



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

NCITE

NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM INNOVATION,
TECHNOLOGY, AND EDUCATION CENTER



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Omaha



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This report outlines the achievements of the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center in accordance with the Grant Award #20STTPC00001-03 for Budget Year 3, which ran July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

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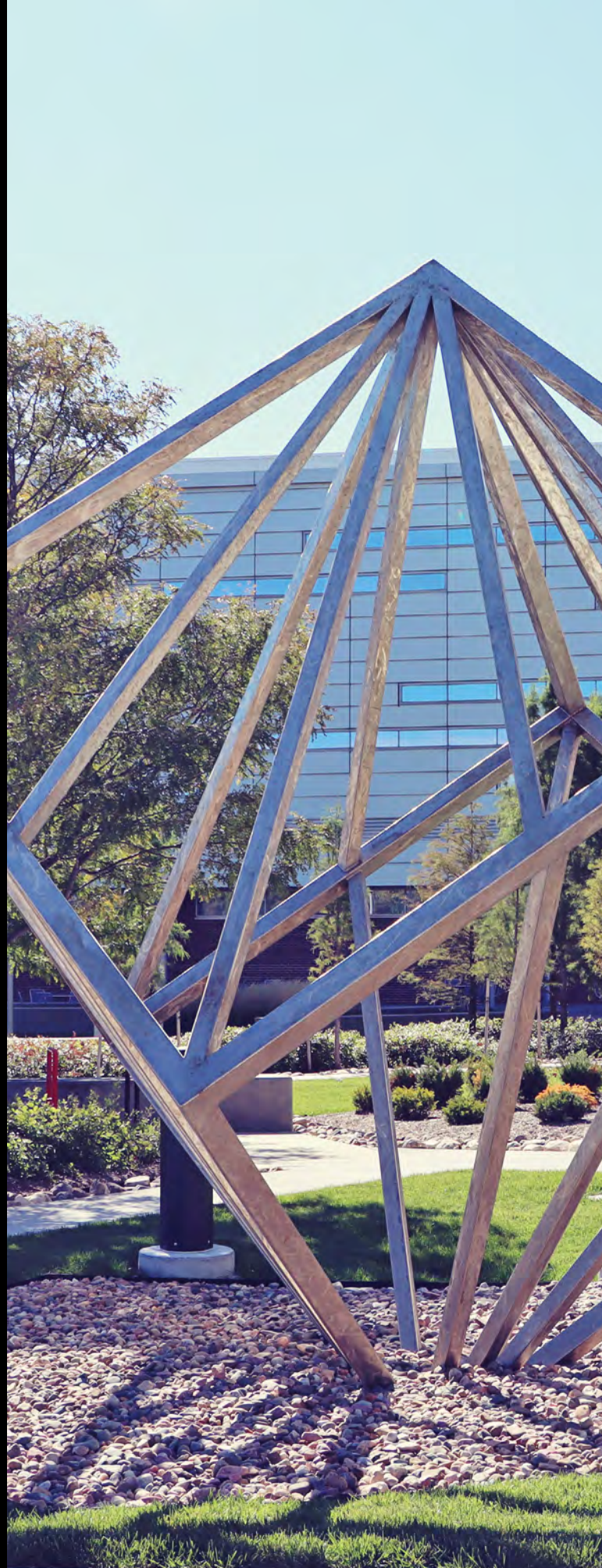
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“IF I HAD TO SUMMARIZE NCITE’S YEAR 3 IN ONE WORD, IT WOULD BE: GROWTH. WE GREW IN PEOPLE. WE GREW IN PROJECTS. WE GREW AWARENESS OF OUR CENTER...”

GINA LIGON
NCITE CENTER DIRECTOR

DEAR NCITE,

In my letter to you in last year’s annual report, I compared NCITE’s first two years to a new plant. In Year 1, I wrote, we planted the seed. In Year 2, the infant sprout emerged from the ground.

Allow me to extend the metaphor: In NCITE’s third year, the sprout unfurled its new leaves and began to mature — rapidly — into the thriving adult plant it always had the potential to be.

If I had to summarize NCITE’s Year 3 in one word, it would be: Growth. We grew in people. We grew in projects. We grew awareness of our center among high-profile figures in government, industry, and academia.

And, of course, we grew the collective body of essential knowledge and tools that help keep our nation safe.

All this was on display during ENVISION22, our first ever annual conference held last October on the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Scott Campus. There, we hosted more than 200 in-person and virtual guests — including U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary Samantha Vinograd, and White House Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Josh Geltzer. The conference provided a long-awaited opportunity to build community among the members of our consortium and showcase our Year 3 portfolio of innovative research projects to stakeholders in government, industry, and academia.

ENVISION marked just one of many times that distinguished visitors walked NCITE’s halls in Year 3. Prior to the conference in October 2022, Christy Abizaid, director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), donned a VR headset in our tech demo room and learned about our research into malign potential of the metaverse. In December, DHS Under Secretary for Science and Technology Dimitri Kusnezov toured our spaces, met with university leadership, and held a fireside chat with our faculty, staff, and students. We also welcomed the University of Nebraska System Board of Regents, the team from the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Program Office (NTER), CEO of Valens Global Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, and other notable local, state, and national officials.

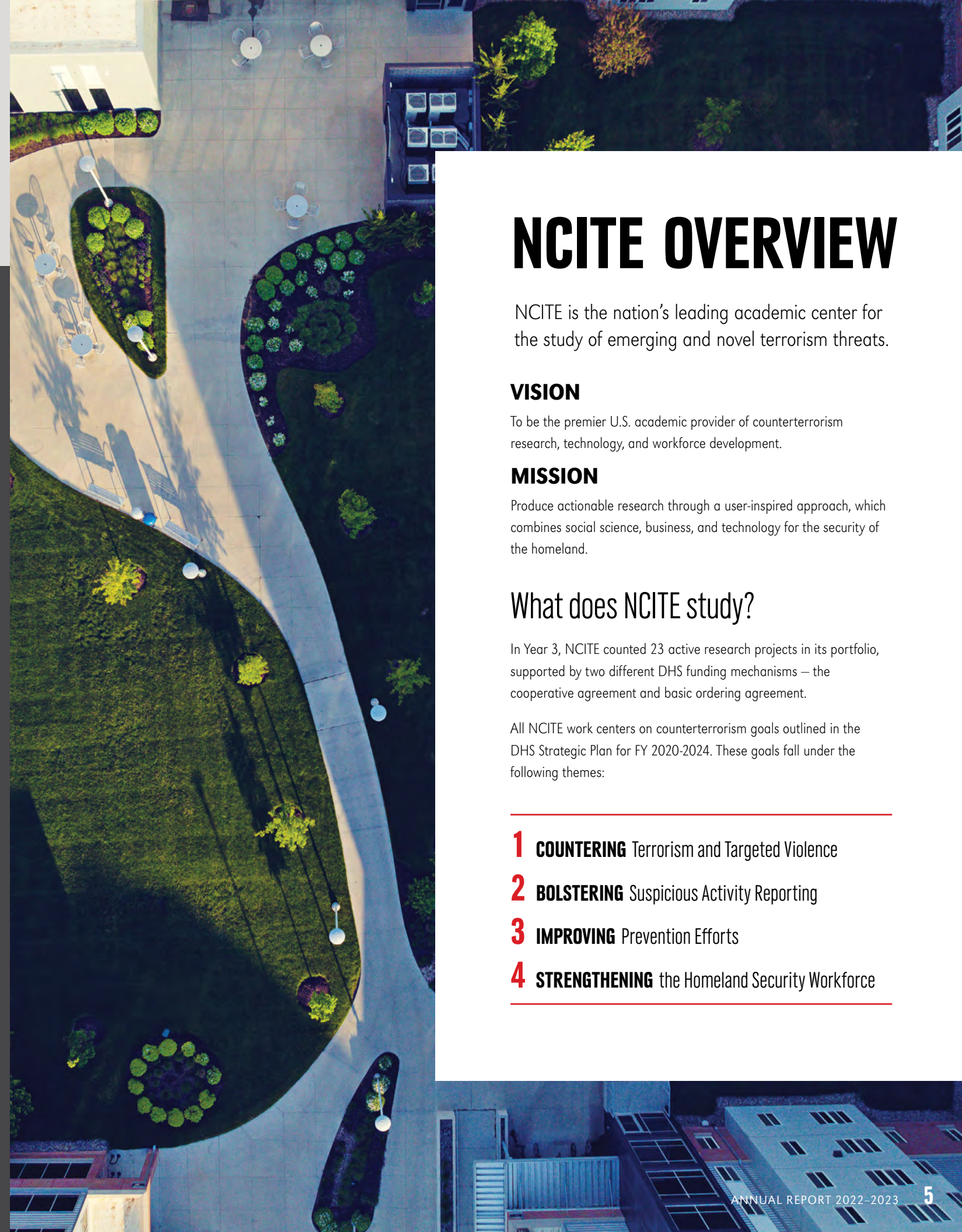
They didn’t just come to us. In Year 3, NCITE leadership, faculty, and staff traveled across North America and Europe, building our network and sharing our consortium’s important work. Most notably, a team of us traveled to Washington, D.C., in February for NCITE’s first ever biennial review with DHS. There, we told the story of our center’s first two years and heard feedback from a team of reviewers who advised us on how we can continue to make NCITE an even more relevant partner for our colleagues in national security.

