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The NCITEr Newsletter September 2023

National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center

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SEPTEMBER 2023



Dear Reader,

I write this as the country is on the verge of a likely government shutdown. I have done work for the federal government during other shutdowns and, each time, they've felt jarring and disruptive in ways difficult to quantify in dollars and cents.

For example, I remember leading my first federal grant for USSTRATCOM during the 2013 shutdown, when my program manager could no longer talk on the phone with me nor come to campus for important events. I remember explaining to the students on the project that they would still be paid, and I remember their incredulous expressions as they tried to understand how some people could be deemed "non-essential" when they worked in organizations charged with keeping us safe.

And I remember the 2018-2019 shutdown that stretched over the holidays, dampening the typical joy of the season with uncertainty about whether our work would continue.

It's a confusing time for those of us who have come to expect and look forward to our daily interactions with members of the federal government — particularly since they are prevented from managing their grants and contracts.

The good news is that NCITE's Year 4 award from the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate (S&T), which funds more than 50 academics across 29 institutions, was executed in the past few weeks. Our government program and project managers at S&T, as well as contract office representatives across the federal government, have worked tirelessly to make sure that none of our work would depend on them being "allowed" to work over the coming weeks.

Because of this, we've recently been able to hold kickoffs for several new projects that have great importance to national security. Among them:

- Sam Hunter will lead a team to redefine what it means to be an extremist organization in America.
- Austin Doctor and START's Marcus Boyd will look at the malign use of geospatial technology.
- A large team from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln's Public Policy Center and the University of Nebraska at Omaha's I-O psychology and criminology programs will examine the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Office's Behavioral Threat Assessment Management (BTAM) programming.
- American University's Joe Young and his collaborator Daisy Muibu will start a study about a peer support program that might have promise for the national security workforce above and beyond where it is currently implemented.
- And I will work with my colleague directors at sister academic research centers across the U.K., Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Norway, and France to launch a long-term international collaboration for studying the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence.

We will work on these difficult national security problems despite the notable absence of our government colleagues who inspired and sponsored it all.

But before they go, I hope this issue of the *NCITEr* will serve as a quick update on what else our academic Center of Excellence is doing. You will find articles on inspiring students mentored by Chapman University's Pete Simi, and you will read a summary of the international award that UNO student Eva Burklund won at the CREST BASS conference. We also link to a timely and important new report from the University of Maine team that examines the challenges faced by family members of extremists. Finally, you will see a run down of awards and media mentions of NCITEr in the news – we have truly assembled an incredible resource for the U.S. government in all of you – I am eager to amplify your work here and on our digital research repository at [Digital Commons](#).

In short, despite the difficult and disruptive message that Congress sends with a potential government shutdown, I am hopeful that you will help your labs and research teams see the importance of the work in times like this — we hold the line when our government colleagues cannot.

The relevance of the problems you are tackling will be even more important when our colleagues return to their desks. Keep focusing, grinding, and innovating.

They are counting on us.



