UCF | Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2025 - JUNE 2026





MEET THE TEAM



DR. JESSICA WICKEY BYRD

Executive Director

Leads the strategic direction of the HTMS Center, fostering interdisciplinary research, collaboration, and knowledge mobilization on issues of human trafficking in a national and global context.



MAYARA MARTINES ‘22MS

Trauma-Informed Director of Events

Provides strategic guidance and leads the development of trauma-informed events that elevate lived experience perspectives, foster meaningful dialogue, and advance the mission of HTMS.



MELANIE TORRES

Project Manager

Leads coordination among partners, stakeholders, and project teams to advance the effective planning, implementation, and evaluation of research and programmatic initiatives.



ALIX FYALL

Executive Assistant

Develops reports, presentations, publications, and other materials that facilitate HTMS's research, education, and public engagement activities.



UCF | Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

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UCF's Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

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UCF

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. JESSICA WICKEY BYRD

Dear Friends, Partners, and Fellow Abolitionists,

It is my privilege to welcome you to the 2025–2026 Annual Report of the University of Central Florida's Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery. This year represents an extraordinary period of growth, innovation, and collective impact for our Center. Our impact is measured not only by what we accomplished, but by the people we empowered. **Since 2020, more than 6,700 students have been educated to identify and report human trafficking in the hospitality industry.** During this reporting year alone, more than 800 students received this education, while our programs and events reached hundreds more across UCF and the broader community.

We also continued expanding our work beyond traditional education. We launched two innovative, **trauma-informed immersive simulations connecting hospitality, healthcare, and law enforcement;** advanced the Buyer Beware initiative and its exploration of technology-driven strategies to disrupt demand; participated in the UCF NSF I-Corps Program; strengthened human trafficking awareness and response efforts at Orlando International Airport; and continued building national and international partnerships.

Through our collaboration with the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program and WorldOrlando, our Center has now engaged more than 150 global leaders from 75+ countries across six continents.

Among all these accomplishments, one remains especially meaningful to me: our commitment to recognizing lived experience as expertise. Lived-experience experts were compensated for their contributions to trauma-informed event planning and development. Their expertise strengthens our research, informs our education, challenges our assumptions, and helps ensure that the work we undertake is not simply about survivors, but is developed with survivors.

None of this work happens alone.

We are grateful for the $500,000 investment from the Florida Legislature during the 2025–2026 year and the remarkable $250,000 commitment from Goodwill Industries of Eastern North Carolina. These investments allowed us to move ideas into action, compensate lived-experience experts, expand education and training, advance applied research, develop innovative prevention strategies, and build partnerships extending far beyond Central Florida.

This year also brought profound loss with the passing of Dr. Roberto Hugh Potter, former Director of the Center. Hugh believed deeply that human trafficking could never be solved by one person, profession, or organization. His philosophy, that it takes a team, remains embedded in who we are and where we are going. We honor his legacy by continuing to build the interdisciplinary, collaborative movement he helped envision. There is still much work ahead. We will continue to ask difficult questions, test new approaches, strengthen the evidence base, develop the next generation of leaders, elevate lived-experience expertise, and build solutions capable of creating meaningful systems-level change.

As you read the pages that follow, I hope you see more than numbers, programs, conferences, and projects. I hope you see a growing community of abolitionists committed to turning knowledge into action. **Together, we are building something larger than any single program or institution.**

With gratitude and determination,

Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd



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YEAR IN REVIEW
ISSUE 3



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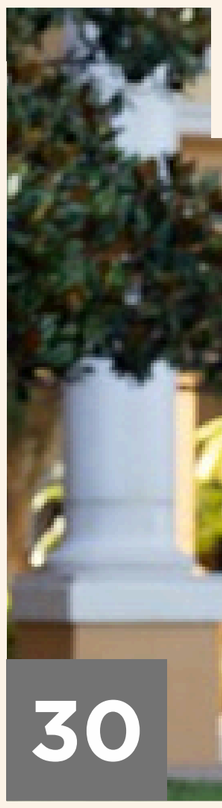


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OUR MISSION, VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES



EDUCATION

OUR MISSION

At the Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, we are committed to deepening the understanding of the escalating global challenge of human trafficking and modern slavery. Our approach encompasses comprehensive community engagement, rigorous research, focused education, and specialized training. Our goal is to not just study this complex issue but to actively seek and implement solutions.

RESEARCH

OUR VISION

We aspire to be the foremost platform for collating and distributing knowledge, research, and fostering community partnerships to effectively counteract human trafficking and modern slavery on a global scale. Our vision extends beyond academic research; it seeks to influence policy, inspire action, and ignite change.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

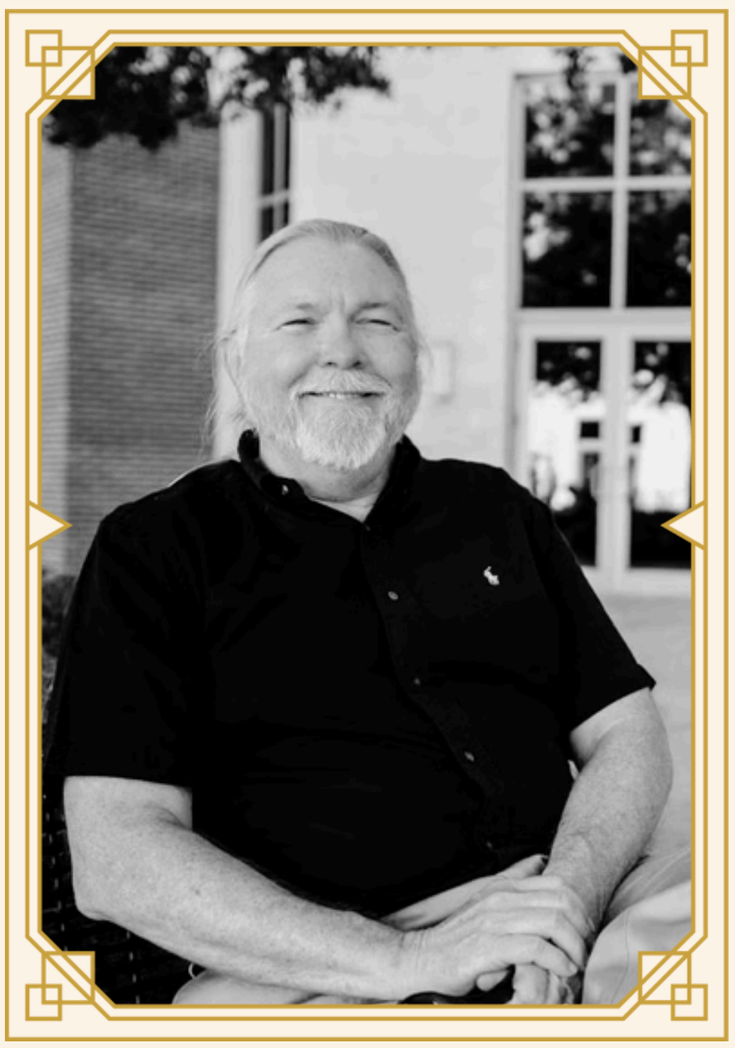
OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Tackling all forms of human trafficking with a holistic approach.
- Prioritizing the dignity and rights of every individual.
- Collaborating with survivors as key partners.
- Working together with various sectors for a unified response.
- Focusing on tangible outcomes and real-world impact.
- Utilizing research and data to guide our actions.



Honoring the legacy and the life of,

Dr. Roberto Hugh Potter



Before Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Dr. Roberto Hugh Potter served as the Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery from 2019 to 2023.

Dr. Potter was a native Floridian with degrees from the University of South Florida (BA, 1975) and the University of Florida (MA, Ph.D., 1982). His interest in human trafficking stems from experience as a field hand as well as education, research, and program development in sexual violence prevention and response. During his tenure, Dr. Potter helped strengthen the center's role as a hub for research, education, and community engagement focused on combating human trafficking and modern slavery. Drawing on his extensive background in sociology, criminal justice, public health, and victim advocacy, he fostered collaborations among faculty, students, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, social service providers, and community organizations.

His vision emphasized that addressing human trafficking required a multidisciplinary approach and a shared commitment across professions and institutions.

Dr. Potter's leadership expanded awareness of trafficking issues throughout Central Florida and beyond, particularly through partnerships with the hospitality industry, public safety agencies, and anti-trafficking organizations. He was a passionate advocate for survivor-centered responses, evidence-based research, and prevention efforts that empowered communities to recognize and address exploitation before it occurred.

In an interview with UCFTODAY in 2019, he said,

"We're bringing an interdisciplinary approach to this. Like most social problems, this is not something that anyone owns or solves. It takes a team."