Part of that feedback involved making our research products ready and available to our government partners and the public. Year 3 saw several NCITE research projects bear fruit, resulting in a steady flow of journal articles, published reports, infographics and more, which we posted on our searchable online repository, Digital Commons. The platform has allowed us to see that our research is truly making a global impact — with reports being downloaded across the U.S. government and by our allies abroad.

But this work doesn’t just exist on the page. In Year 3, we hosted a series of public-facing events that brought our research insights out into full view. We hosted panel discussions on the threat of violence during the U.S. elections, best practices for reintegrating the families of foreign ISIS fighters, terrorist use of memes, and other important topics. We also engaged with the media, adding crucial context to developments in the news, and publishing op-eds on critical trends in national security, including the rise of artificial intelligence technology and threats to critical infrastructure.

From Day 1, NCITE’s vision has been to be the premier U.S. academic provider of counterterrorism research, technology, and workforce development programs. After Year 3, we are further along than ever in making that vision a reality.

Gina Ligon
NCITE Center Director



NCITE OVERVIEW

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

VISION

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

MISSION

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

What does NCITE study?

In Year 3, NCITE counted 23 active research projects in its portfolio, supported by two different DHS funding mechanisms — the cooperative agreement and basic ordering agreement.

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

ABOUT NCITE

NCITE was named a Center of Excellence by DHS in 2020 and launched the same year with a 10-year, \$36.5 million grant from the DHS Office of University Programs. NCITE has since tapped into other DHS funding streams to increase research capacity.

In its first three years, NCITE kept a stable portfolio involving more than 50 researchers at 26 institutions across the U.S. and Europe. Together, our consortium exposed hundreds of students in varied disciplines to the DHS mission and counterterrorism and targeted violence issues.

NCITE'S VALUES

- 1** INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION
- 2** GROWTH MINDSET
- 3** STAKEHOLDER FOCUS

- 4** STUDENT 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.



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.



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.



COURTNEY SKLENAR

Education Programs and Events Manager

Sklenar manages all NCITE events and leads educational development programming for the center's students.



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.



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.



JEN KALVODA

DHS Engagements Project Manager

Kalvoda manages center work funded under NCITE's cooperative agreement with DHS. She also assists in scheduling and organizing the center's calendar.



DEANNA MARCELINO

Research Protection and Commercialization Manager

Marcelino leads IT Transition activities with UNeMed to transition NCITE knowledge or technology projects through patent and commercialization processes.



TIN NGUYEN

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.



BLAKE URSCH

Strategic Communications Manager

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



KAYLA WALTERS

Senior Research Associate

Walters manages NCITE's research portfolio funded under the cooperative agreement. She also serves as lead investigator and works to shape NCITE's internal workforce development opportunities.



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 an associate 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.



SAM HUNTER

Head of Strategic Operations

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.



KAT PARSONS

Research Specialist

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.



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.



**ERIN
PLEGGENKUHLE-MILES**

NCITE Business Strategy

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



SYDNEY REICHIN

Research Specialist

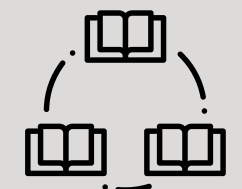
Reichin is responsible for a range of duties supporting BOA projects on soft targets, CP3 program evaluation, and threat assessment. Her own research focuses on the relationship between dark traits and counterproductive workplace behaviors.



ANDREA WALKER

Research Specialist

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.



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.

OUR WORK

NCITE's work spans three main areas — generating innovative research insights, educating students, and assisting the professional counterterrorism workforce. The following stories illustrate how we furthered that work in Year 3.

GENERATING RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Combating terrorism has grown more urgent, difficult, and complex. That's why getting the right tools and practices into the hands of frontline counterterrorism workers is so important.

Our mission is to take down silos and streamline the process to put research into product and practice. The sheer scope of the threat environment outlined by DHS calls for a customer-driven, relentless academic pursuit.

Read how Matt Allen, NCITE's head of business strategy, is channeling that mission with his work evaluating DHS prevention programs.

EVALUATING SAFER COMMUNITIES

NCITE'S MATT ALLEN EXAMINES PREVENTION PROGRAMS

BY BEN BATTAFARANO



MATT ALLEN

Shocking acts of targeted violence have become an all-too-familiar part of American life.

Take Texas. In 2019, a gunman walked into a Walmart in El Paso and killed 23 people, injuring 22 others. In Uvalde in 2022, a gunman killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School.

In line with an executive order issued by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott calling for improved deterrence and detection of domestic terror threats, the Texas Department of Public Safety successfully applied in 2022 for a grant of \$286,381 from the DHS Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) program. With the funds, the department will develop and implement training courses and educational materials for community partners (churches, businesses, schools) on signs of domestic radicalization.

"SO THE PROJECT, AT THE MOST FOUNDATIONAL LEVEL, IS ABOUT EVALUATING TARGETED VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM PREVENTION PROGRAMS."

NCITE's Matt Allen, Ph.D., and his team are leading an evaluation of TVTP and another DHS program, Invent2Prevent (I2P). The evaluation is a three-year, \$4.5 million project that will investigate how the programs have been administered by DHS and how grantees have administered their projects.

"So the project, at the most foundational level, is about evaluating targeted violence and terrorism prevention programs," said Allen.

"We're digging into all of their processes — that can include things like what types of projects should be awarded, the composition of different types of programs, how they select the grantees, and how they manage those grants."

In June 2021, the federal government released a 32-page plan to combat domestic extremism, shifting a decades-long focus from foreign threats. TVTP and Invent2Prevent address two of the plan's chief goals: to enhance research and analysis and increase prevention resources and services at the local level.

