller-Idriss (director, Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab) and John Picarelli (director for targeted violence and terrorism prevention, National Security Council)
- **Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management** with Melissa Zisler (director, National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Office) and C.J. Wren (program manager, Arizona Statewide Threat Assessment and Mitigation Program)



# YEAR 4 PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

NCITE's work is always most thoroughly illustrated by its research portfolio. Check out the following snapshots to see the Center's scientific range and achievements in Year 4.

## THEME 1 UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM



### SUNY UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY ANTICIPATING TERRORIST TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION TO SECURE THE HOMELAND (ATTASH)

PROJECT LEAD:  
**GARY ACKERMAN**

Develop a tool to identify what emerging technologies terrorists may use.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Identified 37 emerging autonomous technologies that could be used by terrorists.
- Successfully enhanced the ATTASH tool completed in Year 1 which will be shared along with the final report.
- The ATTASH tool will be distributed to DHS components for their own use including associated documentation.

#### PROJECTED IMPACT

- The ATTASH tool provides DHS entities with the capability to characterize and prioritize emerging technology threats from terrorists while also being sustainable.
- Inform DHS's Annual State of the Homeland Threat Assessment and help DHS's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office with early warning indicators for terrorist plots involving weapons of mass destruction.
- Help support law enforcement by giving them relevant information.
- Information from the project can be given internationally per DHS discretion.



### UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON EXAMINING THE FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENT EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES

PROJECT LEAD:  
**PAUL GILL**

Analyze the normalization and mainstreaming of conspiracy theories and their functional relationship with violent extremist ideologies.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Developed and validated several psychometric scales to be applied in longitudinal survey research.
- Attended longitudinal data analysis workshop to apply and amend complex data models from other disciplines.
- Designed survey questionnaire for the main longitudinal data collection process.
- Presented findings at NCITE ENVISION24 conference.

#### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Help decision-makers understand how extremist causes lead to a belief in conspiracy theories.
- Aid in the development of intervention programs.
- Advance the development of evidence-based violent extremist risk assessment instruments.



### STANFORD & RICE HOW ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS IN A MULTI- ACTOR ENVIRONMENT SHAPE TERRORIST THREATS AND CT RESPONSES

PROJECT LEADS:  
**MARTHA CRENSHAW AND  
KAITLYN ROBINSON**

Identify and catalogue extremist groups and organizations and their evolution.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Website engagements of more than 15,000 users and 42,000 pageviews ([mappingmilitants.org](https://mappingmilitants.org)).
- Users from six countries outside the U.S. visited the site, accounting for 57% of total visitors.
- Work was cited nine times, including in three government reports.
- Participated in seminar presentations for work on cross-border attacks.

#### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Official launch of new website ([mappingmilitants.org](https://mappingmilitants.org))
- Complete and publish analysis of why nonstate violent actors launch attacks across borders.
- Complete preliminary analysis of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) network by updating existing profiles, completing missing ones, and completing visualization of the group's changing relationships over time.

#### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Create a tool that can compare groups in a consistent way and address blind spots that might emerge from single-group or single-type terrorism assessments.
- Inform DHS about changing group-level dynamics and attack strategies, both at home and abroad.





**UNO**  
**HOW ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMIST LANDSCAPE**

PROJECT LEAD:  
**SAM HUNTER**

Explore the changing nature of domestic violent extremist organizations in the U.S., both in-person and online, through the lens of organizational psychology.

**YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Identified gaps in the academic literature related to industrial and organizational psychology.
- Produced a range of publications, talks, conference presentations, lectures, and briefings on findings.
- Completed software tool for modeling and optimizing SSP System Security Plan operations.

**YEAR 5 PLAN**

- Publish in peer-reviewed academic journals and submit findings to conferences.
- Produce plain-language summaries of key findings for the broader homeland security enterprise.

**PROJECTED IMPACT**

- Offer insight on how individuals are drawn to and operate within extremist organizations in the U.S.
- Provide information about the shifting organizational structures of terrorist and criminal organizations to develop more effective counterterrorism responses.
- Apply industrial and organizational psychology to give a new perspective on the challenge.