Before I had the privilege of leading the Center, Dr. Roberto Hugh Potter laid the foundation upon which so much of our work stands today. Hugh understood that human trafficking is far too complex for any one discipline, organization, or individual to address alone. His unwavering commitment to survivor-centered practices, collaboration, and evidence-based solutions helped shape not only the Center's direction, but the broader anti-trafficking community we continue to build today. I am deeply grateful for the path Hugh created before me, and it is an honor to carry his vision forward. His legacy reminds us that the strongest foundations are built together.

Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd

Dr. Jeff Goltz's Eulogy for his dear colleague and friend,

On June 10, I lost not only a respected colleague but a dear friend whose vision, intellect, and unwavering commitment to fight human trafficking changed countless lives. Dr. Hugh Potter leaves behind a remarkable legacy, one that continues to inspire all who had the privilege of working with him. My professional friendship with Hugh began on September 29, 2014, at the Sheriff's Crime Summit. As we listened to a presentation by the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigations detailing the alarming rise of human trafficking across Central Florida, we were both deeply moved by the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for action. While many left the summit with concern, Hugh left with a plan.

Recognizing that human trafficking could not be addressed by any single agency or discipline, Hugh became the architect of an innovative three-day workshop, *Human Trafficking: A Systemwide Public Safety and Community Approach.* Bringing together experts from law enforcement, victim services, healthcare, education, prosecution, advocacy, and community organizations, the workshop embodied Hugh's belief that combating trafficking required a coordinated, collaborative response.

The "Tips to Trail to Recovery" model became a powerful framework for understanding every stage of intervention, from identification and investigation to victim recovery and reintegration. The workshop's success led Hugh to approach me with an extraordinary proposition: to capture the collective expertise, collaboration, and knowledge of Central Florida's anti-trafficking community in a book. Together, we embraced the challenge. **Our shared belief that "it takes a village to fight human trafficking" became the foundation of a project that would extend far beyond anything we initially imagined.** In 2017, we published the first edition of Human Trafficking: A Systemwide Public Safety and Community Approach with West Academic Publishing. More than a book, it became an encyclopedia and resource for professionals, students, policymakers, and community members seeking to understand and combat human trafficking. Yet for Hugh, there was always more work to be done.

As our regional efforts evolved and expanded, Hugh once again saw the need to document new lessons, emerging practices, and enhanced collaborations. In 2023, we proudly published the second edition, further strengthening the reach and impact of our work. Hugh's relentless pursuit of knowledge, his ability to connect diverse disciplines, and his understanding of the sequencing and stages of intervention in human trafficking continued to shape the field and guide practitioners across multiple sectors.

Even as we looked toward the future, Hugh was already laying the groundwork for a third edition. His vision remained clear: to continually improve our collective response and ensure that communities everywhere could benefit from the lessons learned in Central Florida.

Looking back, it is remarkable to think that a conversation following a crime summit in 2014 would spark our close partnership that expanded anti-trafficking efforts far beyond our local community. Hugh's simple challenge to act transformed into a movement that reached beyond Central Florida, beyond the State of Florida, beyond our nation, and ultimately to a global audience. That is Hugh's lasting legacy.

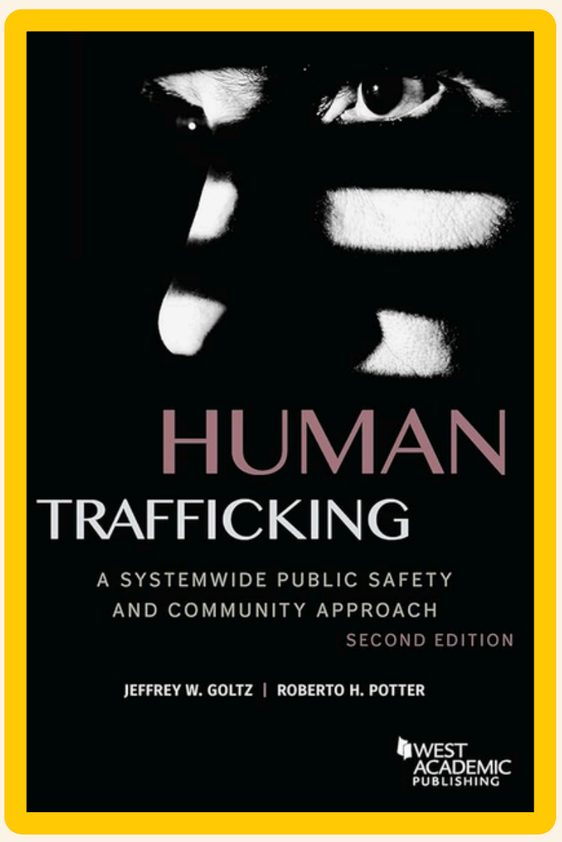
I will remember Hugh not only for his expertise and leadership, but for his calm demeanor, friendship, and steadfast belief that meaningful change is possible when people work together toward a common purpose. His influence lives on in every community strengthened by his anti-trafficking knowledge, and through every reader who continues to learn from the work we created together with countless experts.

Thank you, Hugh, for your friendship, your vision, and your commitment to fight human trafficking. The "village" you helped build continues, and your legacy will endure for generations to come.



Dr. Jeff Goltz, Dean, School of Public Safety, Legal Studies & Education, Valencia College, and Dr. Roberto Hugh Potter at the book launch in 2023

The 3rd edition of the Human Trafficking: A Systemwide Public Safety and Community Approach book should be launched in 2028!



Imprint: West Academic Publishing
Series: Higher Education Coursebook
Publication Date: 10/05/2023

Hugh's simple challenge to act transformed into a movement that reached beyond Central Florida, beyond the State of Florida, beyond our nation, and ultimately to a global audience. That is Hugh's lasting legacy.



IN THE 2025-26 FISCAL YEAR, THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE ALLOCATED $500,000 TO THE UCF'S CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY

The funds were used to develop projects such as Buyer Beware and to expand education and training opportunities for students and the community. Funding also enabled HTMS to compensate survivors for their lived-experience expertise and consultation, ensuring that critical perspectives informed research, prevention strategies, and educational initiatives. Additional support was used to explore and establish partnerships with organizations and stakeholders working to prevent human trafficking at both the national and international levels. The funding further supported the presentation and dissemination of research findings, helping to build a foundation for future scholarship on this understudied topic. Finally, these resources allowed HTMS to manage applied research projects that translate evidence-based findings into real-world tools, programs, and strategies designed to prevent trafficking, strengthen community responses, and support survivors.





Carolyn Hendricks, Vice President of Community Outreach, GIENC

DONOR OF THE YEAR

A meaningful partnership began following our team's presentation, **"Digital Natives in the Anti-Trafficking Movement: From DMs to Danger, Gen Z Exposes Trafficking Tactics," at the JuST Conference in October 2025**.

Inspired by the Center's mission, **Chris Hash, CEO of Goodwill Industries of Eastern North Carolina (GIENC), began exploring opportunities to collaborate; conversations that ultimately led to an extraordinary $250,000 commitment to support the Center's anti-trafficking initiatives.**

We are especially grateful to **Carolyn Hendricks, Vice President of Community Outreach at GIENC,** whose leadership has helped strengthen this partnership, including joining us at the 18th Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Conference in January 2026.

GIENC's generous support is helping advance the Center's growing portfolio of research, education, and innovative anti-trafficking initiatives. This includes research focused on prevention, demand reduction, emerging technology, workforce education, and survivor-informed practices, as well as opportunities to engage lived-experience experts in research, focus groups, training, and program development.

This partnership demonstrates what is possible when organizations unite around a shared purpose; advancing research, elevating lived experience, developing innovative solutions, and creating lasting impact.