The TVTP program began in 2016 and is administered by the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3). It awards grants to state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education to address targeted violence prevention within their communities.

Recent grantees have included:

- Lee Memorial Health System (Fort Myers, Florida) — awarded \$110,000 to create threat assessment and threat management systems to prevent violence against local health care workers.
- Fairfax County Police Department (Fairfax, Virginia) — awarded \$215,000 to create an interdisciplinary threat assessment and management team for evaluating threat levels in potentially dangerous or violent situations.
- International Documentary Association (Los Angeles) — awarded \$193,410 to implement a documentary-based education program for high schoolers to raise awareness on why individuals radicalize to violence.

Invent2Prevent is a competition that awards funds to mentored high school and collegiate student teams to develop a product or tool designed to engage their communities in preventing targeted violence. For example, a project from the University of South Carolina titled “No Name, No Fame” sought to convince journalists and media organizations to limit publishing the names of mass shooters, as research has demonstrated that notoriety increases the incidence of copycats.

Allen and the NCITE team are leading the undertaking, evaluating DHS’s administration of the programs as a whole.

“IT REQUIRES A LOT OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE TO BE ABLE TO CONDUCT EVALUATIONS OF THESE DIFFERENT PROGRAMS. YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND STATISTICS, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND RESEARCH METHODS, AND OFTENTIMES THESE PROGRAMS DON’T HAVE THAT TYPE OF EXPERTISE IN HOUSE.”

As part of the project, the team has partnered with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Public Policy Center and RTI International, an independent nonprofit research institute. The Public Policy Center is focusing on evaluating outcomes of the Invent2Prevent program. Part of its evaluation will examine the unique impact of student involvement and how faculty foster success. RTI, for its part, will conduct an evaluation of a subset of fiscal year 2021 and 2022 TVTP grantees.

“It requires a lot of technical expertise to be able to conduct evaluations of these different programs,” said Allen. “You have to understand statistics, you have to understand research methods, and oftentimes these programs don’t have that type of expertise in house.”

Allen is an industrial-organizational (I-O) psychologist. He’s worked extensively with national security organizations, including spending more than four years with the Department of Defense, developing programs for new hire and leadership selection.

Allen is a Southern California native and received his bachelor’s from the University of California at Riverside. While he earned a degree in psychology, his interest was sparked by a survey course in I-O psychology.

“I didn’t know a ton about it when I started applying for graduate schools, but it’s worked out for me, fortunately,” Allen said. “I particularly liked the idea of consulting — you get to work with a lot of different types of organizations and help them diagnose and solve problems.”

Allen earned his master’s degree from the University of Oklahoma, later earning his Ph.D. in 2008. He credits his advisor, Shane Connelly, Ph.D., an I-O psychologist and researcher on another NCITE project, with inspiring his career trajectory.

“One of her early career experiences was as an internal consultant at the FBI,” Allen said. “When she would talk about her experience working there, I just thought that was so cool.”

Connelly’s experience initially persuaded Allen to apply his I-O psychology expertise to national security. In 2021, Allen joined NCITE as head of business strategy. He also serves as an assistant professor of management at the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s College of Business Administration.

Allen is one of several NCITE leaders who head research projects with the center. Several, like Allen’s, are funded through NCITE’s basic ordering agreement (BOA) with DHS that allows the government to direct work to NCITE according to its operational research needs.

“They approached us initially and said that (developing evaluative criteria for these programs) was kind of a priority project area,” said Allen. “DHS said, basically, how would you go about accomplishing this?”

“WE’RE GOING TO SHOW THE WAYS THAT WE CAN STRUCTURE THE PROGRAM SUCH THAT WE CAN MAKE MUCH STRONGER CONCLUSIONS GOING FORWARD.”

From 2020 to 2022, 109 TVTP grants were funded, with \$50 million awarded. With such a swath of data, the evaluations will focus on scaling the findings to future grant recipients.

“That’s what we’re building towards here,” said Allen. “They would have the tools to be able to do much of the evaluation on their own.”

Drawing conclusions on whether a past project was successful can be a challenge, particularly when it comes to prevention programs. A principal goal for Allen’s team is to develop clear success markers for DHS.

“You (often) get to the end of an evaluation and it’s inconclusive in terms of — did the program work or not?” said Allen. “We’re going to show the ways that we can structure the program such that we can make much stronger conclusions going forward.”

The project will compile several years of data related to program activities and outcomes alongside data from interviews with subject matter experts internal and external to DHS. Processing this information is a multidisciplinary NCITE team of staff research specialists and graduate students trained in I-O psychology, economics, business, and criminology.

Doctoral student Sarah Steele brings qualitative data gathering experience to the team. Steele’s expertise is in criminology and criminal justice, and she’s interviewed extensively within the carceral system during her studies. She completed her undergraduate and master’s programs in Texas but was attracted to NCITE for the applied nature of the research.

“Throughout the Ph.D. program, I’ve had an interest in policy,” said Steele. “UNO is a school that’s known for being very community engaged, which is something that I was very interested in.”

Steele began working with Allen in June 2022 and will be on the evaluation project through her anticipated graduation in fall 2024. Beyond project meetings, she and Allen have one-on-one meetings every month to check in.

“He’s given me mentoring in terms of looking over my job materials,” said Steele. “Matt has a lot of experience in terms of leadership roles and hiring, and it’s been kind of unique to just talk about my professional goals.”

The team is working closely with the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) to evaluate the outcomes and impact of both the TVTP and Invent2Prevent programs.

“Dr. Allen’s evaluation expertise has been critical in helping DHS S&T shape appropriate research designs to evaluate the effectiveness of TVTP programs,” said Ajmal Aziz, S&T program manager for the project. “The evaluations underway will allow DHS to measure what is working, what is not, and what’s promising in TVTP programming.”

Reflecting on his career, Allen said he appreciates the autonomy and flexibility in his work with NCITE.

“I value having the ability to set up my own research agenda,” said Allen, “to come up with the questions that I want answered, and to take that all the way to fruition.”

“NCITE feels special,” he said. “It’s the opportunity to grow something and to build something.”



EDUCATING OUR STUDENTS

NCITE's students are at the core of what we do. We are dedicated educators, committed to bolstering national security by introducing today's learners to the mission of the homeland security enterprise.

Our students are actively engaged with the center's academic efforts and daily operations. They take on leadership roles, performing hands-on work and getting real-world experience that prepare them to be tomorrow's national security professionals.

Read about how NCITE graduate student Anthony Roberson is helping build a more inclusive national security workforce.

CHANGE, IMPROVEMENT, AND A LEAP OF FAITH: A CONVERSATION WITH ANTHONY ROBERSON

BY CHARLIE MAAS



ANTHONY ROBERSON

NCITE student Anthony Roberson began his journey to the center farther away than most.

Before he came to Omaha, Roberson was a Ph.D. student at one of the country's top industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology programs: Pennsylvania State University. In his program, Roberson

worked closely with Samuel Hunter, Ph.D., then professor of I-O psychology at Penn State.

When Hunter accepted a job offer as the head of strategic operations for a new counterterrorism startup called NCITE in faraway Omaha, Roberson was shocked. He was even more shocked that Hunter asked him to join.

"I'll never forget that morning," Roberson said. "I thought it was a joke."

Anthony made the most of his first year at UNO, working with Hunter as a research assistant in the university's I-O psychology program. After that first year, Roberson's research interests and career plans changed when he was offered a position as a junior research associate at NCITE.

At NCITE, Roberson works with a team of researchers on workforce development, taking a leadership role in developing initiatives that improve the education and training of new professionals entering

counterterrorism and improving efforts that minimize barriers to the field.