GINA LIGON
NCITE Center Director



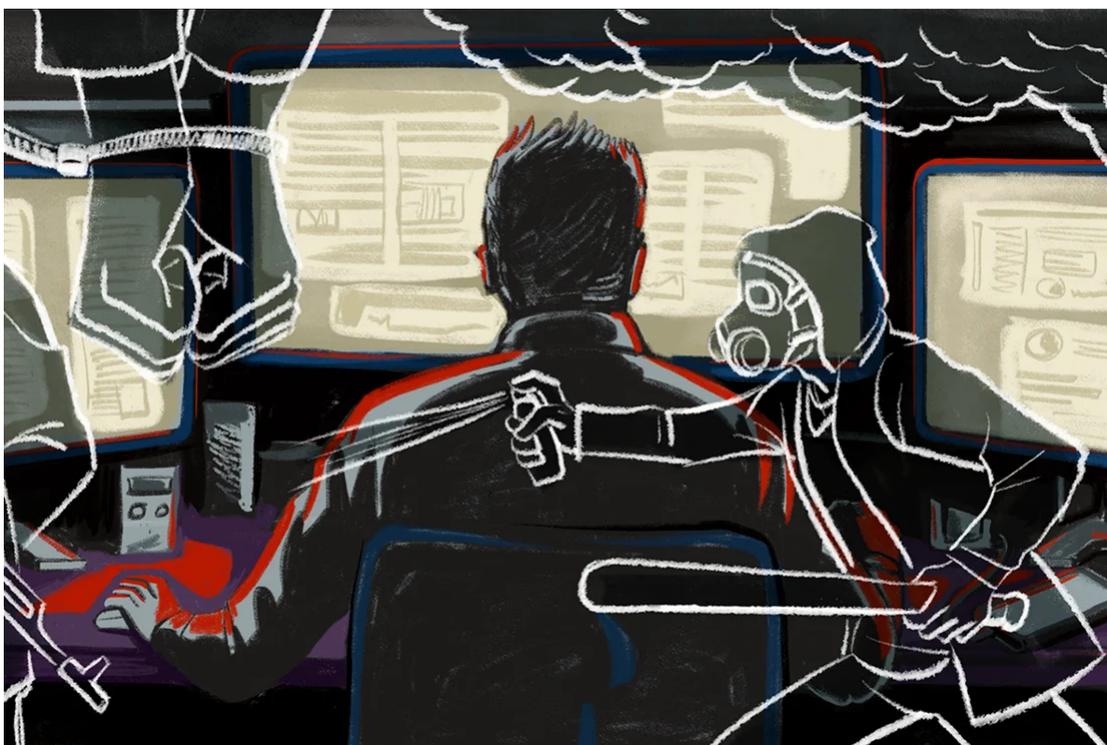
Save the Date for ENVISION24! June 26-28, 2024



Mark your calendars! We're hosting our next in-person conference in Omaha **June 26-28, 2024**. Here, we'll bring our consortium of expert researchers together with leaders in national security, academia, law enforcement, and more. Stay tuned for more details!

SEE PHOTOS AND VIDEO FROM OUR LAST CONFERENCE

Oct. 19: Exploring Trauma in Counterterrorism Work



Academic researchers, government practitioners, and others in the counterterrorism mission community are tasked daily with examining violent and disturbing material. The trauma incurred in the course of this work can take a profound toll – on the personal lives of the individuals and the field as a whole. We'll explore this topic at an upcoming panel. Join keynote speaker **Celia Durall** of the NCTC and panelists:

- **Matthew Crayne**, Ph.D., SUNY Albany
- **Neil Shortland**, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Lowell
- **Daisy Muibu**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Security Studies