Thank you, Goodwill Industries of Eastern North Carolina, Inc. *for your support!*

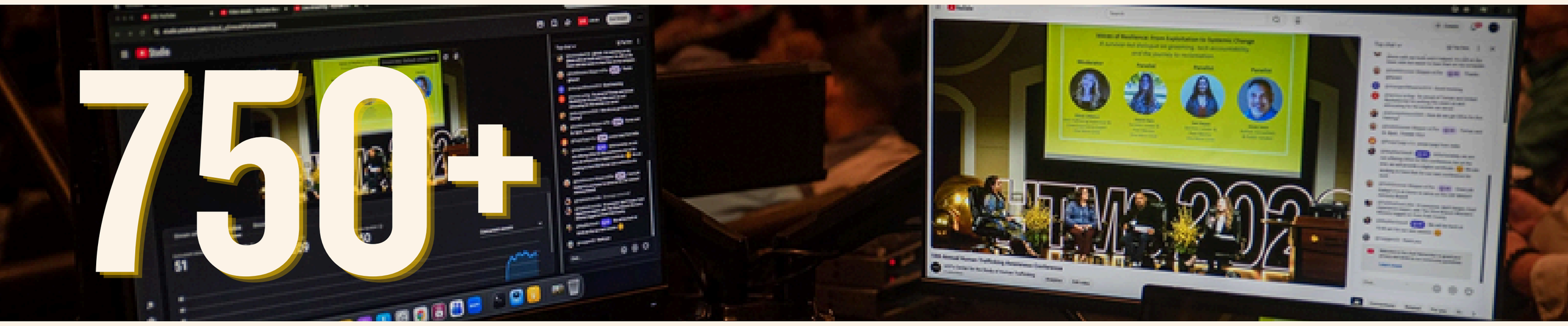




Students were educated from Summer 2025 to Summer 2026 to identify and report Human Trafficking in the hospitality industry



Lived-experience experts were compensated in recognition of the value of their lived-experience expertise and contributions to trauma-informed event planning and development.



Attendees across in-person and virtual programming during Human Trafficking Awareness Month



OUR IMPACT

6,700+ STUDENTS
have been educated since 2020 via their internship courses to identify and report Human Trafficking in the hospitality industry

75+ COUNTRIES
hosted by the U.S. Department of State's International Leadership Visitor's Program

1,500+ ATTENDEES
have attended on-campus and online events, educating the community on human trafficking in the hospitality industry

15 BOARD MEMBERS
from UCF, Valencia College, Love Missions Global, One More Child, FLITE Center, and lived experience experts

2 SIMULATIONS
Hospitality and ecosystem simulations engaging hospitality students, law enforcement, and medical assistants in human trafficking prevention and response

2 NATIONAL AWARDS
2024 Student Group of the Year
Liberator Awards &
Global Research Award

21 EXTERNAL PARTNERS



WORLDORLANDO WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

“Since 1963, WorldOrlando, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, has served as a global hub in Central Florida. We connect local government, nonprofit, business, and academic professionals with their international counterparts through the U.S. Department of State’s premier professional exchange program, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), among others." (WorldOrlando, 2026)

Leaders in Human Trafficking across the world come together in Orlando to review U.S government strategies to combat international trafficking in persons, explore initiatives to recognize, protect, and assist victims of abuse and trafficking.

Since 2019, we have met with more than 150 global leaders from 75+ countries and six continents.









From Summer 2025 - Summer 2026, we hosted delegates from 47 countries: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Republic of Chad, Denmark, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Georgia, Ghana, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan.



From left to right: Dr. David Metcalf (I-CORPS Mentor), Mayara Martines R. de Oliveira, Dr. Jessica Wickey, and Dr. Thomas O'Neal (I-CORPS Mentor)

SELECTED FOR THE UCF NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION I-CORPS PROGRAM

In September 2025, the Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (HTMS) was selected to participate in the UCF National Science Foundation (NSF) I-Corps Program, a competitive initiative designed to help research teams explore the commercial potential of innovative technologies and translate research into real-world solutions.

The Center was selected for its Buyer Beware project, an innovative initiative designed **to reduce buyer demand for commercial sex while addressing human trafficking as a public health issue.** Through the project, HTMS is exploring evidence-based and technology-driven approaches to disrupt demand, strengthen prevention efforts, and address the broader individual and community-level harms associated with human trafficking.

As part of the program, HTMS received a $3,000 customer discovery grant and participated in intensive entrepreneurial training focused on understanding end-user needs before developing products or services.

During the program, the HTMS team conducted more than 50 customer discovery interviews with professionals representing law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, survivor service organizations, higher education institutions, technology companies, nonprofit organizations, and other multidisciplinary partners.

These conversations provided invaluable insights into the challenges faced by professionals working to prevent and respond to human trafficking, while also validating opportunities for technology-driven and evidence-based solutions.

Building on the momentum and insights gained through NSF I-Corps, HTMS advanced its innovation efforts to the national stage. HTMS had the opportunity to take its customer discovery efforts to **AIMed25 in San Diego, California, one of the leading national conferences focused on the intersection of artificial intelligence, medicine, and healthcare innovation.**

Participation in NSF I-Corps strengthened the Center's ability to bridge academic research with innovation and implementation. Through expert mentorship, entrepreneurial training, and continuous stakeholder engagement, the program encouraged HTMS to refine its research concepts, better understand market needs, and develop sustainable solutions capable of creating measurable social impact. The progression from the I-Corps program to the AIMed show floor demonstrated how customer discovery could move HTMS research beyond the academic environment and into spaces where technology, industry expertise, and real-world implementation intersect.

The experience also expanded the Center's national network of collaborators, connecting HTMS with researchers, entrepreneurs, innovation experts, technology professionals, and industry leaders committed to translating research into meaningful change.

The knowledge gained through I-Corps and the Center's subsequent engagement at AIMed continues to inform HTMS's strategic initiatives, supporting the development of innovative tools and multidisciplinary partnerships that advance the prevention of human trafficking and improve responses for victims and survivors.



From left to right: Dr. David Metcalf (Director, Mixed Emerging Technology Integration Lab, Institute for Simulation & Training) and Dr. Jessica Wickey at the Southern Methodist University Conference on Human Trafficking Data, in Dallas, TX

BUYER BEWARE PROJECT OVERVIEW

AN AI FIREWALL TO REDUCE BUYERS' DEMAND

Our project proposes developing and implementing an advanced AI-driven law enforcement solution by monitoring and analyzing buyers' online search behaviors. We aim to detect buyer behaviors in real-time, protect vulnerable populations, and support law enforcement in identifying and prosecuting buyers.

The project leverages UCF's nationally recognized strength in modeling, simulation, and training to design, test, and validate AI tools in collaboration with state and local partners.

Data generated through the platform will inform both policy decisions and future prevention strategies. Efficiency and expansion through public/private partnerships. **Training the next generation of students and law enforcement.**

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND TOOLS



BUYERS PURCHASE FIREWALL ACTIVATED

Pro-Active intercept of buyer behavior (PSA, deterrent, information campaign to slow demand)



AI HUNTERBOTS "SHADOW HUNTERS" AFTER BUYERS

IN PROGRESS

Support Law Enforcement: Provide actionable intelligence to help identify and prosecute buyers and support victims.



SHIELD APP FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

IN PROGRESS

Streamlines reporting, warrant, and subpoena processes, reducing processing time from days to minutes, increasing efficiency and productivity.

Return on investment to the state

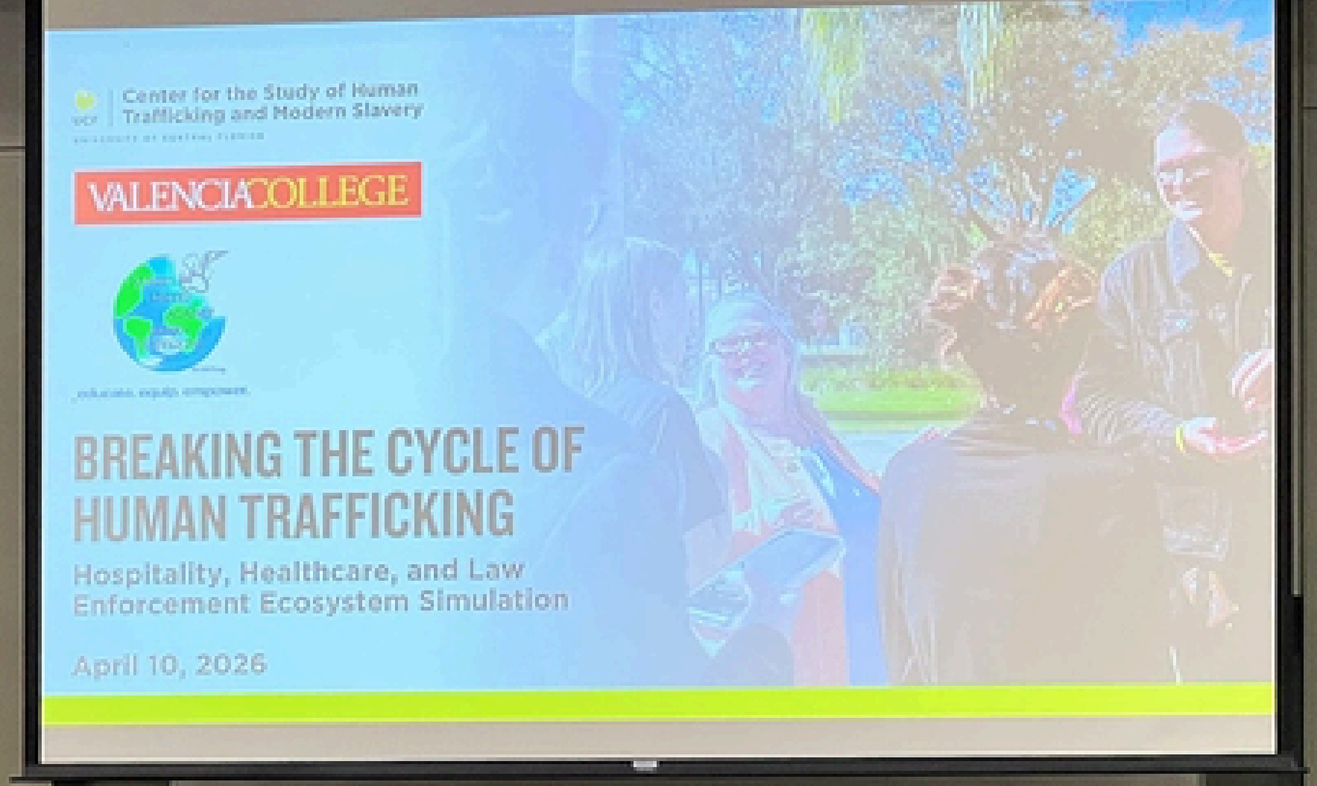
US $1 MILLION

expected per year.