HE PLACES GREAT IMPORTANCE ON IMPROVING OUR WORKPLACES BY CREATING PRODUCTIVE, MERIT-BASED ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL EMPLOYEES.

Roberson speaks passionately about the need for greater commitment from decision-makers at organizations to further diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. He places great importance on improving workplaces by creating productive, merit-based environments for all employees.

Roberson also points out the importance of educating decision-makers in government, academia, and industry on evidence-based, nonpartisan DEI practices.



NCITE junior research associate Anthony Roberson, right, discusses his research with federal officials, including DHS Under Secretary of Science and Technology Dimitri Kusnezov, far left.

DEI work, Roberson said, doesn't just focus on creating positive, inclusive environments for people from diverse backgrounds. It also aims to identify how a diverse group of people can bring their unique strengths to their teams and organizations.

New policies that improve team environments and workplace programs that educate employees about systemic barriers are both examples of DEI initiatives.

Within the national security space, DEI work seeks to better understand the barriers that can stop people with

marginalized identities from entering the field of counterterrorism.

Roberson finds NCITE to be the optimal place for his research interests and has grown to appreciate how his and NCITE's goals align. Before accepting his position at NCITE, Roberson assumed the typical work that NCITE students did was quantitative, highly technical, and laser-focused on unfamiliar academic subjects.

"I didn't know how I would fit in at NCITE ... but seeing how interdisciplinary the center is, and seeing that I can work on student development, DEI initiatives — that's what drew me toward NCITE," he

said. "The theme, too, of keeping people safe ... Knowing that the work I do can influence the success of those research projects drives my motivation as well."

"THE THEME, TOO, OF KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE ... KNOWING THAT THE WORK I DO CAN INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS OF THOSE RESEARCH PROJECTS DRIVES MY MOTIVATION AS WELL."

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Inclusive Diversity Strategic Plan for 2021-2024 emphasizes the importance of continuing DEI work. To remain up-to-date in a rapidly changing world, DHS committed itself not just to creating productive work environments for different minority populations but creating opportunities to maximize their strengths.

THE CENTER USES THE STRENGTHS OF STUDENTS FROM AN ARRAY OF BACKGROUNDS AND PREPARES EACH OF THEM TO BE EXCELLENT IN WHATEVER CAREER THEY CHOOSE.

Roberson's experience reflects what many students at NCITE discover: The center uses the strengths of students from an array of backgrounds and prepares each of them to be excellent in whatever career they choose.

Roberson's work has positively impacted NCITE's efforts to develop the future counterterrorism workforce. True to the flexible approach of many DEI programs, Roberson, along with many of NCITE's students and staff, views the center's own programs for employees as opportunities.

Courtney Sklenar, NCITE education programs and events manager, works closely with Roberson, ensuring NCITE's academic programs are open and accessible to a diverse group of potential applicants.

"He has helped me with the STEM Innovation Fellows program, creating NCITE internship opportunities, looking

at unique ways to engage with minority-serving institutions, and so much more," she said. "The knowledge he has on diversity, equity, and inclusion has ensured that our education programs are inclusive to anyone and that we are building a culture that anyone would be proud of."

"HE'S AN EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT AND IS HIGHLY REGARDED BY HIS PEERS AS BEING INSIGHTFUL, THOUGHTFUL, AND BRIGHT."

Samuel Hunter, Roberson's graduate school mentor, perhaps understands Roberson's work better than anyone.

"He's an exceptional student and is highly regarded by his peers as being insightful, thoughtful, and bright. Anthony has a strong passion for his work in DEI and comes at the work from a very creative perspective, seeking to understand the complexities and nuances of that evolving space."

"THESE GROUPS TEND TO BE TARGETED BY TERRORISM GROUPS, AND BY HAVING THEM ON BOARD AT NCITE, WE CAN HAVE MORE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR COMBATING TERRORISM."

Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives extend into all industries. However, in the national security domain specifically, DEI has the potential to pave the way

for many people that are traditionally underrepresented in the field.

As the nation faces an increasing number of threats, both physical and digital, DEI programs can be tools for creating competent, flexible agents of change, Roberson said. People of color, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and others are all assisted by DEI work. In turn, these minds go on to innovate with new strategies that bolster national security.

"THIS FIELD NOT ONLY EXISTS, BUT CAN BE APPEALING TO PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, INCLUDING MYSELF. I NEVER THOUGHT I COULD BE IN A COUNTERTERRORISM SPACE UNTIL I GOT HERE."

"These groups tend to be targeted by terrorist groups, and by having people from marginalized groups on board at NCITE, we can have more creative solutions for combating terrorism," Roberson said.

Now in his fourth year of graduate education, Roberson has come to embrace the people and culture of NCITE and the mission of counterterrorism work.

"This field not only exists, but can be appealing to people from different backgrounds, including myself," he said. "I never thought I could be in a counterterrorism space until I got here."

DEVELOPING THE HOMELAND SECURITY WORKFORCE

NCITE is a committed partner to working professionals in the homeland security enterprise.

We pursue research with an applied focus in an effort to place vital information in the hands of those who need it. Our projects seek to answer questions from professionals in the field.

One of those questions: How does this difficult, sometimes traumatizing work affect individuals and the profession as a whole?

In two separate projects, four NCITE researchers are working to find out.

INSPIRED BY THEIR EXPERIENCES, RESEARCHERS STUDY TRAUMA IN COUNTERTERRORISM WORKFORCE

BY EVA BURKLUND

For the NCITE researchers studying trauma in counterterrorism practitioners and researchers, the work is deeply personal.

Joe Young, Ph.D., has spent his academic career studying the causes and consequences of violence. But the work took a tragic turn when his advisor, who also studied violence, suffered mental health issues and ultimately took his own life.

It made Young, now a professor of criminology at American University, realize something.

“There are probably some costs associated with being in this world that we’re not properly identifying,” he said.

Neil Shortland, Ph.D., recalls the toll of studying case files that involved indecent images of children for a local police department early in his career.

“I remember what that did to me, having to read those materials,” said Shortland, an associate professor of criminology at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. “My first interest in this project was definitely from what I did back then and knowing what it’s like being exposed to some of the worst materials.”

Daisy Muibu, Ph.D., was born and raised in Kenya and became interested in counterterrorism after she watched terrorist attacks increase following the Kenya National Defense Forces invasion of Somalia. She has worked on criminal justice reform and counterterrorism in Kenya and southern Somalia for years.

Her interest in the effects of trauma stems from a conversation she once had with Young: Would their different backgrounds and professional experiences shape the way they process violent material?

“I also work with datasets, but I find myself collecting a lot of my own data in the field in locations that perhaps have a higher risk, and so we recognize that,” said Daisy Muibu, an assistant professor of security studies. “Would we be similarly affected given the fact that we have these different types of exposure relative to one another?”

