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The NCITEr Newsletter: January 2022

National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center

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THE NCITE^R



National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center | A U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence

JANUARY 2022

Dear NCITE Community,

Countering terrorism and targeted violence in the U.S. is always important, but especially so in this moment.

We live in a time when bad actors exploit technology to commit harm. This has been exacerbated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, deepening partisan divide, and an omnipresent online culture that elevates, accelerates, and mainstreams once-sidelined conspiracy theories and extreme beliefs. Meanwhile, foreign adversaries like China, Russia, and Iran are taking advantage of U.S. divisions to weaken our trusted institutions.

With this clear-eyed look at our problems, we release our first *competitive* request for proposals (RFP). As stewards of DHS' funding for counterterrorism and terrorism prevention research, we endeavor to find the best scholars to address the challenges faced by our Homeland Security workforce, a broad group encompassing federal, state, and local professionals working in government, industry, and nonprofits to keep us safe.

The full RFP will appear on our website on Feb. 1.

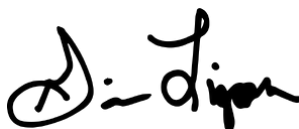
First, I wanted to speak to you directly about the priority areas:

- *Nature of counterterrorism and targeted violence operations.*
We seek innovative projects that examine the nature of novel terrorism and targeted violence threats against the U.S. For example, projects that focus on the security implications of emerging technologies based on the Internet of Things, decentralized networks, and emerging social media platforms are of key interest to NCITE. We are also interested in the emerging technologies that can augment the Homeland Security workforce to monitor and disrupt these threats.
- *Domestic terrorism.* Countering domestic terrorism and targeted violence in the U.S. is of high interest to DHS. In its most recent (May 2021) Strategic Intelligence Assessment, the FBI and DHS jointly said the greatest terrorism threat to the U.S. is “posed by lone offenders, often radicalized online, who look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons.”
 - What are the strategic implications of the historic Jan. 6 attack?
 - What is the role of social media-based extremist, conspiratorial, and foreign-influenced linked content in influencing the domestic terrorism landscape?

- What is the nature of domestic terrorist organizations today and going forward? What trends exist among their use of social media platforms and communication strategies?
- *Developing the current and future workforce for security positions.* NCITE is committed to developing the people doing the difficult security work.
 - What type of programs might offer resilience to individuals who consume violent and extremist content for their careers?
 - What types of educational programs have the most impact on changing perceptions about security work?
 - What are the most up-to-date datasets that DHS can provide its counterterrorism workforce? How can we know how effective such datasets compare to DHS definitions and current understanding?

I am hopeful to see proposals that will generate an innovative scientific finding with novel methods and unique data sources. We are eager to amplify your work through our NCITE consortium, which now has 19 institutions and over 50 researchers.

Enjoy this newsletter that, as always, tells the stories of the people behind our work.



GINA LIGON
NCITE Center Director



YEAR 3 RFP

NCITE will issue its request for proposals and launch a webinar explaining the RFP process on Feb. 1. Some particulars:

- **Period of performance:** July 1, 2022 — June 30, 2023. Multi-year projects encouraged.
- **Who is eligible:** Institutes of higher education. NCITE does not award to individuals, private, non-higher ed organizations, nor government entities — though such groups can be partners.
- **Find out more:** Full RFP, DHS funding terms and conditions, and FAQ on unomaha.edu/ncite on Feb. 1



Workforce Development

Strengthening the current and future national security workforce

NCITE is studying ways to bolster the 240,000-employee DHS. With so many employees focused on demanding — though seemingly disparate mission sets and threat areas — DHS faces a key challenge in maintaining and developing a capable, well-trained workforce. Sharing their perspectives on this issue are:

- **Michelle Black**, NCITE Director of Education and Workforce Development and assistant professor of political science at UNO
- **Vignesh Murugavel**, NCITE graduate assistant in workforce development and UNO doctoral candidate in Industrial-Organizational (I-O) Psychology
- **Jeffrey Brownsweiger**, a 17-year DHS employee and senior advisor in the DHS Intelligence and Analysis Training Division and acting director of the DHS Intelligence Training Academy.



Michelle Black

Q: Why is it important to focus on the needs of the national security workforce?

A. National security agencies need to keep their workforces agile and growing, meaning that they need to stay up on the latest technology, training, research, and innovation. This allows them to be competitive and meet their mission objectives. DHS workers need to know the latest threats, disruptive or dangerous technology, and intelligence.

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Vignesh Murugavel

Q: How has your time as an NCITE researcher shaped your career and research interests?

