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The NCITer Newsletter: October 2020

National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center

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OCTOBER 2020



Dear NCITE community,

Welcome!

Welcome to The NCITEr, our inaugural newsletter that describes research addressing one of the most pressing threats of the day: violent extremism in America.

The National Counterterrorism, Innovation, Technology, and Education Center, one of the latest Homeland Security academic hubs, launched in July at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. NCITE has tapped some of the best minds in the fields of counterterrorism and terrorism prevention. NCITE's call is two-fold: harness the nation's intellectual firepower around the complicated issue of terrorism; develop tools to help frontline Homeland Security workers better understand, mitigate and stop ideologically-driven people from violence.

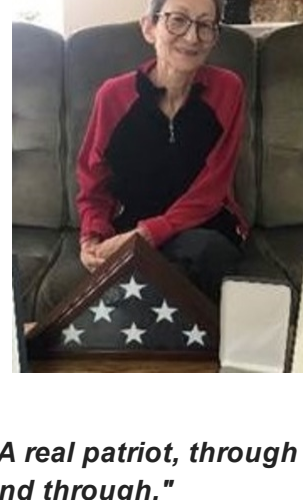
In this newsletter, you'll see a range of projects, from the artificial intelligence-augmented reality glasses under design at San Diego State University to Stanford University's Mapping Militants effort, which shows how right-wing and white supremacy groups can influence one another. You'll learn about a new book on ISIS support by our partners at George Washington University. You'll read about my personal hero, the scientist and patriot, Dr. Kay Mereish. You'll see how students are being shaped into the future national security workforce.

The timing is all too relevant. America stands on the cusp of one of the most turbulent presidential elections. We are facing extraordinary challenges by the COVID-19 pandemic. Add civil unrest as unresolved issues over race and police come to the fore. Add unprecedented wildfires and still-occurring hurricanes. Add rampant misinformation as contagious as the real-life coronavirus. The result is a perfect storm for ideological extremism to become violent.

Ideologies and motivations may differ, but what unites terrorists is the use of violence to stoke fear. Fear can be a powerful and destructive motivator. The antidote to fear is often insight. **NCITE**. Our virtual door is open to you now. Come in. Learn about NCITE. Be an insider or, as our newsletter says, NCITEr.

Stay safe,

Gina Scott Ligon



"A real patriot, through and through."

SPOTLIGHT:

DHS medal recipient

Dr. Kay Mereish

Dr. Kay Mereish has always been interested in what the eye cannot really see. From butterfly legs when she was a child in Jordan to an immuno-suppressant agent when she was a graduate student at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, she pays attention.

Beyond her lifelong scientific curiosity was something else that not even a prized microscope could show – patriotism. [Read more.](#)



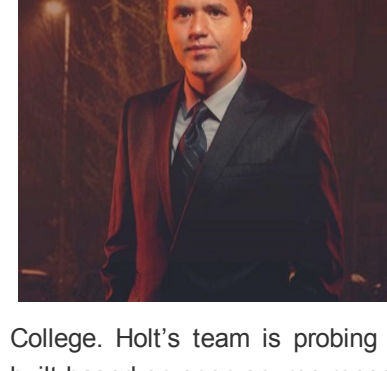
Ask a researcher

Featuring Martha Crenshaw of Stanford and Iris Malone of George Washington University, we explore group-level threats and how machines can assist in learning about and mitigating this threat environment. [Read more.](#)



Coming soon!

A book on ISIS supporters in America is out next month. Written by the prolific researchers at NCITE partner George Washington University's Program on Extremism, this 248-page book explores how pervasive ISIS support is in the U.S.



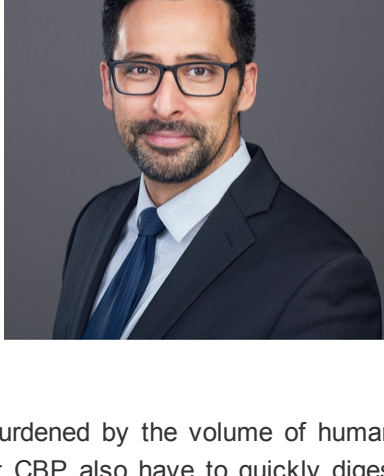
Who are cyberhackers?

This chicken-egg question underlies the NCITE-backed project led by Thomas Holt, director of the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. The project also includes Steven Chermak of Michigan State and Joshua Freilich of John Jay College. Holt's team is probing deeper into a dataset of cyberattacks built based on open-source reporting.

Hackers are like lock-pickers, and what drives them is a host of motives: economic, breaking and entering computer systems for profit; disruption, hacking for hacking's sake; and ideology. That last motive is a driver for hackers who want to shape public discussion and policy. They get and dump information in public to shame their targets or force behavior change. But did this group follow the same radicalization pathway that turns someone into a physical attacker? Are they hackers first and ideologues second, and if so, what was the nexus that turned these cyber smiths into radicals? [Read more.](#)

Helping DHS 'see' terrorists at the border

In non-COVID-19 times, some 1.1 million people and hundreds of thousands of vehicles and cargo containers pass through U.S. ports of entry each day. The gatekeepers - U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents - are much fewer in number.