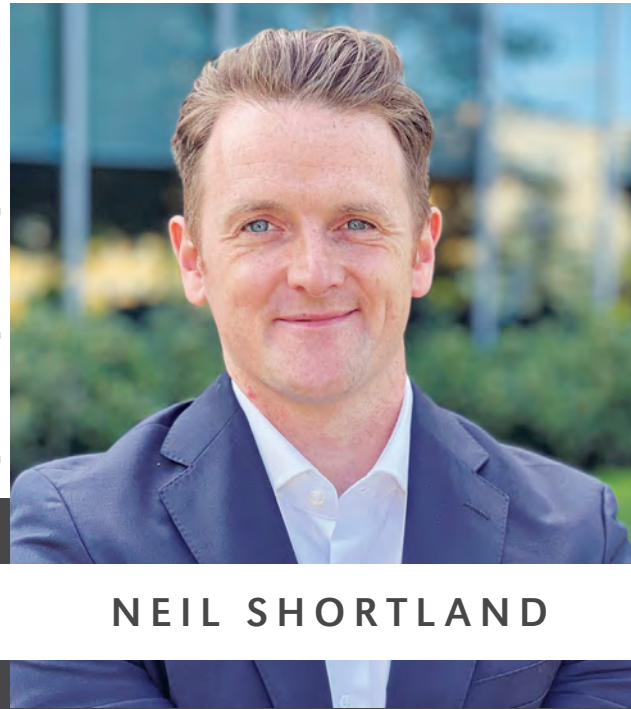
Each NCITE researcher differs in personal experience, but what they share is working in a unique field that demands an up-close look at violence. Knowing this, they are asking a central question: How does the study or practice of counterterrorism affect those doing it?

In parallel research projects, NCITE experts are seeking to better understand the effects of exposure to traumatic material in the counterterrorism workforce and identify ways to support those doing the work.

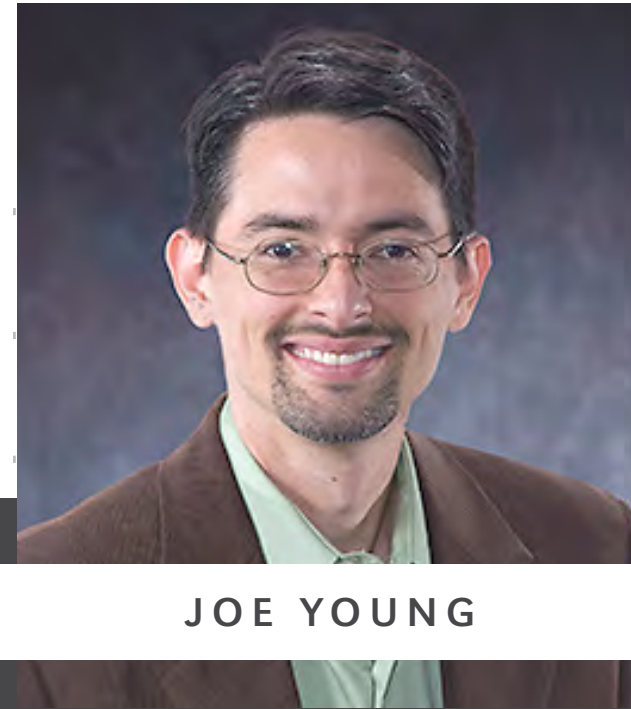
Matthew Crayne, Ph.D., an assistant professor of management at the University at Albany, and Shortland are focusing on the academic sphere. Their project analyzes the components of terrorism researchers’ jobs to better understand the potential for moral injury, or the often-harmful impact of experiencing something that violates a deeply held value or belief.



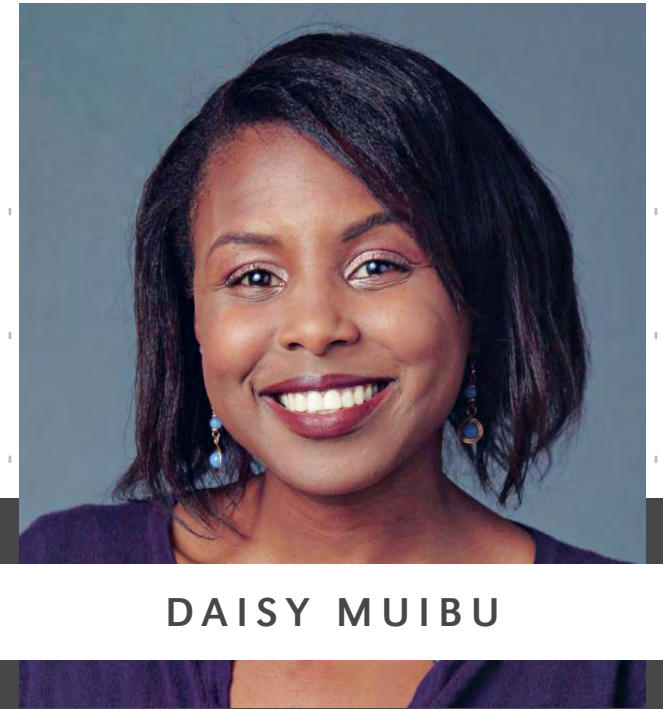
MATTHEW CRAYNE



NEIL SHORTLAND



JOE YOUNG



DAISY MUIBU

Muibu and Young are studying counterterrorism practitioners. They are surveying professionals in law enforcement and other government organizations to identify levels of exposure to violent material and determine the potential for vicarious trauma. Their goal is to develop ways to support the workforce.

To understand the impact of this exposure on researchers, Crayne, an I-O psychologist who studies leadership and occupational choice in businesses, interviewed researchers about their work. He found counterterrorism researchers themselves may not realize how distressing the exposure to violence may be.

“There are certain things that you will react to worse than others. It’s often things that you identify with,” Shortland said. “When I was (working with law enforcement on cases involving indecent images of children), the worst reaction I ever had was when the victim was the same age as my half-brother.”

That said, the researchers’ findings so far indicate a deep need and willingness to talk about the challenges facing the counterterrorism workforce.

“THE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF WHAT YOU’RE EXPOSED TO ARE PRETTY HIGH IN OUR BASELINE, WHICH SUGGESTS THAT THIS IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT. THIS IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT.”

“When you ask people if they feel like they have ever been exposed to or distressed by the material that they encounter, the majority of people will say no,” Crayne said. “But if you ask a slightly different question — ‘Do you feel like you have made any adjustments or changes in the way that you live your day-to-day life based on the things that you’ve learned as a terrorism researcher’ — overwhelmingly, the answer is yes. To me, they certainly look like traumatic experiences.”

In some cases, the work involves exposure to violence or hate speech directed at various identity groups. This could be particularly troubling for a researcher who identifies with the targeted group.

“WE’VE HAD GOOD FORTUNE THAT MOST PEOPLE HAVE BEEN VERY OPEN AND WILLING TO TALK WITH US AND SEE THE VALUE OF THE WORK.”

“I think just building that baseline understanding of what’s the impact (of vicarious trauma) is useful for our field simply because we don’t fully know,” Muibu said. “So far, the projects have found that exposure to potentially traumatic material is widespread.”

In one example, Crayne said interviewees reported not taking mass transit after studying the 7/7 bombings, a 2005 terrorist attack in which four men with ties to Islamic extremism bombed London’s mass transportation system during rush hour.

There are other ways in which the nature of counterterrorism work can affect someone’s personal life. Even explaining the day-to-day work to outsiders can be difficult, and potentially isolating. The use of different coping strategies, including dark humor, could be alienating to the wrong audience.

“We had initially assumed maybe folks would be a bit hesitant to want to speak with us, especially about a subject matter that had to do with mental health and within the field,” Muibu said. “We’ve had good fortune that most people have been very open and willing to talk with us and see the value of the work.”

After surveying about 150 people in the counterterrorism workforce, Young and Muibu found that seven out of 10 respondents reported daily exposure to violence.

Other interviewees said they always face the door when sitting in a public area.

Young recalls the reaction he got at a party once.

“The frequency and intensity of what you’re exposed to are pretty high in our baseline, which suggests that this is something we should be thinking about. This is something we should be concerned about,” Young said.

This material doesn’t affect everyone the same. While reading violent material could be difficult for anyone, specific types of violent material could have a different impact on individuals depending on their values and identities.