Support law-enforcement productivity and

CASE SUCCESS RATES

to reduce DEMAND.



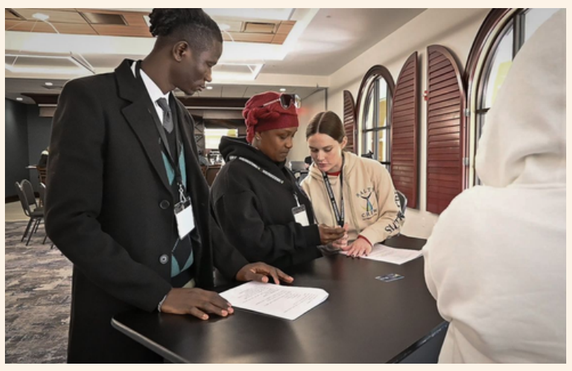
INAUGURAL HOSPITALITY AND ECOSYSTEM SIMULATIONS

The UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery hosted, **for the first-time ever, two innovative, trauma-informed Interprofessional Education (IPE) simulations** designed to equip students with the practical skills and multidisciplinary perspectives needed to identify, intervene, and prevent human trafficking. The first simulation, **Breaking the Cycle of Human Trafficking in the Hospitality Industry Experiential Learning Simulation,** happened during Human Trafficking Awareness Month and marked the inaugural live immersive hospitality simulation at UCF Rosen College. Students assumed hotel roles, including front desk, food and beverage, security, and management, and participated in a 30-minute real-time trafficking scenario.

The second simulation brought together Rosen College hospitality students, Valencia College's Criminal Justice Law Enforcement Academy Track, and Valencia College's healthcare students to engage in an evidence-based experiential learning exercise focused on collaborative responses to human trafficking. Hosted at the Valencia College School of Public Safety, the simulation provided participants with a unique opportunity to collaborate across professions and better understand the critical role that hospitality, law enforcement, and healthcare professionals play.

The Center extends its sincere gratitude to the **Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation** (MBI) for its invaluable partnership throughout the planning, development, and implementation of both simulations. MBI investigators and victim advocates played an active role not only in designing realistic, trauma-informed scenarios, but also in bringing them to life by portraying key roles within the simulations, including victims, traffickers, and buyers. A special thank you to **Dr. Francine Bono-Neri** with Nurses United Against Human Trafficking and **Dean Jeff Goltz** with Valencia College School of Public Safety, Legal Studies, and Education for their partnership, leadership, and dedication in planning this innovative educational experience.

Both simulations incorporated immersive learning, direct mentorship from industry and community experts, and post-simulation focus groups to capture participant experiences and insights from more than 60 undergraduate students. By fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration and hands-on learning, these interprofessional simulations helped prepare the next generation of students to recognize indicators of trafficking, respond effectively within their respective fields, and contribute to a coordinated, survivor-centered approach to combating exploitation.












“It was helpful and felt very realistic! Enjoyed the session and was very informative. It will help us in the real world.” - student feedback

UCF | Rosen College of Hospitality Management
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

NURSES UNITED AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING
NUAHT.org

VALENCIACOLLEGE
School of Public Safety
Criminal Justice Institute

RESOLVED STRATEGIES
A GLOBAL JUSTICE SOLUTIONS GROUP



To request a specialized presentation or tailored workshop for your company, school, or event, email htmscenter@ucf.edu

TRAININGS DEVELOPED AND FACILITATED

1,200+ Faculty, advisory boards, association's safety and security teams, Intel security teams, and corporations were trained in human trafficking education for the hospitality industry.

140+ **Greater Orlando Aviation Authority employees (GOAA) were trainied in trafficking in the transportation industry.**

100+ **Code enforcement officers in the State of Florida & Credible Messengers for Orange County** were trained to identify and report trafficking.

70+ UCF first-time-in-college (FTIC) **nursing students** were trained in human trafficking & victim detection in healthcare.

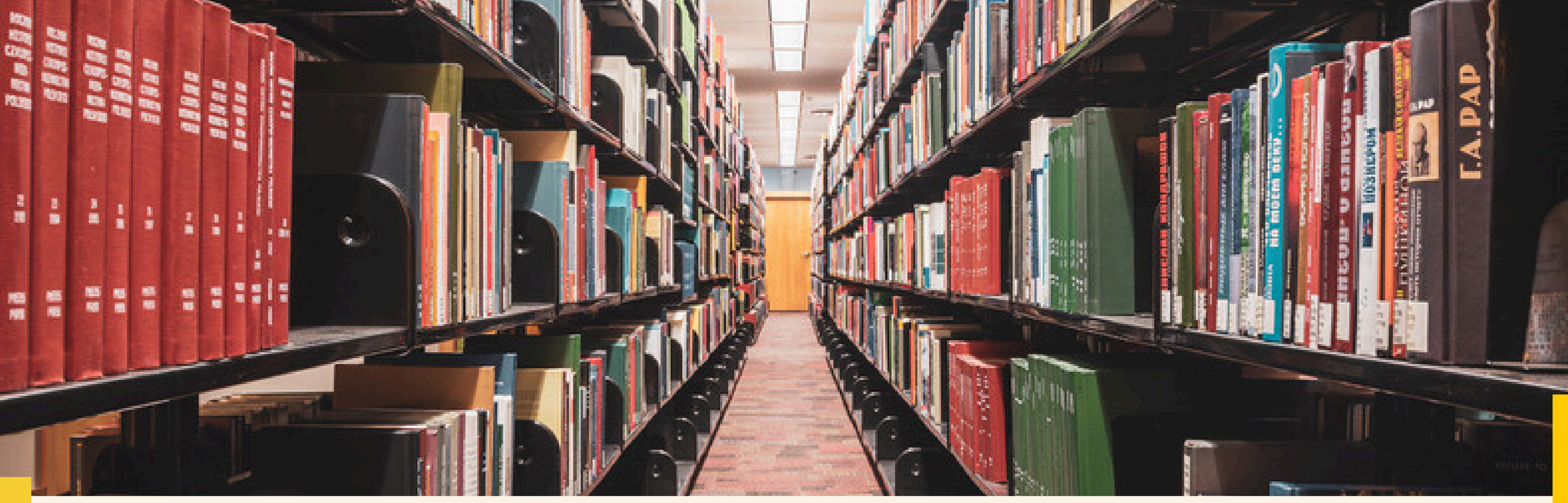
45+ **Hospitality, heathcare, and law enforcement students** were trained via a live immersive simulation.

100+ **Youth Leaders for Orlando Kidz Zones**, were trained in human trafficking awareness & prevention; supporting children in the city's highest poverty neighborhoods.

ECPAT Dr. Wickey Byrd wrote child **sex tourism/trafficking curriculum for tour guides in Asia with ECPAT**, the world's largest influencing network fully dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of children.

6,700+ Hospitality students received human trafficking education to properly identify and successfully report trafficking.

As of July 13, 2026, the Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery is now leading the effort to standardize nurses' training across the state of Florida (in partnership with UCF Nursing and Nurses United Against Trafficking) in accordance with the new law HB303, which mandates that all nurses be trained in human trafficking.