**UNO & PENN STATE**  
**UNDERSTANDING MALEVOLENT CREATIVITY AND THE METAVERSE: AN EMERGING THREAT LANDSCAPE**

PROJECT LEADS:  
**SAM HUNTER AND SCARLETT MILLER**

Provide a framework for DHS to understand how emerging technologies could be used by extremist groups.

**YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Released findings through conference submissions, presentations, paper submissions and publications, invited talks, and press engagement.
- Spoke to interested personnel in government about findings.

**YEAR 5 PLAN**

- The virtual environment will include collaboration features where multiple participants can work together to generate ideas within immersive virtual reality.
- Engage in end-user working groups to share updates and receive input on best practices for sharing key findings.
- Host virtual meetings for end users interested in a deeper dive into the project.

**PROJECTED IMPACT**

- Inform DHS about the potential threat of artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented/extended reality technologies when used by extremist organizations.
- Disseminate findings to academic colleagues and provide developmental opportunities for graduate students who have a career interest in homeland security enterprise.



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

**UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA**  
**IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE AND RADICALIZATION IN ONLINE MICROBLOG PLATFORMS**

PROJECT LEADS:  
**MATTHEW JENSEN AND SHANE CONNELLY**

Build awareness of online messaging strategies and how they may be used to either promote or counter extremist rhetoric.

**YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Disseminated findings through publications, presentations, and meeting with stakeholders.
- Completed research on techniques to mitigate the negative effects of extremist rhetoric and produced final report.
- Addressed practitioner and academic audience about findings and impact.

**PROJECTED IMPACT**

- Provide insight regarding cyber tactics, messaging techniques, and procedures of extremist ideological groups.
- Build awareness of how messaging strategies can counter extremist rhetoric.



**UNO**  
**NON-TERRORISM CHARGES FOR DOMESTIC TERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS**

PROJECT LEAD:  
**SEAMUS HUGHES**

Examine domestic violent extremism cases that do not result in terrorism charges and recommend policy to close the gaps that exist in these prosecutions.

**YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Mentioned in news media 25 times.
- Conducted 18 briefings with practitioners, including DHS, FBI, CIA and GAO.
- Produced two infographic handouts outlining federal charges against violent incels and violent QAnon adherents.

**YEAR 5 PLAN**

- Expand ongoing NCITE research to ensure a holistic picture of non-terrorism federal charges arrests.
- Produce infographics that provide examples of relevant prosecutions.
- Tailor research to address the most pressing policy and analytical questions.

**PROJECTED IMPACT**

- Generate more research and findings on prosecuting domestic violent extremism.
- Disseminate research through FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces, DHS Fusion Centers, and other law enforcement channels.
- Publish academic journal articles to further the discussion within academia on this topic.



**UCONN**  
**UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN THE RECRUITMENT AND OPERATIONAL BEHAVIOR OF TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS**

PROJECT LEAD:  
**EVAN PERKOSKI**

Examine recruitment practices and membership characteristics that affect the operation and outcomes of terrorist organizations.

**YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Undergraduate researchers created a dataset which details the recruitment patterns of over 300 terrorist organizations worldwide.
- Submitted three different reports about project findings.

**YEAR 5 PLAN**

- Examine case studies to validate the data collected over the life of the project.
- Create a comprehensive report that includes a framework for understanding terrorist threats as a function of recruitment practices.

**PROJECTED IMPACT**

- Enhance DHS's ability to thwart recruitment practices and radicalization by terrorist organizations, thereby preventing future radicalization and hindering the success of violent extremist organizations.

# THEME 1 UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM



## UCF UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM POLITICAL DISCOURSE TO ELECTION-MOTIVATED VIOLENT EXTREMISM

PROJECT LEADS:  
**ADAN VELA AND  
STEVEN WINDISCH**

Develop a threat-level monitor to determine the risk of election-motivated violence targeting election officials and staff.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Contributed multiple reports and presentations about findings, including multiple media mentions.
- Completed data collection and delivered findings on the threshold between political discourse and election-motivated violence.
- Identified and shared knowledge on what techniques and protocols won't work as well as others.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Create guidelines and recommendations for election officials and staff on how to protect themselves and their information online.



## CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY UNDERSTANDING THREATS TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS

PROJECT LEAD:  
**PETE SIMI**

Understand a broader trend of public support for political violence in the United States, including patterns related to threats against public officials.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Presented preliminary results at conferences such as the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections (CSSE) and briefed multiple organizations about findings.
- Worked with multiple investigative journalists regarding threats to judges (Bloomberg News) and overall threats (CNN).

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Conduct a state-of-science review to assess existing survey studies focused on the level of public support for political violence.
- Focus on data analysis, sharing results in plain-language infographics, in-person and virtual briefings, and written products such as peer-reviewed article submissions and op-eds.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Fill a critical gap in the understanding of threats to public officials.
- Help shape a comprehensive understanding of the current threat landscape and support for political violence in the U.S.



# THEME 3 TERRORISM PREVENTION



## UNIVERSITY OF MAINE BARRIERS TO FAMILY SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTING (SAR) OF MOBILIZATION BEHAVIORS

PROJECT LEAD:  
**KARYN SPORER**

Understand the role family members of violent extremists can play in countering violent extremism.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Analyzed nearly 70 hours of interview data (1,417 pages of transcription), writing results and research papers.
- Submitted a manuscript which is currently under peer review.
- Submitted a research brief about findings.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Provide a baseline awareness of loved ones' observations and responses to radicalization.
- Increase understanding of barriers to reporting suspicious behaviors.
- Create a strategy for developing training resources for family members of violent extremists.



## UNO UNDERSTANDING AND PREPARING FOR TERRORISM AND TARGETED VIOLENCE RISKS AT EVENT VENUES

PROJECT LEAD:  
**TIN NGUYEN**

Inform and improve threat assessment research and practice, which will in turn guide DHS's threat assessment resourcing decisions.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Presented findings at NCITE ENVISION24 conference.
- Presented findings on protecting outdoor events on *NCITE Insights* podcast.
- Completed interviews with event security professionals.
- Distributed preliminary findings to local and DHS stakeholders in a working group at the NCITE annual conference.

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Collect open-source information about various kinds of event-related targeted violence to better understand the threat.
- Develop a theoretical understanding of how different venue personnel should discuss security with event organizers to strengthen communication and collaboration.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Create a consensus and awareness within academia about threat assessment organizations.
- Transform baseline needs identified in this project into practical solutions.
- Educate threat assessment organizations about how peer organizations build community networks and staff teams.
- Inform DHS and NCITE on how to better support threat assessment efforts.



# THEME 4 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



## SUNY ALBANY & UMASS LOWELL PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN TERRORISM RESEARCH (PT2R): IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS AND INTERVENTION POINTS FOR WORK-RELATED PSYCHOSOCIAL TRAUMA

PROJECT LEADS:  
**MATTHEW CRAYNE AND  
NEIL SHORTLAND**

Identify the prevalence, form, risk factors, and impact of psychological trauma that terrorism researchers and scholars experience.

### YEAR 4 AND PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- Involved 9,000 hours of student engagement over the span of the whole project.
- Created a comprehensive analysis of the psychological impact of terrorism research on researchers.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Offer insight and tools to support the well-being of scholars within the homeland security enterprise.
- Bolster the mental health, resilience, and effectiveness of the counterterrorism research community.

# THEME 4 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



## KENNESAW STATE & TEMPLE THE NEEDS OF THE COUNTERTERRORISM WORKFORCE AND THE UTILITY OF EXISTING DATASETS

PROJECT LEADS:  
**MICHAEL LOGAN AND  
STEVEN WINDISCH**

Provide information on the reliability and validity of existing terrorism datasets available to counterterrorism professionals.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Found 97 different domestic terrorism and targeted violence datasets based on literature review.
- Created a new dataset called the Violent Events Dataset (VED).
- Published findings in numerous conference papers and posters.

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Disseminate information found in the project across multiple disciplines through reports and conferences.
- Produce comprehensive training modules tailored for counterterrorism analysts focusing on leveraging publicly available datasets on domestic terrorism and targeted violence.
- Host a "Researcher-Meets-End-User" event to get feedback on the research thus far.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Improve information sharing to strengthen domestic violent extremism prevention and resources.
- Assist the counterterrorism workforce with identifying viable datasets.
- Remove the burden on the counterterrorism workforce to evaluate datasets.