“I made a joke,” he said. “It was a pretty gallows-humor joke, and my wife looked at me like, ‘What is wrong with you?’ And I looked at everybody else that we were talking to, and nobody was laughing. I was like, ‘Oh, there might be something wrong with me. I might be affected by violence in a way that these other people aren’t.’”

By better understanding the experiences of those in the counterterrorism workforce and building a culture in which people feel like they can talk about these topics, government and academia better position themselves to support the counterterrorism workforce.

Take Shortland’s personal experience.

A further complication is the prestige of doing challenging work and a professional culture of pride around the potentially traumatic material that practitioners and researchers have encountered. This can make it difficult for those in the field to talk about the impact of violent material and receive support.

“Several of the interviewees have implored us, like ‘You need to keep doing this, this is really critical,’” Young said. The sentiment has started him thinking about how to expand the research.

“I don’t think that anybody really acknowledges how just doing this research can be a very challenging and distressing job,” Crayne said.

“How do we make it bigger?” he asked. “How do we help more people?”

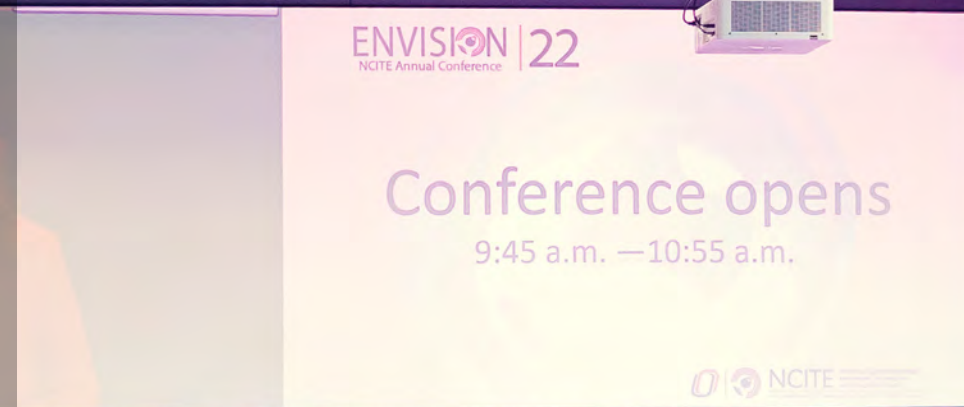
OUR IMPACT

In Year 3, NCITE began to transition into a mature Center of Excellence.

Our staff grew. So did the number of experts in our consortium, projects in our portfolio, and money spent on innovative counterterrorism and targeted violence research, technology, and workforce development programs.

Our projects bore fruit in the form of a steady stream of research deliverables that we made available to the public and our partners in the homeland security enterprise.

In short, Year 3 was a year of impact.



NCITE IMPACT

YEAR 3 BY THE NUMBERS

50+

Consortium Researchers
across the U.S. and Europe

26


Institutional Partners

Partners Include: Stanford University, University
of Amsterdam, and University College London

547 Total Students Exposed
to DHS Mission
Consortium-wide

22 UNO Center Operations
and Research Personnel


**40 TOTAL STUDENTS ON RESEARCH AND
CENTER OPERATIONS AT UNO FROM:**

 College of Information
Science & Technology

 College of Public Affairs
and Community Service

 College of Business
Administration

 College of Arts
& Sciences

 University of Nebraska
College of Law

RESEARCH

23 FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

15

DHS Cooperative
Agreement
Projects

8

Other Funded
Projects

43

Reports
Published Online

1,972

Total
Downloads

589

Downloads of Reintegration
of Foreign Terrorist Fighter
Families: A Framework of
Best Practices for the U.S.

136

Downloads of Vicarious
Trauma via the Observation
of Extremist Atrocities: A
Rapid Evidence Assessment

86

Downloads of Maintaining
the Movement: ISIS
Outreach to Westerners in
the Post-Caliphate Era

19

Peer-Reviewed
Publications

3

Provisional
Patents Filed

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

3,220+

Total Attendance of Workshops and Seminars that Featured NCITE Presenters
Including: Threats to Agriculture, Elections and the Threat of Violence, and Terrorist Use of Memes

33 NCITE-HOSTED WORKING GROUPS WITH GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

146

Stakeholders in Attendance

105

Stakeholders Who Attended More Than Once

5

Expert Testimonies

COMMUNICATIONS

71,966

Pageviews

16,884

Users

111

Researchers Cited in State, Local, and National Media

1,249

Email Listserv

4,378 TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

2,724

X, formerly Twitter

1,485

LinkedIn

28

YouTube

44

Facebook (new)

97

Instagram (new)



NCITE YEAR-IN-REVIEW

NCITE's Year 3 was defined by travel, discovery, and growth. But most importantly, it was a year of lasting memories for our center. Check out a selection of our favorite moments.



DEMONSTRATING RELEVANCE WITH 'METAVERSE ROADSHOW,' NTER VISIT

In May, a team of NCITEs led by Sam Hunter, Austin Doctor, and Joel Elson traveled to Washington, D.C., to demonstrate the malign potential of the metaverse to colleagues at the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

During the tour, the NCITE team conducted workshops and live demonstrations of AR/VR technology for intelligence professionals at the NCTC. The demonstrations showcased the immersive nature of the technology and its potential for misuse. The visit, Doctor said, "felt like we were doing what we are here at NCITE to do."

NCITE also hosted visitors from the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Office to share capabilities and challenges. The team from NTER met with NCITE experts in Omaha and Lincoln and received a tour of Memorial Stadium — hearing about the threat assessment measures that go into creating a safe game-day experience — from experts with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Public Policy Center.

WELCOMING DECISION-MAKERS IN NATIONAL SECURITY

Many distinguished visitors have walked the halls at NCITE over the past year.

In October, Christy Abizaid, director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), visited NCITE and learned about the center's research, technology initiatives, and workforce development programs. During her visit, Abizaid experienced virtual reality demonstrations showcasing the potential threats of the metaverse and learned about NCITE's other important initiatives.

In December, Dimitri Kusnezov, under secretary for DHS's Science and Technology Directorate, also paid a visit. Kusnezov engaged in technology demonstrations, held a fireside chat with NCITE students and staff, and emphasized the importance of collaboration and risk-taking in tackling complex problems.

NCITE also welcomed the University of Nebraska System Board of Regents and President Ted Carter, who visited the center during a tour of the UNO campus. The university leaders demonstrated metaverse technology with students Alexis d'Amato and Madison Scott. They also heard about NCITE's education and workforce development efforts from students Anthony Roberson, Cynthia Kennedy, and Eva Burklund.

Other center visitors included: Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, CEO of Valens Global, who spoke about his book "Enemies Near and Far," and researchers Amira Jadoon and Andrew Mines, who spoke about their research on the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K).



ENVISION22: A LONG-AWAITED MILESTONE

ENVISION22, NCITE's first in-person annual conference, marked a significant milestone in the center's development. The event, long-delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, brought together experts from government, academia, law enforcement, and more. More than 200 guests attended both in-person and virtually, with in-person guests traveling from 13 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.K.

The conference featured a range of presentations on national security research and included esteemed speakers such as Samantha Vinograd from the Department of Homeland Security and Josh Geltzer from the White House National Security Council. The event highlighted the center's collaborative approach to problem-solving and its dedication to understanding pressing global challenges.

ENVISION22 showcased NCITE's expansion, its research consortium, and its efforts to cultivate the future counterterrorism workforce. The conference emphasized the importance of collective action and the role of academia in strengthening national security.