PUBLICATIONS IN PROGRESS

TEXTBOOKS IN PUBLICATION PROCESS:

1. **Human Trafficking in the Hospitality Industry:** A Global Perspective: Prevention, Detection, Trauma-Informed Response, and Industry Leadership
2. **Human Trafficking**: A System-Wide Public Safety and Community Approach, 3rd Edition

TEXTBOOK CHAPTERS IN PUBLICATION PROCESS:

1. **Sex Work, Tourism, and Society: Complex Relationships and Global Impacts;** The Complex Interplay Between Sex Tourism and Human Trafficking
2. **Wellness in the Hospitality Industry:** The Dark Side of the Service Industry

JOURNAL ARTICLES:

Wickey Byrd, Jessica & Fyall, Alan & Panse, Gaurav & Ronzoni, Giulio. (2023). **Mitigating the Scale, Reach, and Impact of Human Trafficking at Major Events: A North American Perspective.** *Event Management,* 27

IN PROGRESS:

- **Scenario-Based Simulated Training** as a Pedagogical Tool for Human Trafficking Recognition in Hospitality Education

- A Conceptual Taxonomy of **AI Tools for Combating Human Trafficking** in Hotels: Mapping Functions, Risks, and CSR Integration

- **Breaking the Cycle of Human Trafficking:** Hospitality, Healthcare, Law Enforcement & Victim Services Ecosystem Simulation

- Behind the Screen: **Online Grooming and Human Trafficking Vulnerabilities in Gaming Communities**

- Trafficked and Incarcerated: **Exploring the Lived Experiences** of Current and Formerly Incarcerated Survivors

- Crypto and Crime: The **Role of Digital Currency in Fueling Human Trafficking**



AWARENESS TAKES FLIGHT

Collaborating as the **research partner,** the UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery supports United Abolitionists and the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority **to strengthen human trafficking awareness, detection, and response across the Orlando International Airport.**

Airports are not simply transportation hubs. Under the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 and the DHS Blue Lightning Initiative, **airports are recognized as high-risk environments for human trafficking, and there is growing federal and state pressure on airport operators to train frontline employees accordingly.** Spearheaded by United Abolitionists, Inc. and developed in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority (GOAA), the G.O.A.A. training program has prepared airport personnel to recognize the signs of human trafficking and understand how to respond appropriately since 2025. **The training focuses on identifying key indicators, increasing situational awareness, and promoting proper reporting procedures. G.O.A.A. training is offered free of charge to all airport personnel**, helping to ensure broad participation across staff and reinforcing a coordinated effort to combat human trafficking within the airport environment.

Research Results & Training Impact

Evaluation results demonstrate that the human trafficking **training at Orlando International Airport (MCO) substantially strengthened participants' preparedness to recognize and respond to potential trafficking situations.** Pre-training survey responses identified important gaps in employees' confidence and knowledge, particularly around identifying trafficking, knowing how to report concerns, and responding appropriately when a suspected case occurs.
Following the training, participants reported significant improvements across all four measures of trafficking identification and response readiness:

Together, these findings demonstrate that the MCO training initiative extends beyond awareness-building. The program is strengthening the capacity of **airport personnel to serve as informed and prepared frontline partners** who can recognize potential indicators of trafficking, understand appropriate reporting pathways, and take action when concerns arise.

> **"The personal experiences and stories that were presented make you want to make a difference by knowing what to pay attention to, what to look for, and how to react and respond"**

Table 1

Pre- and Post-Training Human Trafficking Identification and Response Readiness Among MCO Airport Personnel

Impact Measure	Before Training	After Training	Change
Can identify human trafficking	51.4%	93.4%	+42 pts
Likely to report trafficking	88.0%	98.0%	+10 pts
Knows how to report trafficking	60.4%	94.0%	+33.6 pts
Confident handling a suspected case	46.3%	90.7%	+44.4 pts

**A total of 154 pre-training responses and 151 post-training responses were analyzed.*

**Percentages represent respondents who selected "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree."*



THE FIRST SOFT ROOM IN THE WORLD IS AT MCO

This model was built to be replicated. Email us to help you bring it to your airport: htmscenter@ucf.edu

Creating a trauma-informed, calming space for victims.

A soft room is a dedicated, private space designed to provide immediate comfort, calm, and dignity to individuals who may be in crisis, including potential victims of human trafficking or other forms of exploitation, who are being identified and assisted at the airport.

Designed to provide a safe, private, and home-like environment, the room offers an alternative to traditional law enforcement or institutional settings, helping to reduce anxiety and support survivors during a critical point of intervention.

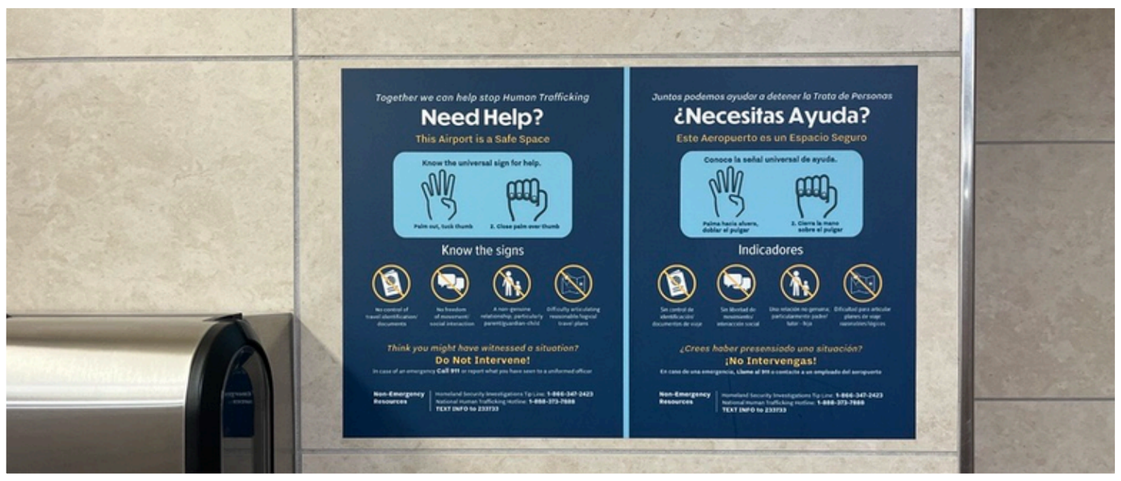
This happens away from public view, in a setting designed to signal that they are safe, that someone cares about them, and that help is available.

Scan the QR Code for a virtual tour of the Orlando International Airport's Soft Room led by Founder/President of United Abolitionist, Inc., Tomas J. Lares.

THE FIRST TRAUMA-INFORMED RESTROOM SIGNS IN THE COUNTRY ARE ALSO AT MCO

First trauma-informed restroom signage at Orlando International Airport developed and approved by lived experience subject matter experts, ensuring survivor-informed messaging and resource accessibility in a high-traffic public space.

A collaborative effort between Orlando International Airport (MCO), the UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, and United Abolitionists, Inc. resulted in the creation of the airport's first trauma-informed restroom signage. Designed to provide discreet access to support resources while prioritizing dignity, safety, and empowerment, the signage was developed with direct input from lived experience subject matter experts and formally approved by survivor leaders.





HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS MONTH

In 2010, by presidential proclamation, President Obama declared January “National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month” and every year since, each president has followed this tradition.

Presidential proclamations not only raise the profile of the issue, but are also snapshots of global trends and challenges, and significant U.S. anti-trafficking policy achievements (U.S. Department of State).

The UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery has been actively engaged since 2019 in advancing awareness through strategic partnerships and collaborative initiatives. These efforts are designed to reach a broad and interdisciplinary audience, including UCF students, faculty, and staff, as well as community partners across education, government and public sectors, healthcare, law enforcement, social services, and lived-experience experts.

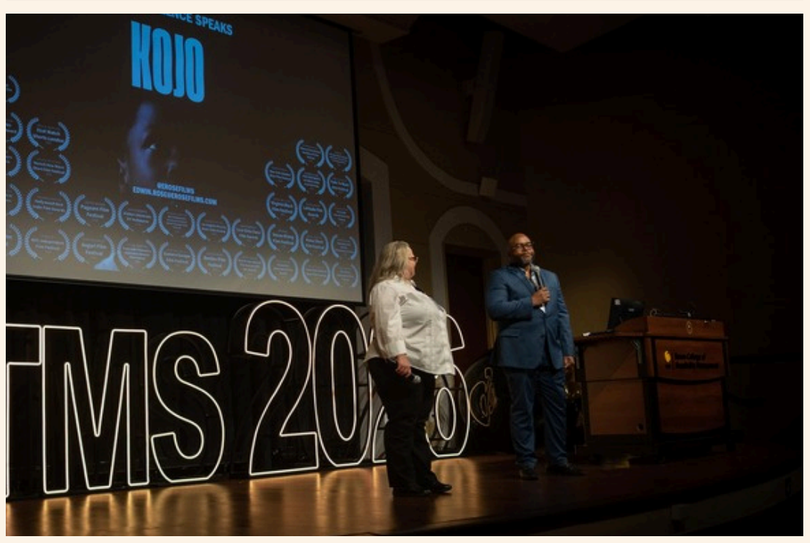
These initiatives include signature programs such as the Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Conference, Red Sand Project activations both on campus and across Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties, targeted industry workshops, curated training and curriculum, and the Polaris Star Awards.