## AMERICAN UNIVERSITY VICARIOUS TRAUMA IN COUNTERTERRORISM PRACTITIONERS

PROJECT LEADS:  
**JOSEPH YOUNG AND  
DAISY MUIBU**

Develop a baseline understanding of how counterterrorism practitioners are affected by exposure to violence.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Created a survey and collected responses from 469 practitioners and government workers.
- Communicated findings through seven conferences and presentations throughout the year.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Develop targeted suggestions on how to make counterterrorism practitioners more resilient.
- Better understand how to track and categorize different kinds of traumatic exposure practitioners experience.
- Fill in gaps in the literature and provide a snapshot of the mental health of counterterrorism practitioners.



## AMERICAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF PEER SUPPORT TRAINING PROGRAMS TO REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF SECONDARY EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

PROJECT LEADS:  
**JOSEPH YOUNG AND  
DAISY MUIBU**

Evaluate the existing evidence on peer support programs and identify best practices, then apply those to assess a DHS use case.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Surveyed 104 counterterrorism practitioners operating within the United States.
- Hosted multiple workshops to gain an understanding of counterterrorism practitioners and explain these findings to stakeholders.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Understand how different levels of exposure to violence affect the well-being of counterterrorism practitioners.
- Mitigate vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue throughout the counterterrorism workforce.

# EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



## UNO BUILDING CAPACITY IN HSE-FOCUSED BUSINESS ANALYSIS APPLICATION

PROJECT LEADS:  
**ERIN BASS AND ERIN  
PLEGGENKUHLE-MILES**

Expose MBA students to viable careers in the homeland security enterprise and deliver project solutions to DHS end users.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Surveyed students and found those unfamiliar with the homeland security enterprise dropped from 67% to 39% via pre-and post-test surveys.
- Students familiar with the homeland security enterprise doubled, increasing from 16% to 32% via pre-and post-test surveys.
- Exposed 235 students in Year 4 to the homeland security enterprise.

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Continue exposing students to career paths in the public sector and get them in front of end users who could potentially hire them.
- Implement more student exposure through DHS end-user projects, homeland security guest speakers, and business school pipeline development.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Give students the training and skills to address homeland security challenges.
- Expose students to career opportunities and introduce DHS end users to potential hires.
- Give business students a better understanding of careers in government.



## SDSU BUILDING CAPACITY AT MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

PROJECT LEADS:  
**ERIC FROST AND  
LANCE LARSON**

Develop and educate a future homeland security workforce through graduate courses at a minority-serving institution.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed teaching of HSEC 602 class with teaching materials, videos of classes, clear focus on DHS strategy goals.
- Prototype classes taught by Intelligence Training Academy to students as approved by DHS.
- Hosted fentanyl webinar that drew over 600 attendees.

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Educate graduate students about the homeland security enterprise with the hope that they will develop their own solutions to national security challenges.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Workforce development for the homeland security enterprise at minority-serving institutions.
- Increase collaboration between students, academics, and local, state, and federal practitioners.



## UNO INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCIENCE AND SECURITY (IAPSS)

PROJECT LEAD:  
**GINA LIGON**

Improve knowledge sharing and collaboration across international research and development apparatus with a focus on targeted violence and terrorism prevention.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Held the first two webinars of the IAPSS Seminar Series to support early career researcher (ECR) development.
- Held inaugural IAPSS conference in London, drawing 62 attendees from 12 countries.
- Awarded six stipends totaling \$30,000 to support ECR development.

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Hold second annual IAPSS conference in March or April 2025. Location TBD.
- Establish more mechanisms for collaboration between countries and researchers.
- Continue development of the ECR network.
- Continue ECR grant program.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Facilitate knowledge sharing among different countries to find common priorities and research methods.
- Assist the development of the next generation of social and behavioral scientists in the prevention space.

# EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



## DUKE UNIVERSITY ASSESSING THE BENEFITS OF SIMULATIONS AND WAR GAMES FOR HOMELAND SECURITY ENTERPRISE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT LEAD:  
**DAVID SCHANZER**

Improve workforce development for the homeland security enterprise through the development, deployment, and evaluation of homeland security-focused strategic simulations.

### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Developed simulation game and assessment tools used in Spring 2024.
- Completed research that supported development of the game *Acceleration*, improving student learning.