FINDING A NEW HOME

With NCITE's staffing growth in Year 3, the center suddenly faced a welcome challenge: finding space for everyone.

Over the course of the year, NCITE staff was divided between two buildings — its original offices in Mammel Hall and new space across 67th Street in Maverick Landing. That will change in Year 4, as the center has begun the process of moving into its new home in the Scott Technology Center.

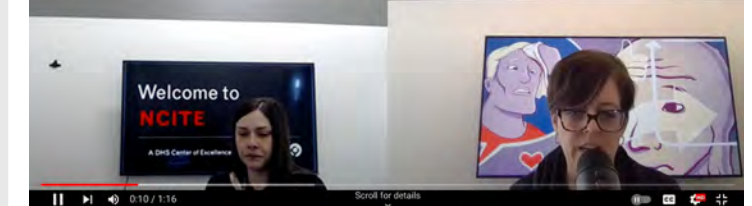
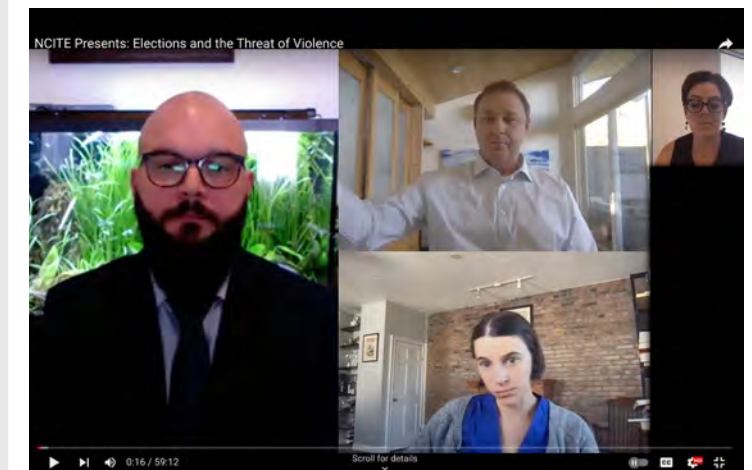
The new home will allow NCITE students to experience a unique environment where they may cross paths with other security-oriented building tenants such as the National Strategic Research Institute, the U.S. Air Force's tech developer Kessel Run, and the advertising firm Interpublic Group of Companies.



SHARING INSIGHTS THROUGH EVENTS

In addition to its annual conference, which was streamed online, NCITE hosted a series of hybrid events in Year 3 in an effort to make its research insights accessible and available to the public. Events included:

- A panel on elections and the threat of violence, featuring consortium researchers Pete Simi, Steven Windisch, and Iris Malone.
- A panel on terrorist use of memes, featuring NCITE research specialist Kat Parsons, Moonshot's Oliver Goodman, and Tech Against Terrorism's Arthur Bradley.
- A conversation with Nicholas Rasmussen, DHS counterterrorism coordinator.
- A panel discussion on reintegrating the families of foreign terrorist fighters, featuring Austin Doctor; Julie Coleman, judicial affairs officer with the United Nations; Andrew Mines, research fellow at the George Washington University Program on Extremism; and Omar Mohammed, founder of Mosul Eye.
- A panel on the Islamic State in Afghanistan and Pakistan, featuring Doctor, Mines, and Amira Jadoon, assistant professor at Clemson University.



AGING THE BIENNIAL REVIEW

In February, NCITE leadership traveled to Washington, D.C., to share the story of NCITE's first two years to a panel of reviewers. The daylong examination was the final piece of the government's three-part biennial review. DHS has its Centers of Excellence undergo rigorous reviews of scientific quality, relevance, and management and operations every two years. Since the review, NCITE has responded to DHS feedback, in particular by re-imagining the structure of the center's oversight boards and by making its research deliverables publicly available on UNO's Digital Commons platform.



STAYING ON TOP OF EMERGING THREATS

NCITE aims to be a national leader in recognizing and assessing emerging and novel terrorism threats. In Year 3, that meant evaluating the malign potential of artificial intelligence (AI) technology. NCITE's Sam Hunter and Joel Elson co-authored an essay published in Real Clear Defense that outlined the threat of AI in the wrong hands. Elson also spoke at UNO's Future of Work Symposium about the risks involved with widespread adoption of AI.

"This is leading to some potential concerns about the novelty of new attacks — new attack types that we've never conceived of and are having difficulty anticipating, and the essential need to train individuals at entry level," he said.



NEW FACES, NEW CAPABILITIES

NCITE's team at the University of Nebraska at Omaha grew substantially in Year 3, boosting the center's ability to manage and publicize its important work. In addition to new students who assist in research and daily operations, NCITE welcomed the full-time newcomers below.

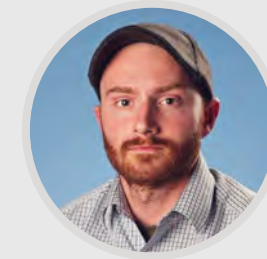
NCITE also hired Seamus Hughes, who began July 1 as the senior research faculty and policy associate, and launched the search for a new research associate who will join the team in Year 4.



SCOTT JORDAN
Coordinator of Operations,
Special Projects, and Events



JEN KALVODA
DHS Engagements
Project Manager



BLAKE URSCH
Strategic Communications
Manager



SARA VETTER
DHS Engagements
Project Manager

YEAR 3 PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

Year 3 was most defined by our innovative research projects. Check out the following snapshots to see NCITE's scientific range and achievements.

THEME 1 UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM



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 operations and outcomes of terrorist organizations.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Hosted a conference with experts to gather insight about how recruitment characteristics shape the activities of armed groups
- Commissioned a series of expert reports on how specific recruitment characteristics shape operational patterns among a sample of armed groups
- Delivered full report on the link between terrorist recruitment and operational behavior

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Begin data collection examining how membership characteristics are linked to the behavior of armed groups cross-nationally and over time
- Begin case studies of domestic armed groups

PROJECTED IMPACT

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



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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Examined threats directed to public officials using court records
- Created infographic summaries related to identified trends and patterns

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Assess current level of public support for political violence in the U.S. through a state-of-science review

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Fill a critical gap in the understanding of threats to public officials
- Assist in the understanding of the current threat landscape and support for political violence



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 study how they may be used to either promote or counter extremist rhetoric.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Developed models and dictionaries based on their research on moral disengagement
- Investigated techniques to mitigate the negative effects of extremist rhetoric

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Disseminate results and analysis from research
- Conduct outreach efforts to ensure their research has a broad scope to practitioners and the public
- Conduct additional experiments on mitigating online extremist messaging

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

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 could be used by terrorist groups.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed development of ATTASH horizon scan methodology as a threat detection tool
- Applied ATTASH to CBRN-relevant technologies and identified 56 technologies that have seen significant advances in the last five years and could be potential emerging threats

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Apply ATTASH framework to 10 groups identified by stakeholders and determine potentially threatening emerging technologies and the viability of the identified threats
- Provide Microsoft Excel tool version of ATTASH framework to stakeholders for their own use in threat identification and evaluation

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Provide DHS analysis support tools to understand emerging threats related to extremist use of emerging technologies



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 emergent technologies could be used by extremist groups.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed a literature review and plain-language explainer of the metaverse and terrorism
- Presented findings from both UNO and Penn State experimental studies
- Hosted a technology demonstration and briefing in D.C. to end users

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Explore how emerging technologies (such as ChatGPT) affect malevolent creativity of users through controlled lab experiments