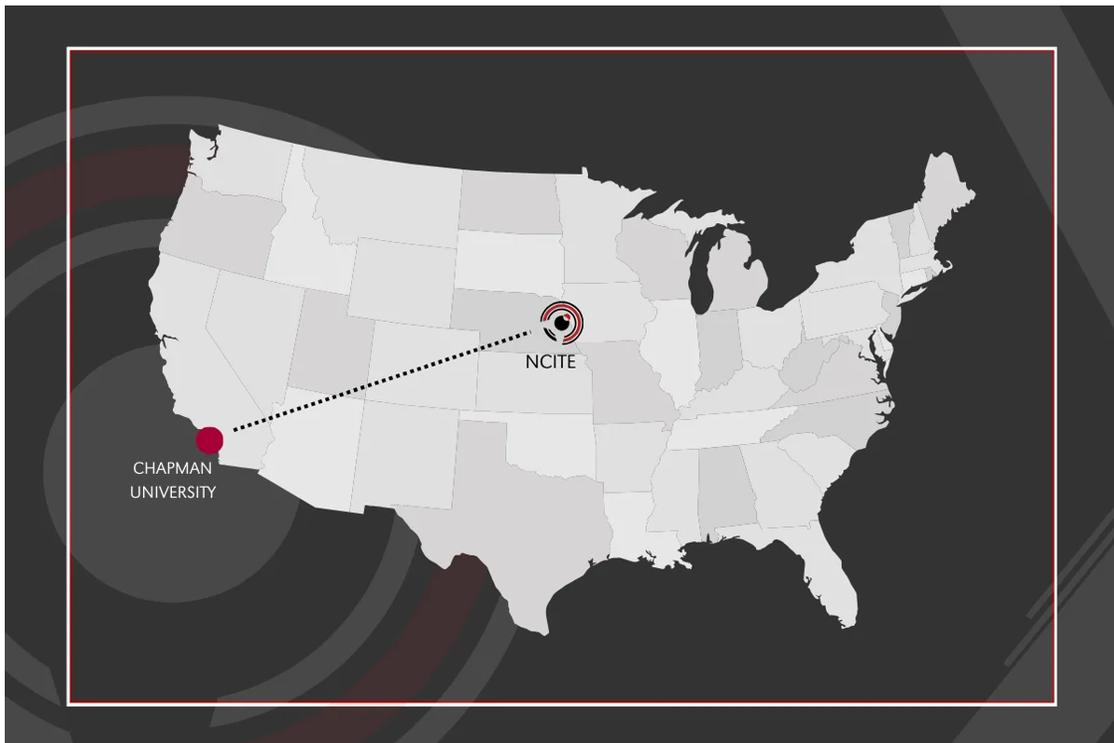
REGISTER NOW

Building Connections in D.C.



This summer, a team from NCITE traveled to Washington, D.C., to host a workshop that brought together national leaders and experts on improvised explosive devices. Held Aug. 8-9 at the American Geophysical Union, the workshop aimed to identify operational challenges and related knowledge gaps facing the counter-IED mission community. The workshop was a key element of an NCITE research project led by **Austin Doctor**, head of counterterrorism research initiatives, that aims to create a comprehensive report on research challenges in combating terrorist use of explosives. The project is supported by DHS S&T Technical Program Manager Dana Saft and CISA OBP Strategy Branch Deputy Jason Stewart.

Student Spotlight: Chapman Team Monitors Threats



NCITE is leading the national conversation on the rising problem of threats to public officials, thanks to a research project led by Chapman University's **Pete Simi**. But documenting the scope the problem wouldn't be possible without the student researchers on Simi's team.

[READ MORE ABOUT THE TEAM](#)

Explore NCITE Research – New Project Pages



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.

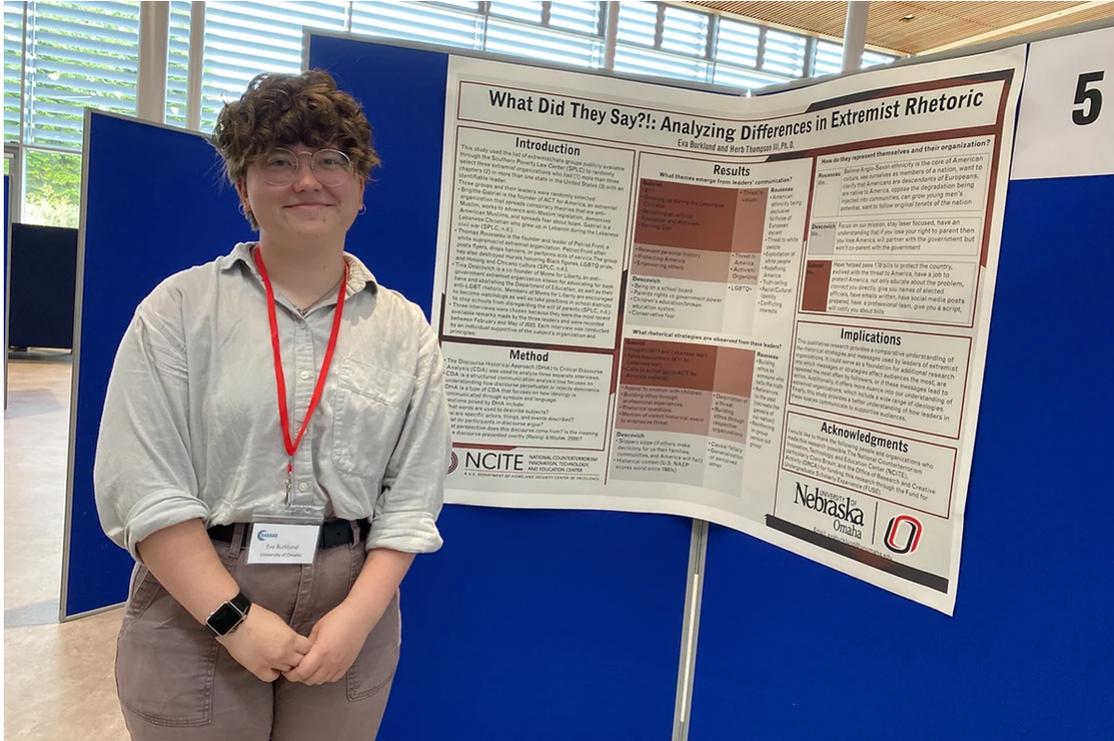
NCITE's mission is to take down silos and streamline the process to put research into product and practice. The sheer scope of the threat environment outlined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security calls for a customer-driven, relentless academic pursuit.