### YEAR 5 PLAN

- Include the game *Acceleration* as a part of a course at Duke University for the 2024-2025 year.
- Publish a study about the benefits of education and training with games.

### PROJECTED IMPACT

- Optimize student learning with revisions to the game *Acceleration*.
- Allow DHS to deploy the latest educational and training resources.
- Contribute to a better understanding about what aspects of games are optimal for learning.
- Share game and training with other counterterrorism partners.



## OTHER NCITE PROJECTS

### PUBLIC SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION EVALUATIONS

PROJECT LEAD:  
**SAM HUNTER**

PROJECT PARTNERS:  
**RESEARCH TRIANGLE INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

Evaluate prevention programming, soft target security, and **threat assessment** and management tools to identify potential vulnerabilities and best practices to protect and prevent.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate prevention programming and identify best practices by allies abroad.
2. Evaluate soft target security and approaches for quantifying potential vulnerabilities.
3. Evaluate current threat assessments and threat management tools.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Research Triangle Institute (RTI) wrapped up one of their two tasks.
- NCITE's research team submitted *Threat and Risk Assessment Measurement: A State of the Science Review*, which served as the compilation of findings and reports that have been submitted to DHS.

#### IMPACT

Identify gaps and inform updated protocols for developing new risk assessment techniques and recidivism reduction programs that strengthen terrorism prevention efforts.

### SCIENTIFIC EFFORTS TO COMBAT TERRORIST USE OF EXPLOSIVES IN THE UNITED STATES

PROJECT LEAD:  
**AUSTIN DOCTOR**

PROJECT PARTNERS:  
**NATIONAL STRATEGIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

Develop an updated, unclassified federal report outlining challenges in combating terrorist use of explosives in the U.S. that reflects the changes to improvised explosive device (IED) threat and capability landscape.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Identify pathways to mitigate the evolving terrorist IED threat using research, development, test, and evaluation initiatives.
2. Prioritize knowledge and capabilities needed to disrupt events leading to an IED attack and respond to IED incidents.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Researchers submitted the final copy of *Research Challenges in Combating Terrorist Use of Explosives in the United States*.
- The project concluded in summer 2024.

#### IMPACT

This report improves the nation's ability to prevent, respond to, and mitigate the use of explosives against critical infrastructure.

### PUBLIC SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION: TARGETED VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM PREVENTION (TVTP) GRANT PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

PROJECT LEAD:  
**MATT ALLEN**

PROJECT PARTNERS:  
**RESEARCH TRIANGLE INSTITUTE AND UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**

Evaluate two DHS grants funding Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention programs to determine how well they are working and develop tools that support future evaluation of TVTP programs.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) grant program and Invent2Prevent.
2. Develop evidence-based tools to assist DHS grantees with future program evaluations.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Awarded additional funds to continue evaluation efforts for grantees in more recent grant cycles and develop sustainability measures for grant programs.

#### IMPACT

Standardized evaluation approaches across programs, as well as tailored evaluations for each program, supported future program evaluations and established baselines.

## OTHER NCITE PROJECTS

### MANAGING THE EXIT OF INCARCERATED VIOLENT EXTREMISTS IN THE COMMUNITY-HANDBOOK

PROJECT LEAD:  
**ERIN KEARNS**

Develop a comprehensive plan to manage the reintegration of federally incarcerated former violent extremists back into communities after their release from correctional facilities.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Engage subject matter experts involved in the management of former violent extremists after release from correctional facilities to identify opportunities to improve processes.
2. Develop a handbook about working with violent extremist offenders as they reintegrate back into their communities.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed 70+ interviews with stakeholders and other individuals involved with the reintegration process.
- Submitted a report analyzing outputs of stakeholder interviews.

#### IMPACT

The handbook will be provided to the Administrative Office (AO) within the judicial branch and will summarize needs within the reintegration process that will inform budget and other services supporting the federal court system.