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Inform DHS about the potential threat of artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented/extended reality technologies when used by extremist organizations



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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed in-depth interviews with 10 election officials to establish a victim-centered understanding of election-motivated violence and identify risk exposure
- Implementation of initial threat-level monitor based on narrative trends in traditional and de-identified open-source media

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Utilize open-source red-teaming to determine risk assessment and cyber hygiene needs
- Continue to tweak threat-level monitor using information from the 2024 election cycle

PROJECTED IMPACT

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

THEME 1 UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM



GWU COUNTERTERRORISM AND TERRORISM PREVENTION FOR PRACTITIONERS

PROJECT LEAD:
SEAMUS HUGHES

Monitor and understand the evolving threat to the U.S. homeland from foreign terrorist organizations, homegrown violent extremists, and domestic violent extremists.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Held eight events, with a total of 10,000 event views
- Completed 38 publications regarding the evolving threat to the U.S. homeland
- Website engagement of over 68,000 through Capitol Hill Siege main page and trackers, quarterly infographic trackers, and reports

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Engaged with numerous stakeholders from DHS, other U.S. government entities, and state and local agencies
- Connected with the public through events, reports, social media, and a listserv to educate about violent extremism



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 catalog extremist groups and organizations and their evolution.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Updated five profiles and published eight new group profiles
- Published report on transnational network ties of RMVE and AGAAVE groups

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Publish report on fragmentation in U.S. domestic violent extremist groups
- Conduct study on when groups decide to attack abroad, particularly when they target Western countries

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Inform DHS about changing group-level dynamics and attack strategies, both at home and abroad



THEME 2 SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTING INITIATIVE



MSU EXAMINING THE UTILITY OF SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTING (SAR) ON CYBERCRIME INCIDENTS

PROJECT LEAD:
TOM HOLT

Explore how current suspicious activity indicators map onto cyber crime and identify indicators most relevant to cyber crime.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Finalized dataset of 196 cyber attacks carried out by state and non-state actors between 1998 and 2018
- Identified 177 applicable Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) indicators that span financial, all crimes, and information sharing environment SARs, with most prevalent indicators being stating a group affiliation or engaging in hacking attempts

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Informed DHS about how suspicious activity prior to a cyber crime may differ from attacks on physical targets



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 preventing terrorism and targeted violence.

YEAR 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Analyzed 65 hours of recorded interview data with family members of violent extremists
- Identified key similarities in the experiences of family members

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Conduct a deductive-oriented data analysis of interview data to further explore findings
- Triangulate research findings using public sources

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



THEME 4 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH



SUNY ALBANY & UMASS LOWELL PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN TERRORISM RESEARCH (PT2R)

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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Delivered a literature review and database of relevant paper abstract/outlines report on vicarious trauma
- Completed domestic and international site visits with leading terrorism research centers

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Identify risk factors, as well as work, health, and workforce outcomes of psychological trauma through experience sampling study of terrorism researchers
- Develop model of psychosocially traumatic experiences within terrorism research work, modeling risk factors, protective factors, and work outcomes

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



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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Identified 126 datasets related to domestic violent extremism and/or targeted violence through a literature review of 1,413 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and technical reports
- Held four group-based discussions with 12 CT professionals from DHS and federal partners

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Administer survey to understand data-related limitations and needs of the CT workforce
- Evaluate and synthesize datasets to align with needs of the CT workforce

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Improve information sharing to strengthen DVE prevention and resources
- Assist the CT workforce with identifying viable datasets
- Remove the burden on the CT 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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Developed a survey instrument to gather data from counterterrorism practitioners
- Began data collection and delivered preliminary findings on the effect of exposure to violence on counterterrorism practitioners

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Complete and analyze practitioner survey data
- Deliver a report that details the methods used in the study and the completed survey instrument
- Deliver an end-of-project dissemination workshop with DHS end users, as well as academic and general audiences, hosted at American University

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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Enrolled 49 students in MBA project-focused capstone courses and 232 in DHS-focused business analytics courses
- Students completed 22 projects on DHS-related problem sets

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Administer DHS-focused business courses
- Complete student projects to analyze DHS-relevant data

PROJECTED IMPACT

- Increase student exposure to the homeland security enterprise
- Prepare students with knowledge and skills related to DHS operations
- Bolster recruitment efforts across the DHS by developing a pipeline of talent from UNO, while also providing end users with tangible outcomes addressing their current needs



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 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Incorporated NCITE workforce development efforts into homeland security graduate-level courses at SDSU
- Included more than 45 students in NCITE-related coursework, including four independent research projects

YEAR 4 PLAN

- Continue teaching and refining homeland security courses to adhere to DHS future strategy, especially the Third Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, as well as the NCITE programmatic goals and objectives
- Implement a new focus on fentanyl as an HSE concern, including the development of a workshop for stakeholders

PROJECTED IMPACT

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





OTHER NCITE PROJECTS

One of the clearest signs of NCITE's growth has been the expansion of its projects funded through its basic ordering agreement (BOA) and other vehicles. Those include the following projects, all led by NCITE faculty at UNO.

PUBLIC SAFETY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **MATT ALLEN**

DHS's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) provides grant funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments – along with nonprofits and higher ed institutions – to enhance the capability of local terrorism and targeted violence prevention efforts. This project will perform rigorous evaluations of two of these programs and develop recommendations for scaling evaluations for sustainability.

REINTEGRATING THE FAMILIES OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTER FAMILIES

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **AUSTIN DOCTOR**

Bringing home the families of terrorist fighters who left the U.S. to fight for the Islamic State can be a complicated and controversial process. This project aims to promote evidence-based models for the reintegration of spouses and children and develop tools and training for practitioners.

WORKSHOP AND REPORT ON RESEARCH CHALLENGES IN COMBATING TERRORIST USE OF EXPLOSIVES IN THE UNITED STATES

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **AUSTIN DOCTOR**

This project aims to develop an unclassified report that reflects the changes to the improvised explosive device (IED) threat and capability landscape. The report will improve the nation's ability to prevent, respond to, and mitigate the use of explosives against critical infrastructure.

METaverse ROADSHOW IN D.C.

INVOLVED PERSONNEL: **SAM HUNTER, AUSTIN DOCTOR, AND JOEL ELSON**

This task order was awarded to send NCITE researchers to Washington, D.C., to demonstrate the potential malign use of virtual reality equipment to government stakeholders. It occurred in early May 2023.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION EVALUATIONS (THREAT ASSESSMENT)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **SAM HUNTER**

This project aims to evaluate the current utility and efficacy of threat assessment tools and approaches. In addition, the team is evaluating the challenges and utility of standardized approaches to assessing vulnerabilities of soft targets.

HANDBOOK FOR MANAGING THE RELEASE OF FEDERALLY INCARCERATED EXTREMISTS IN THE COMMUNITY

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **ERIN KEARNS**

This project will develop a handbook to be used as a resource to reintegrate previously incarcerated individuals charged with violent extremism-related offenses back into the community.

SCREENING FOR INSIDER THREATS IN U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT: A NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF DEPARTMENT POLICIES & PRACTICES

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **ERIN KEARNS**

This project aims to identify best practices in screening for insider threats in law enforcement. The team will develop a toolkit and online module for law enforcement agencies to self-assess.

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


PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **JOEL ELSON, ERIN KEARNS**


Effective terrorism and targeted violence prevention relies on members of the public to report suspicious behavior. Yet, breakdowns in this process occur when people are unsure what should be reported, unwilling to report, or unclear about how and where to report. This project aims to create and test an intelligent chatbot that can be used by members of the public to report suspicious activity.


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