NCITE aims to be a leading national resource that brings together some of the best minds and cutting-edge ideas around the field of counterterrorism.

We've updated our website to include individual project pages for each of our Year 4 endeavors. Click through and explore the critical research happening across our consortium. Have an update on a project? Email ncite@unomaha.edu to share!

LEARN MORE ABOUT NCITE RESEARCH

Student Spotlight: NCITE's Eva Burklund



Eva Burklund, NCITE student communications assistant, traveled to the United Kingdom this summer for the Behavioral and Social Sciences in Security (BASS) conference. There, she took home the judge's award for best poster for her research exploring the rhetoric of extremist leaders.

LEARN MORE ABOUT EVA

Report Highlight: University of Maine

Facilitating Suspicious Activity Reporting at the Community Level

Barriers to Acknowledging and Reporting Suspicious Behavior Among Family Members of Homegrown Violent Extremists

NCITE researcher **Karyn Sporer**, University of Maine, recently submitted a report on her project examining barriers that can discourage family members of homegrown violent extremists from recognizing and reporting suspicious activity. These barriers include:

- Histories of acute violence and trauma
- Missed and misunderstood warning signs
- Interventions and fear of the negative consequences of reporting

[READ THE REPORT](#)

Kicking Off New Innovative Research

This month, NCITE hosted kickoff meetings with DHS stakeholders for four new research projects:

- **International Academic Partnerships for Science and Security** – led by Gina Ligon (NCITE) and Stacey Conchie (CREST)
- **Current and Emerging Malign Use of Geospatial Technologies to Threaten Critical Infrastructure in the United States** – led by Austin Doctor (NCITE), Marcus Boyd (START), and Samuel Henkin (START)
- **NTER Office Initiatives** – led by Tin Nguyen (NCITE), Andrea Walker (NCITE)
- **Domestic Violent Extremist Landscape** – led by Sam Hunter (NCITE) and Gina Ligon (NCITE)

NCITE News and Updates



NCITE Moves into New Offices

NCITE has moved into new office space in the Scott Technology Center on the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus. Stay tuned for more information on an official ribbon cutting.



Hunter Gets Named Professorship

Sam Hunter, head of innovation and emerging threats, has been named the Regents-Foundation Professor of Industrial-Organizational Psychology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Hunter formally accepted the award on Sept. 28.

Got News to Share? Tell Us!

Do you know an NCITE investigator who has done something amazing recently? We want to know! Please share news about awards, publications, and other accomplishments early and often. We welcome student news especially – thesis defenses, conference presentations, accepted journal articles, and more. Email ncite@unomaha.edu.

A Sampling of NCITErers in the News

- **Evan Perkoski** (University of Connecticut), *The Associated Press*
["A flamethrower and comments about book burning ignite a political firestorm in Missouri"](#)
- **Steven Windisch** (Temple University), *azfamily.com*
["Report raises concerns about domestic terrorism funding"](#)

- **Michelle Black** (University of Nebraska at Omaha), *UNO News*
"UNO researcher shares expertise at Arctic defense conference"
 - **Gina Ligon** (University of Nebraska at Omaha), *Real Clear Defense*
"What keeps the homeland security enterprise up at night?"
 - **Pete Simi** (Chapman University), *Disaster Zone*
"A growing threat of violence against public officials"
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GRANT ACKNOWLEDGMENT & DISCLAIMER

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