The 60,000-member workforce is burdened by the volume of humans and cargo. The men and women at CBP also have to quickly digest, comprehend and judge a vast amount of information about each individual or vehicle or container seeking U.S. entry. The average agent's attention now is split among different devices, each with different functions. This problem set hampers efficiency and effectiveness for America's front line in prohibiting terrorists or bad actors from entering.

But technological advances in artificial intelligence and augmented reality offer the promise of more streamlined, focused border patrol effort. Aaron Elkins and Bongsik Shin, both in the Management Information Systems Department in the Fowler College of Business at SDSU are on the case. [Read more.](#)

Inside NCITE

♦ The window is still open for five open-rank, tenure-track professor positions in counterterrorism research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. NCITE is proud to be part of this historic hiring opportunity that stretches across disciplines. The full-time positions, which would begin in the 2021-22 academic year, are in political science, criminology and criminal justice, industrial-organizational psychology, management and information technology innovation. The application deadline is Oct. 16. For more information, click [here](#).

♦ NCITE-affiliated researchers recently won National Institute of Justice awards totaling over \$1.5 million. A nearly \$772,000 [grant](#) is going to Michigan State University for a project led by Steve Chermak and Arun Ross of Michigan State and Joshua Freilich of John Jay College. Their project looks at the risk and protective factors that either push one toward politically motivated violence or mitigate the propensity for violence. A \$797,000 [grant](#) is going to John Jay College for a project led by Freilich, Chermak, and Brent Klein of the University of South Carolina. It will expand an earlier school-shooting study examining potential root causes and related factors that contribute to school violence.

♦ NCITE is presenting a presentation on the DHS National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) program. The hourlong webinar, for NCITE-affiliated students and researchers, features Kevin Peters, chief of the NTER program. He will discuss the Suspicious Activity Reporting mechanisms aimed at averting terrorist attacks or stopping radicalized ideologues from taking violent action.

♦ Plans for our annual conference to be held in late spring/early summer 2021 are in the works. Stay tuned for more details!



UNO grad students aim to innovate

by *Khyllie Kight*

This year University of Nebraska at Omaha master's degree students will focus on creating innovative technology solutions for the Homeland Security Enterprise (HSE). IT Innovation students are required to have an Innovation Area of Emphasis, which serves as the domain in which they are innovating. They are being led by Doug Derrick, NCITE director of Innovation and Transition. "Our expectation for you as fellows is to develop new innovations in the field of counterterrorism that will continue to be used by Homeland Security even after you graduate," Derrick said at the ITIN Fellows' kickoff meeting in September. [Read more.](#)

*Upper left photo courtesy of Johnston Portrait Studio



Researchers adapt in COVID-19

Adan Vela had a plan. The assistant professor of industrial engineering would design a course teaching research and data mining skills to undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida. The course would have a public good: The students would be sifting through reams of data on incels – an online subculture of involuntarily celibate men who hate women and sometimes act in violence. The students would then analyze for patterns of radicalization and changes in online behavior. Then came COVID-19. And like nearly everyone on the planet, Vela saw his plans screech to a halt. And had to change. [Read more.](#)



Launched and working in pandemic

They hired a staff, entirely through Zoom virtual interviews. They held center and project launches, entirely remotely. They "opened" a counterterrorism research center without really opening any physical doors as both a pandemic hit and while a new headquarters is being built. The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center is up, open and running. Dr. Jeffrey Gold, chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and University of Nebraska Medical Center, marveled at the center's quick, virtual creation and called it "a gem for UNO." [Read more.](#)



Building NCITE's future home in Mammel Hall

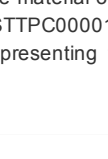
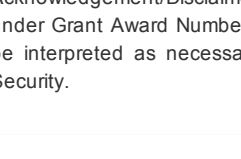
By *Byron Moore*

The upcoming new home of NCITE is currently on track to be completed by early 2021. The \$17 million addition to the UNO [College of Business Administration's](#) Mammel Hall includes an additional 43,700 square feet in three stories. Designed by Holland Basham Architects and built by Weitz Co., it will feature geothermal heating and cooling and a two-story atrium. In addition to NCITE, the building will house the School of Accounting, the entrepreneurship lab, and the CBA Scholars Academy. The new addition will allow for more classroom spaces, faculty offices, research labs, study spaces, and a 180-person multipurpose room for the growing CBA. NCITE offices occupy temporary quarters at their nearby Scott Technology Center. Currently, NCITE staff members are working from there and from their homes. NCITE looks forward to being able to welcome government, research and community partners to this exciting new space.

"NCITE exemplifies all of the incredible research being done in our college, showing how we can take high-quality, cutting-edge research that's truly innovative and have it apply to real world problems."

Michelle Trawick, CBA dean.

Website

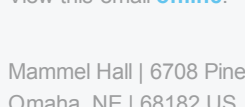


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