18TH ANNUAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS CONFERENCE















18TH ANNUAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS CONFERENCE (CONT)

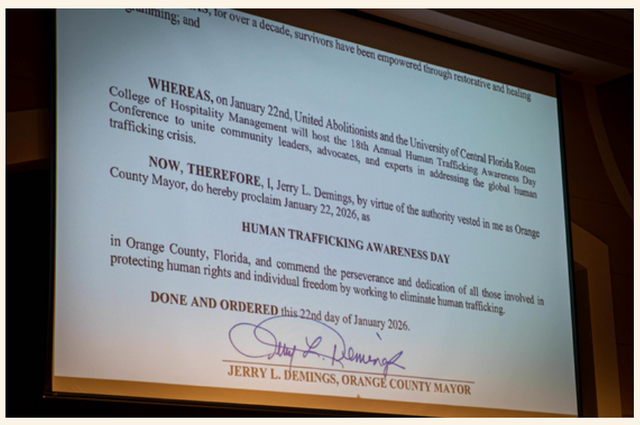
The 18th Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Conference took place on January 22nd, 2026, and was hosted by the **UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and the United Abolitionists** at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. This year, the conference was called **"Behind the Click: Rewriting the algorithm to reduce demand against exploitation"** and focused on human trafficking in the ever-changing digital world. This hybrid conference brought together survivors, lived-experience leaders, advocates, technologists, researchers, and policymakers to confront the growing role of technology in driving human trafficking to **450+** attendees. This is more than a conversation; it's a movement to rewrite the algorithm and reclaim the digital space for safety, justice, and freedom.

The event demonstrated the commitment to survivor-centered and trauma-informed practices. Conference participants donated **250+** toiletry items to support survivors of human trafficking, providing essential resources to community partners serving those impacted by exploitation. **In recognition of the value of lived experience expertise, six lived-experience experts were compensated for their presentations, and consulting fees were provided to two lived-experience experts for their contributions to trauma-informed conference planning and development.** These efforts reflect the Center's ongoing commitment to ensuring that survivor voices are respected, valued, and meaningfully integrated into education, awareness, and prevention initiatives.

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings issued a proclamation reinforcing the community's commitment to combating human trafficking, and **Florida State Attorney Monique Worrell** presented updates on Orange County's efforts to fight human trafficking. The Center would like to thank you for your support of anti-trafficking initiatives and the continued advocacy for survivors of human trafficking.

The Center also thanks **Orange County Sheriff John Mina, who** actively targets human trafficking in Central Florida, and **Jose A. Ramirez, Director of the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation (MBI),** for sharing valuable insights during the conference and continuing to be a strong partner in advancing multidisciplinary efforts to prevent human trafficking and support survivors. Central Florida is a community that works collaboratively in anti-trafficking efforts, and it starts from the top with elected officials.

Thank you, **Kailey Carter**, for providing the latest statistics for the state of Florida from **BRIGHT; Savi Reyes, Stacie Ham, Jesse Leon, & Olivia Littleton**, for providing your experience and expertise on trafficking in a digital space during you panel "***Voices of Resilience: From Exploitation to Systematic Change***"; and **Edwin Rose**, for sharing your short film for the first-time **"*Chained Silence Speaks Chapter One: Kojo*"** with us, bringing awareness to labor trafficking in Ghana's fishing industry. Thank you, **Megan Lundstrom**, for providing insight as to what types of trafficking are being reported on a national level through **Polaris; Bryon Rossi, Curtis Miller, and Justin Euteneier** from the **EPIK Project**, for your presentation ***"Don't Forget the Buyers, The Case for Demand".***









The 19th Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Conference will be on January 21st, 2027, at the University of Central Florida, Rosen College of Hospitality Management in Orlando, Florida.



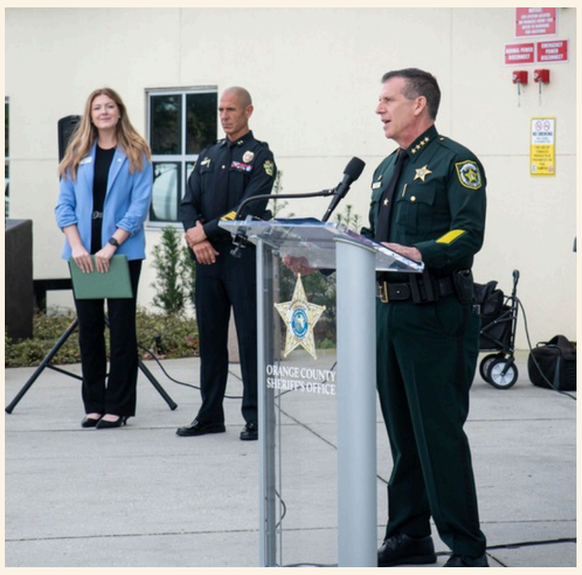
THE RED SAND PROJECT HOSTED BY THE CENTRAL FLORIDA HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE: ORANGE, OSCEOLA, SEMINOLE COUNTIES

Our Executive Director, Dr. Jessica Wickey, and our Director of Events, Mayara Martines, are members of the Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force. This task force is a network of governmental & non-governmental agencies working together to combat all aspects of human trafficking in Central Florida. One of the major events hosted by the Task Force is the **Red Sand Project,** a participatory artwork created by Molly Gochman that uses sidewalk interventions and earthwork installations to create opportunities for people to question, connect, and take action against vulnerabilities that can lead to human trafficking, modern slavery, and exploitation.

In 2026, the events happened at the Kissimmee Civic Center, Orange County Sheriff's Office, and Palate Coffee Roasters. We thank **Olivia Littleton & Mikala Moffitt**, Co-Chairs of the Central Florida Human Trafficking Task Force, for their efforts in organizing these initiatives.

















16TH ANNUAL POLARIS STAR AWARDS

The Polaris Star Awards is an annual event that brings together individuals, organizations, businesses, and activists who are dedicated to combating human trafficking. This prestigious award ceremony, hosted by United Abolitionists, Inc. and the UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, honors and recognizes the outstanding efforts and initiatives made in the fight against modern-day slavery and exploitation. **Since 2011, 125 individuals have received one of the various awards.**

In 2026, the Polaris Star Awards was hosted at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Thank you, **Karla Ray and David Jones**, for being the Master of Ceremonies. Their ability to connect with the audience created a fantastic atmosphere.

This year, 20 awards were awarded, and 2 Lived Experience Experts were compensated in recognition of their contributions to trauma-informed event planning. Thank you, **Ms. Jennifer Hostetter**, a thirty-year veteran of the service industry and an Instructor at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, for hosting the first-ever tequila tasting for attendees.

To the amazing sponsors, **Republic National Distributing Company and their VALOR program for their in-kind beverage donation, Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association for their in-kind food donation, and the Rosen College of Hospitality Management for their venue donation**, we thank them for their generosity in celebrating this special event!

















PRESENTATIONS

The UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (HTMS) delivers targeted presentations designed to increase awareness, build practical knowledge, and strengthen response capacity across multiple sectors. These presentations are tailored to diverse audiences, including students, educators, healthcare professionals, hospitality leaders, law enforcement, and community partners, and focus on identifying indicators of trafficking, understanding industry-specific vulnerabilities, and applying trauma-informed, survivor-centered approaches.

Through interactive and evidence-based content, HTMS presentations equip participants with actionable tools to recognize, report, and respond effectively to human trafficking within their respective roles.

JUNE 2026

Buyer Beware: Leveraging AI-Driven Behavioral Data to Disrupt Demand in Human Trafficking

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Dr. David Metcalf
Event: Southern Methodist University Human Trafficking Data Conference: Building Partnerships for Impactful Human Trafficking Data, Dallas, TX

APRIL 2026

Human Trafficking & Victim Detection in Health Care

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira
Event: Classroom Presentation – UCF College of Nursing

Human Trafficking and AI

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Dr. David Metcalf
Event: Alliance to End Human Trafficking Conference, Boston, MA







FEBRUARY & MARCH 2026

HTMS Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Lauren Crocket (Visual Matrix)
Event: UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management Dean's Advisory Board Meeting

HTMS Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Patty Jeffries (Visual Matrix)
Event: CFHLA Safety and Security Directors

Buyer Beware for Law Enforcement

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Dr. David Metcalf
Event: Law Enforcement Presentation

HTMS Advisory Board Meeting

Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira











PRESENTATIONS (CONT.)

