

NEWS RELEASE

New National Security Partnership Benefits Florida's State University System, Talent Pipeline

TALLAHASSEE, Sept. 30, 2020 -- A new partnership between the [State University System of Florida](#), the [Florida Defense Alliance](#) and the [National Security Innovation Network](#) (NSIN) gives students real-world opportunities to develop innovative solutions to national security challenges, strengthening the talent pipeline for government and industry.

NSIN is a program of the U.S. Department of Defense and a problem-solving network that adapts to the emerging needs of those working to preserve national security. The organization dedicates its efforts to identifying collaboration opportunities for defense, academic and entrepreneurial innovators to solve national security problems in new ways. The new partnership also involves the Florida Defense Alliance, an organization within Enterprise Florida.

Students at several state universities are either already enrolled in [Hacking for Defense \(H4D\) classes](#) through the new initiative or will be in the coming years. Examples of projects already under way are:

- Students in the University of Central Florida's Senior Computer Science Capstone program are working with the U.S. Army 44th Medical Brigade at Ft. Bragg to build a new app for more accurate tracking of medications. They also are creating a dashboard and mobile app to better manage Civil Affairs data within the United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and helping the U.S. Army create a more robust training environment to combat cyber threats.
- At [Florida Polytechnic University](#), capstone senior design students are working to develop streamlined communication tools for operations group squadron commanders to access mission-critical data effectively.
- Florida Atlantic University students are developing new machine learning models based on reinforcement learning techniques that use data from sonobuoys to improve the Navy's P-8's ability to track submarines. They will also be working on artificial intelligence-based solutions that monitor battlefield chat and radio feeds to automatically update the status of friendly and enemy forces on a dashboard.

"This Memorandum of Understanding is an excellent opportunity for our 12 institutions to support an industry critical to the state of Florida," said Syd Kitson, chair of the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida. "By preparing our graduates for the types of issues and real-world problems facing the defense industry, we build a dynamic talent pipeline for Florida that fosters innovation and problem-solving."

In addition to the semester-long courses and student team projects, the partnership also includes:

- Providing fellowships for project teams that pay full-time innovators to continue working on Department of Defense challenges
- Placing problems into university hackathons to generate solutions and identify student talent for recruitment
- Supporting solutions and ventures that address Department of Defense challenges to create new commercial businesses
- Connecting State University System students, faculty, researchers, mentors and defense liaisons to Department of Defense installations, leaders and organizations

Additional goals of the partnership include helping more students earn internships and begin careers in national security-related fields and also expanding faculty research in national security. It may also allow for students to be sponsored for security clearance-making them more competitive for future employment in the industry. Those student-focused components will be led by Florida International University and Florida Gulf Coast University.

NSIN will hire a University Program Director (UPD) who will report to the [FAMU-FSU College of Engineering](#), with up to 30 percent of their effort allocated to working with and supporting the Chancellor's Office for system-wide coordination and success. This will be the first NSIN UPD ever assigned to a HBCU institution and a state university system.

This is a State University System-wide collaboration, designed for maximum participation, with all 12 of Florida's public state universities playing a role in areas such as defense liaisons, applied research, mentorship and student/faculty engagement.

The FDA's role in the MOU is to facilitate access to military leaders, engage the Department of Economic Opportunity and the Florida Chamber of Commerce to align talent pipeline initiatives, and to promote this program throughout the defense community, with local and state leaders, as well as uniformed service leaders.

With more than 20 major military installations and three of ten U.S. combatant commands located in Florida, the military and defense are a solid component of Florida's economy, contributing \$95 billion annually and supporting more than 914,000 jobs. Because of Florida's consistent effort to be the most military-friendly state in the nation, our state is second in the nation for military retirees, third in the nation for veterans, and fourth in the nation for Defense Contracts – of which more than 50 percent are in manufacturing.

The new agreement formalizes and expands existing FDA relationships in our communities to provide students a window into our military and defense industries as part of final projects but also helps solve some of the most challenging military issues.

This new statewide effort addresses one of the Governor's goals for our military and defense organizations: to create a ready workforce that fills critical defense industry jobs and supports our installations with equipment and solutions.