### CURRENT AND EMERGING MALIGN USE OF GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGIES TO THREATEN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

PROJECT LEAD:  
**AUSTIN DOCTOR**

PROJECT PARTNERS:  
**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM (START)**

Increased accessibility of geospatial technology can be employed by terrorists to launch attacks against critical infrastructure and other crowded targets. This research forecasts how these technologies could be used and informs response and prevention.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how new geospatial technologies can be used by terrorists in innovative ways.
2. Inform federal, state, local, and tribal authorities on potential threats from these technologies.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed three rapid reviews looking at advancements in geospatial technologies.
- Conducted 20+ interviews with subject matter experts informing concerns about emerging geospatial technologies and applications by non-state actors.

#### IMPACT

Provide authorities with information on the potential ways terrorists may use geospatial technologies to attack critical infrastructure to inform response protocols.

### NTER OFFICE INITIATIVES

PROJECT LEADS:  
**ANDREA WALKER AND TIN NGUYEN**

PROJECT PARTNERS:  
**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN PUBLIC POLICY CENTER AND CNA CORP**

Evaluate the effectiveness of the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Office (NTER) Master Trainer Program focused on enhancing outcomes for Certified Master Trainers and improving behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) program setup and implementation.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Master Trainer Program.
2. Provide recommendations to improve BTAM program capabilities.

#### YEAR 4 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Conducted 15+ interviews with subject matter experts within the NTER Master Trainer space.
- Conducted 15+ interviews with subject matter experts within the Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) Program space.

#### IMPACT

Provide insights and recommendations to improve the NTER Office Master Trainer Program and BTAM practices to prevent violence and mitigate threats.

## OTHER PROJECTS AND GRANTS

### DEVELOPING AND TESTING AN INTELLIGENT CHATBOT TO HELP IDENTIFY THREATS AND IMPROVE TIPS REPORTING

PROJECT LEADS:  
**JOEL ELSON  
AND ERIN KEARNS**

Improve the tips reporting process to reduce breakdowns in action required to prevent terrorism and targeted violence by creating a chatbot to aid in tip reporting.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Develop an intelligent chatbot to aid in threat identification and improve tips reporting.
2. Test the use of the chatbot as a stand-alone tool and to potentially integrate into existing tips reporting platforms.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Completed all data collection, analysis, and reports summarizing the development and testing of a chatbot for reporting and investigating threats.

#### IMPACT

Improve understanding of barriers to tips reporting and behavioral threat assessment team needs. Identify and offer solutions for common pitfalls in reporting platforms.

### REINTEGRATING THE RETURNING SPOUSES & CHILDREN OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

PROJECT LEAD:  
**AUSTIN DOCTOR**

Prioritize and effectively reintegrate the spouses and children of foreign terrorist fighters to the United States and develop training programs to support the workforce and broader community tasked with managing the reintegration of this population.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Establish and report out best practices on reintegration for national security and humanitarian purposes.
2. Develop a microcredential training program for the reintegration workforce and broader community of practitioners.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Awarded additional funds to develop a microcredential training program.

#### IMPACT

Evidence-based training upskills the workforce supporting the reintegration of families of foreign terrorist fighters into the U.S.

### SCREENING FOR INSIDER THREATS IN U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT

PROJECT LEAD:  
**ERIN KEARNS**

Study how police departments screen for and identify insider threats in the hiring process and among active officers.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Inform recommendations for best practices for screening applicants and current officers to reduce the risk of insider threats.
2. Identify additional opportunities for agencies to improve how they elect to monitor and detect potential insider threats among officers.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Disseminated a report outlining the results of the research and offering recommendations for reducing the risk of insider threats.
- Developed a document for law enforcement agencies to use to assess the rigor of their hiring practices in screening for insider threats.

#### IMPACT

Provide a systematic understanding of insider threats in law enforcement and address gaps in department-level policies and procedures.





## Connect with NCITE at the University of Nebraska at Omaha

📍 6001 Dodge St. Omaha, NE 68182

✉ [ncite@unomaha.edu](mailto:ncite@unomaha.edu) ☎ 402.554.6422 🌐 [ncite.unomaha.edu](http://ncite.unomaha.edu) ✖ @NCITE\_COE  NCITE  NCITE  @ncite\_coe

*The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its education programs or activities, including admissions and employment. The University prohibits any form of retaliation being taken against anyone for reporting discrimination, harassment, or retaliation for otherwise engaging in protected activity. 0475RPTNCITE1124*

**Read the full non-discrimination statement for the University of Nebraska at Omaha**