A. NCITE has opened my eyes to two things: the scale at which I-O Psychology can be applied and the variety of uses for my knowledge, skills, and abilities as a science-practitioner. Counterterrorism work provides an opportunity to think about topics in my field in new and interesting ways... I am looking forward to continuing my work with people in the homeland security enterprise after I graduate.

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Jeffrey Brownsweiger

Q: How does such a large federal organization with diverse components and mission sets work together?

A. DHS is a very dynamic organization, with broad missions, authorities, and responsibilities. We have components that have existed for hundreds of years and others less than 20 years. The DHS Intelligence Training Academy is one of the recent additions to the Department that works to support the developmental needs

of the intelligence workforce. Our efforts are an important part to improving standardization and quality in intelligence operations.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

**FOUNDATIONS OF THE FOREIGN FIGHTER PROBLEM:
Investigating blind spots relating to gender, minors, and families
WEBINAR: Feb. 2, 9 AM CST**

The Program on Extremism at The George Washington University and the National Counterterrorism, Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE) will hold a virtual event on a pressing subject that's generally off the public's radar. This panel is in support of a research study funded by the DHS Science & Technology Directorate.

[REGISTER](#)

DESIGN CHALLENGE HACKATHON

This weekend event on Feb. 25-27 is designed for students in COEs to get a window on DHS problem sets and try solving them. Organized by CAOE, the Arizona State University-based Center for Accelerating Operational Efficiency, the event features cash prizes and a chance to collaborate and network. CAOE is looking for student teams and judges. If interested, ncite@unomaha.edu.

[REGISTER](#)

NCITE ANNUAL MEETING 2022

NCITE will hold its annual meeting in **April**. It will be virtual for our out-of-town DHS board. Stay tuned for more detail on date and program plus watch for upcoming

announcements about a hoped-for in-person event to come in the fall for our researchers!

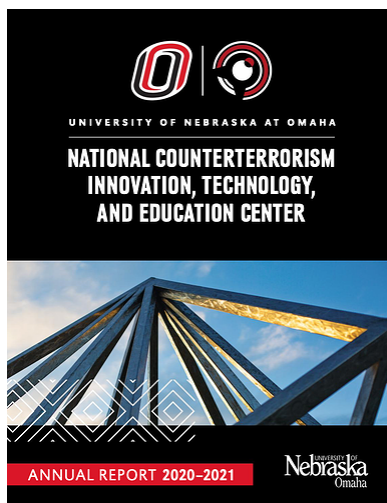
INSIDE NCITE

NCITE ANNUAL REPORT

NCITE's first year was a busy one:

- Started a federally designated research consortium for counterterrorism and targeted violence studies.
- Launched 16 research and education projects
- Expanded the staff, added eight new UNO-based researchers
- Responded to government and media requests for sense-making around the tumultuous events of 2020 and 2021.

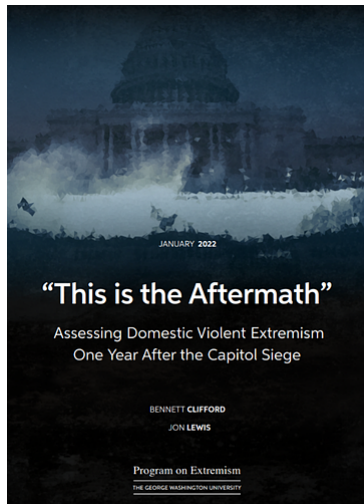
NCITE aimed to capture the effort — and impacts — in this first annual report.



ANNUAL REPORT

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

NCITE partner, The George Washington University Program on Extremism, published a 47-page report on the one-year anniversary of the Jan. 6 Capitol attack. The report drills into the arrest and charging documents of 704 Americans.



READ THE REPORT

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Doug Derrick has *transitioned* out of his role as NCITE Director of Innovation and Transition to serve as the UNO College of Information Science and Technology's Associate Dean for Research. Dr. Derrick remains co-PI on the NCITE grant and is leading an NCITE education project that puts master's-candidate IT Innovation students with DHS components.



Kayla Walters, NCITE research associate, successfully defended her dissertation in I-O Psychology at Pennsylvania State University last month. Dr. Walters continues to shape NCITE research evaluation.



Ashlee McGill will be joining NCITE in an externship role later this month. A second-year law student at the University of Nebraska, McGill's background includes experience with the U.S. Air Force JAG Corp. in Los Angeles and National Strategic Research Institute, the Nebraska-based University-affiliated Research Center for the Department of Defense. She will help NCITE develop a tool for workplace presubmission review focused on DHS CAPO and Privacy needs.

Interesting people? Upcoming events?

Send ideas for our next NCITEr edition to NCITE's egrace@unomaha.edu.



NCITE NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM
INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY,
AND EDUCATION CENTER
A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

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