To request a specialized presentation or tailored workshop for your company, school, or event, email htmscenter@ucf.edu

JANUARY 2026

Do Major Events Provide an Effective Platform to Tackle Human Trafficking Panel

Presenters: Dr. Alan Fyall (Moderator), Alan Wilkett, Dr. Jessica Wickey, Olivia Littleton, Jodi Domangue, Sarah Mahoney, Noel Thomas, Dr. Michael Duignan, and Tomas J. Lares. This panel was organized jointly by: Dr. Michael Duignan, professeur des universités, University of Paris 1: Panthéon-Sorbonne, and Founder and Chair of the Centre for Events & Festivals (CEF).
Event: Leadership Workshop (Pictured below on the right), Orlando, FL.

NOVEMBER 2025

Hospitality and Human Trafficking: What We Need to Know
Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd and William Zambelli
Event: Human Trafficking Task Force Community Outreach Committee, Virtual.

Follow Money Fight Slavery: Room for Change Panel
Panelists: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Georgine Muntz, Gina Parisi
Event: Follow Money Fight Slavery Virtual Summit; Host: Dark Watch.

The Dark Side of the Industry: Human Trafficking and Wellness
Panelist: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira
Event: Graduate Class Presentation, Orlando, FL.

Buyer Beware and HTMS Center Tabling Showcase
Tabling: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira
Event: AI MED Conference (Pictured Below), San Diego, CA.



OCTOBER 2025

Digital Natives in the Anti-Trafficking Movement: From DMs to Danger, Gen Z Exposes Trafficking Tactics
Presenters: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira, Ashley Zarwanitzer, and Maddy Hutchinson
Event: Juvenile Sex Trafficking Conference Series (Shared Hope JuST Conference), Orlando, FL

HTMS Anti-Trafficking Efforts
Presenter: Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira
Event: Human Trafficking Joint Task Force, Orlando, FL

Educação, Indústria e Tráfico Humano
Presenter: Mayara Martines Ramalho de Oliveira
Event: Challenging Borders: Slave Labor and Human Trafficking in the Global Context hosted by the Clínica de Trabalho Escravo e Tráfico de Pessoas (CTETP) of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil

Human Trafficking and the Transportation Industry
Presenter: Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, Tomas J. Lares
Event: Human Trafficking Symposium: Fight for Child Online Safety hosted by Congressman Mike Haridopolos, Cocoa, FL





KNIGHTS OF THE RELM

CULTURE | **PASSION** | **RESPECT**

The RELM in Knights of the RELM stands for '**R**esist **E**xploitation and **L**ead with **M**orality'. This acronym is aligned with the group's goals of increasing awareness, engaging with community resources, advocating for survivors, and even taking on initiatives linked to prevention. The organization focuses on student development academically, professionally, and socially.





"Watching our students confidently share insights, research, and real-world applications reminded me why I love this work. The next generation is not only ready to lead, but they are already leading. We are developing our army of abolitionists, and they are prepared with the tools and knowledge to identify and report trafficking!"

Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd

Knights of the RELM and the UCF HTMS Center attended the **Juvenile Sex Trafficking (JuST) Conference, Shared Hope International,** and presented the panel **"Digital Natives in the Anti-Trafficking Movement: From DMs to Danger, Gen Z Exposes Trafficking Tactics"** in October 2025 in Orlando, Florida.

Our Executive Director, Dr. Jessica Wickey Byrd, moderated the panel with Knights of the RELM students, Ashley Zarwanitzer and Maddy Hutchinson, and our Project Manager, Mayara Martines, M.S.

GO KNIGHTS!



Red Sand Project Event

STUDENT ORGANIZATION, KNIGHTS OF THE RELM 2025-26 BOARD MEMBERS

MADELYN HUTCHINSON
President
Restaurant and Lodging Management, B.S.

FRANCIS "FRANKIE" PEPE ‘26
Vice-President
Hospitality Management, B.S.;
Hospitality, Health, and Well-Being, Certificate

LIV WASTIER ‘26
Secretary
Hospitality Management, B.S.;
Leadership Studies, Minor

NATALIE WEISS '26
Social Media Director
Hospitality Management, B.S.;
Entertainment Management, Certificate

ASHLEY ZARWANITZER ‘26
Volunteer Director
Hospitality Management, B.S.;
Theme Park Management Minor

And congratulations, graduates!

The Center extends our heartfelt congratulations and deepest gratitude to the 2025-26 graduate student board members of Knights of the RELM!

“We are incredibly thankful for concluding another amazing semester and school year with Knights of the RELM. The amazing partnerships, advocacy, and hard work resonated with all of us during our entire time. With so many of us graduating this year, things feel bittersweet, but we know we have worked on projects that will stay with us for a lifetime.”

“Being a part of the Knights of the RELM has been one of the highlights of my college career. I have gotten to know some of the most incredible and dedicated people through RELM, and I am forever grateful for their support, service, and friendship.”

“I will forever be thankful for what KOTR gave me. A sense of community and the best board I could imagine working with. This topic has become extremely important to me, and I am so thankful to have popped into a random meeting one day that then spurred into 3 semesters of a newfound passion for change. My passion won’t end with graduation, and I am grateful to carry my knowledge forward to advocate wherever I go. Thank you to all the lived-experience experts for speaking your truth and for eliciting inspiration and support. GO SUPPORT PALATE COFFEE ROASTERS!”

“I am grateful for the opportunity to have been part of this work and to have grown both personally and professionally through it. More importantly, I leave with a deeper sense of responsibility to remain aware, to keep learning, and to continue advocating beyond my time here.”

‘We aim to be service leaders of change through impact, legacy, development, and sustainability in events on a local, national, and global scale.”

Connect with us at htmscenter@ucf.edu and become a member.

IN THE MEDIA

UCF student organization raises awareness on human trafficking

Bryanna Valderrama Dec 5, 2025 Updated Dec 5, 2025 0



Natalie Weiss, senior hospitality management major and social media director of Knights of the RELM, holds UCF's Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Annual Report at the Knights of the RELM tabling at the Rosen campus on Nov. 18.

The Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and its student organization, **Knights of the RELM**, were featured by **Nicholson Student Media** for their efforts to engage students in human trafficking prevention and awareness. The article highlighted student-led outreach initiatives, including awareness tabling events, participation in the Red Sand Project, and the development of immersive simulations designed to help future hospitality professionals recognize and respond to indicators of human trafficking. The feature showcased the Center's commitment to education, student engagement, and innovative approaches to prevention.

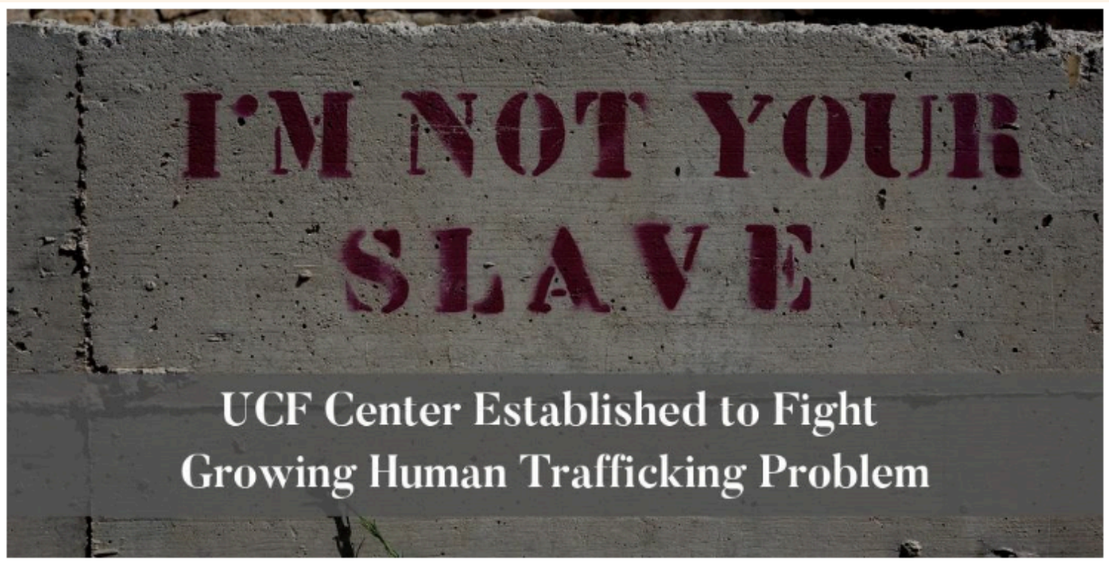
Natalie Weiss, senior hospitality management major and social media director, shared a goal that the organization wants to work on. "The issue we want to tackle on is the student engagement and how aware they are, and how they can bring that into their working environments in their knowledge to share with others," Weiss said.

The Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and Knights of the RELM were featured by **The Washington Centre** for their student-led efforts to combat human trafficking through education, awareness, and community engagement. The article highlighted how students are helping lead outreach initiatives, awareness campaigns, and prevention activities that empower the UCF community to recognize and respond to human trafficking. The feature reinforced the Center's commitment to developing future leaders who are actively engaged in creating safer communities and advancing anti-trafficking efforts both on campus and beyond.

UCF's Campus Crusade: How Student-Led Awareness Challenges Florida's Trafficking Epidemic?

HUMAN TRAFFICKING - December 6, 2025 - By Research Team





The University of Central Florida is taking a bold step in bringing attention to the growing problem of human trafficking. In recent years, the school has worked to be at the forefront of human trafficking research and to help build awareness. This year, a new Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery was established. It hopes to proactively address the problem that is spiraling out of control in our state.

The Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery was recognized by **Brooks Law Group** for its leadership in addressing the growing issue of human trafficking in Florida. The article highlighted the Center's mission to advance awareness, research, education, and community collaboration to combat human trafficking and modern slavery. By positioning UCF as a key contributor to prevention and solution-focused efforts, the feature underscored the Center's role in bringing greater visibility to this critical issue both locally and globally.



HTMS Advisory Board Meeting

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS 2025-26

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

DR. JESSICA WICKEY BYRD '13MS, '24EDD
Executive Director, UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

MAYARA MARTINES RAMALHO DE OLIVEIRA,'22MS '26MA
Trauma-Informed Director of Events,
UCF Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

DR. GARY DEEL '07 '10MS
Adjunct Professor, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management

EDWINA NORVELUS '11
Director of Graduate Affairs, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management

HOLLY ROBBINS
Director of Marketing & Communications, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management

DR. STEPHEN PRATT
Professor, Tourism, Event, Entertainment, and Attractions,
UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management

DR. DENVER SEVERT
Associate Professor, Hospitality Management, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management

KYLE TRAGER '08, '12MPA
Director of Development, University of Central Florida

EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

KIMBERLY BREWSTER '03
TEAM ADAM Consultant, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

DR. DOUG GILMER
Law Enforcement Veteran and Founder & CEO,
Resolved Strategies

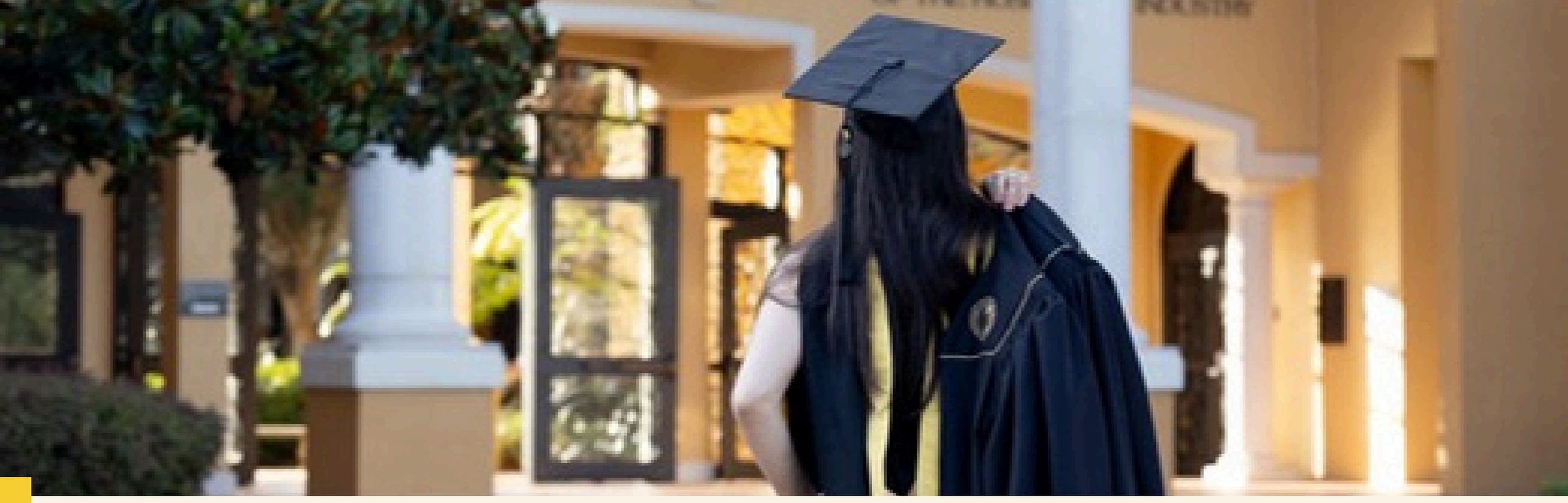
DR. JEFFERY GOLTZ '06PHD
Dean, School of Public Safety, Legal Studies & Education, Valencia College

TINA KADOLPH
Co-founder and President, Love Missions Global

OLIVIA LITTLETON
Senior Director of Survivor Services,
One More Child

EZEKIEL MCKINE
Regional Advocate II, FLITE Center

MISTI SPENCER '18
Lived Experience Expert, Author, Speaker



SPONSORSHIPS AND DONATIONS

EDUCATION EMPOWERS

Help human trafficking survivors begin a new chapter at the University of Central Florida

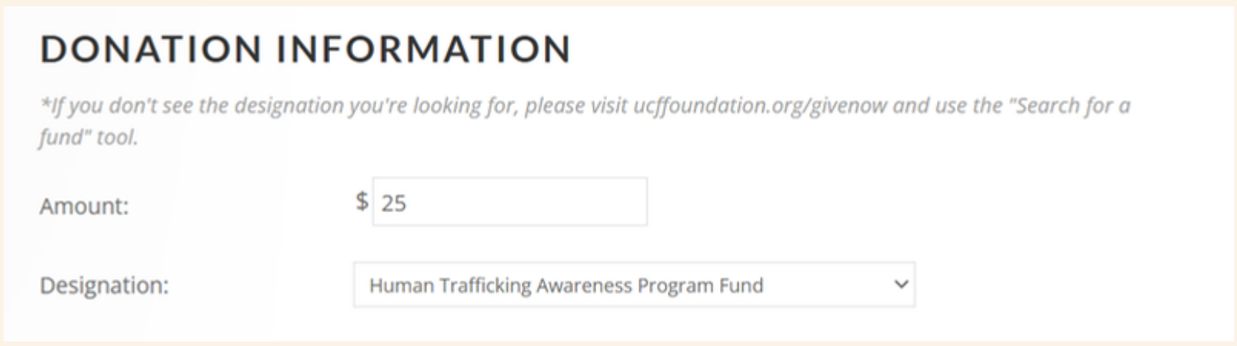
$1,000,000

FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Your support has the power to change lifes.

- **Technology and Equipment:** Computers, laptops, or tablets for staff, student fellows, or survivors participating in scholarship programs.
- **AV equipment** such as projectors, cameras, or microphones for training sessions and events.
- **Office supplies** like notebooks, pens, or printing paper for day-to-day operations.
- Marketing materials such as **printed flyers, posters, or banners** for outreach and awareness campaigns.
- **Educational materials** like books or subscriptions to relevant journals.
- **Legal assistance for survivors or advocacy-related efforts.**
- Graphic design or marketing services to enhance awareness campaigns.
- **Translation services** for resources in multiple languages to **assist survivors** from diverse backgrounds.
- Professional development training for staff or teachers involved in related educational programs.
- **Workshops or seminars** hosted by experts in related fields.
- **Financial Support Alternatives:** Gift cards for food, transportation, or clothing to **directly assist survivors.**
- **Event sponsorships** for public forums, awareness walks, or campaigns during major events like Human Trafficking Awareness Month.
- **Print or media** advertising to **amplify messaging during high-visibility campaigns.**

In-kind donations can provide valuable support to the UCF's Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery.



MAKE AN IMPACT, DONATE TODAY



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research.ucf.edu/htms

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htmscenter@ucf.edu

Follow us online:

@ucf.htms

UCF's Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

@ucfhtms

Check out our gallery:
ucfhtmscenter.smugmug.com

Upcoming events:

19th Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Conference
January 21, 2027, at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Orlando, FL

17th Annual Polaris Star Awards
January 22, 2027, at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Orlando, FL

See more information on our website.



YEAR IN REVIEW | FY 2025-26

UCF | Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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