"The signing of this MOU and ground-breaking program is great news for Florida," said Jamal Sowell, Florida Secretary of Commerce and Enterprise Florida President & CEO. "Florida's military and defense industry is a key economic driver for the state. Enterprise Florida and the FDA will continue to create opportunities, working with our partners, to support Florida's military installations and strengthen Florida bases."

This MOU contributes to the FDA reaching its vision of Florida providing the most innovative and comprehensive military, defense and national security support in the Nation.

"Establishing this network at the state level, connecting up Florida's strong university system and long-established military installations and defense industry is the smart thing to do at this time to position Florida for the future," says FDA Chair Kellie Jo Kilberg. "Research and innovation are the basis for solving the toughest problems and Florida confirms we want to be serious and bring the right individuals together with this agreement to move forward."

UCF Board of Trustees [Chair Beverly Seay](#) played an important role in establishing the partnership, as she is the NSIN southeast region's senior advisor.

A trustee at UCF since 2013, Seay advises and connects companies, universities, and investors in modeling and simulation, cybersecurity, blockchain and computing technologies. She brings global experience and a Fortune 500 track record in domestic and global business operations, and she is a recognized leader in innovative and creative technologies.

"NSIN works diligently to build strategic collaborative partners who can bring much to the table in helping to meet the defense and national security challenges of today," said [Dr. Tommy Sowers](#), NSIN's Southeast Regional Director. "We have worked to establish partnerships with top research universities throughout the country, and Bev is a tremendous help in expanding those partnerships further, in not only Florida but the greater Southeast region of the U.S."

In the last fiscal year, NSIN has broadened its outreach and services to an additional 500,000 students, 36 states, three territories, the U.S. European Combatant Command, and the U.S. Africa Combatant Command. NSIN programs have brought over 170 new dual-use ventures to the national security ecosystem.

For six consecutive years, UCF has been [the No. 1 workforce supplier of graduates to U.S. aerospace and defense industries](#), according to Aviation Week Network. In

addition, UCF ranks second in the nation (only to Georgia Tech) for teaching the critical skills needed by employers.

“We have exceptional academic talent throughout the Southeast, and I am excited to help our universities prepare students to become the next generation of national security problem-solvers,” Seay said. “Students will benefit from new courses and real-world exercises that mirror what they would do in careers with the Department of Defense or defense-related companies. These partnerships will be especially valuable in Florida and other southeastern states that play such an important role in the defense and homeland security industries.”

Additional Quotes:

FAMU-FSU College of Engineering Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies Farrukh Alvi, who will supervise the new University Program Director hire

“We believe that this position and person will be a significant asset to our college and our parent institutions as well as the SUS; they will help enhance our engagement with the DoD and help provide solutions to the most pressing problems in a mutually beneficial framework.”

FIU President Mark B. Rosenberg

“At FIU we are excited to support the National Security Innovation Network through the Hacking for Defense program and the Florida Defense Alliance, where we co-lead efforts that contribute to the success of students throughout the entire State University System. These initiatives allow us to support national defense and Florida’s economy while we help students prepare to compete for great jobs upon graduation.”

Florida Poly President Randy K. Avent

“This partnership represents a remarkable opportunity for our students to rise to meet real-world challenges and develop real solutions. As a university, we are ready and excited to support the National Security Innovation Network and the needs of the Department of Defense through the Hacking for Defense program.”

Media Contacts:

Renee’ Fargason, State University System/Board of Governors, 850-245-9724, renee.fargason@flbog.edu

Beth Medina, Florida Defense Alliance, 850-298-6652, bmedina@enterpriseflorida.com

Aly Gregg, National Security Innovation Network, 304-549-5092, AGregg@nsin.us

Chad Binette, UCF, 407-823-6312, Chad.Binette@ucf.edu

Lydia Guzman, Florida Polytechnic University, 863-327-9762, lguzman@floridapoly.edu

Joshua Glanzer, Florida Atlantic University, 561-297-1168, jglanzer@fau.edu

Maydel Santana, Florida International University, 305-348-1555, santanam@FIU.edu

Tisha Crews Keller, FAMU-FSU College of Engineering, 850-410-6495,
tckeller@eng.famu.fsu.edu