

# SECSA CHRIE FALL 2025 H.E.A.T. NEWSLETTER

A stylized world map in a light blue color is centered on the Atlantic Ocean. Numerous glowing white lines connect various points across the continents, representing a global network or communication system.

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**Scholarship**  
**Expertise**  
**Curiosity**  
**Smart**  
**Advancement**

# Message from the SECSA CHRIE President

## Dr. Kate Price-Howard

Dear SECSA-CHRIE Hospitality Educators,

As we bring the Fall semester and 2025 to a close, I would like to take a moment to recognize and celebrate the dedication, resilience, and innovation that define our community of hospitality educators across the Southeast, Central & South American regions. This semester, like so many before it, has reflected your commitment to advancing hospitality education through teaching, scholarship, mentorship, and service. Your impact on students and the broader industry continues to be both meaningful and far-reaching.

With the conclusion of the Fall term, we now turn our attention to the promise of a new year. The arrival of 2026 brings renewed opportunities for collaboration, scholarly engagement, and professional growth within the SECSA-CHRIE Federation. It is a time to reflect on our accomplishments while also looking ahead with optimism and purpose.

One of the highlights of the coming year will start in January 8-10, 2026 and is the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Graduate Education & Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality & Tourism, hosted by the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management at Auburn University. This conference continues to provide an important platform for emerging scholars to share their research, receive constructive feedback, and engage with faculty mentors and peers. This conference plays a critical role in fostering academic development and encouraging rigorous inquiry within hospitality and tourism disciplines.



**Dr. Kate Price-Howard**  
**Troy University**

**President**  
**SECSA CHRIE**

# Message from the SECSA CHRIE President

## Dr. Kate Price-Howard

We are also looking forward to the ESD Undergraduate Research Symposium, being hosted by Boston University on February 26 - 27, 2026. This is our opportunity to showcase the impressive work of undergraduate students and underscores the value of experiential learning and faculty mentorship. By providing students with the opportunity to present their research in a professional academic setting, we help prepare the next generation of hospitality leaders, researchers, and educators while reinforcing the scholarly mission of our institutions.

We will then head south to Tampa, FL and be hosted by the Muma College of Business at the University of South Florida for the 11th Annual SECSA-CHRIE Conference, scheduled for March 19-21, 2026. This signature event will bring together educators, researchers, and industry professionals for three days of knowledge sharing, collaboration, and networking. The conference serves as a cornerstone of our federation, offering opportunities to present research, exchange innovative teaching practices, discuss emerging industry trends, and strengthen professional relationships across our diverse region. Acceptance letters have been sent and additional details regarding the host institution, program highlights, and registration can be found on the conference website!

As we close out the Fall semester, I encourage each of you to take time to rest, recharge, and celebrate your accomplishments. Your continued engagement with SECSA-CHRIE strengthens our federation and advances hospitality education as a whole.

On behalf of the SECSA-CHRIE Board, thank you for your ongoing commitment and contributions. We look forward to connecting with you in the new year and throughout 2026.

Happy New Year to all of you,

Kate Price-Howard, PhD, CHE, CHIA, CTRS  
President (2025-2026),

ICHRIE SECSA Federation

# About ICHRIE

International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (ICHRIE), a non-profit professional association, provides programs and services to continually improve the quality of global education, research, service and business operations in the hospitality and tourism industry.

ICHRIE, an inclusive, collegial association, values creative, ethical and progressive action and improvement of global hospitality and tourism education and research.

We have six (6) regional areas called Federations that span the globe. When you join International CHRIE, you also become a member of the Federation and can take advantage of conferences and networking closer to your location.

For more information, please visit: [www.chrie.org](http://www.chrie.org)





# Bridging Academia and Industry



**Dr. Jessica Wiitala**

**Secretary  
SECSA CHRIE**



**Assistant Professor of Event Management**

**Department of Event and Hospitality Management  
High Point University**

## **Bringing Classroom Theory to Industry Practice: Presenting at IAEE Expo! Expo!**

Dr. Jessica Wiitala had the privilege of presenting two sessions at the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) Expo! Expo! Annual Conference in Houston, Texas, this December. It was her first time attending and presenting at this premier industry event. At High Point University, Dr. Wiitala teaches event-focused courses, including experiential marketing and event sponsorship, principles of experience design, and a graduate-level design thinking course. Her passion for intentional design and designed experiences became the foundation for bringing academic frameworks directly to industry practitioners.

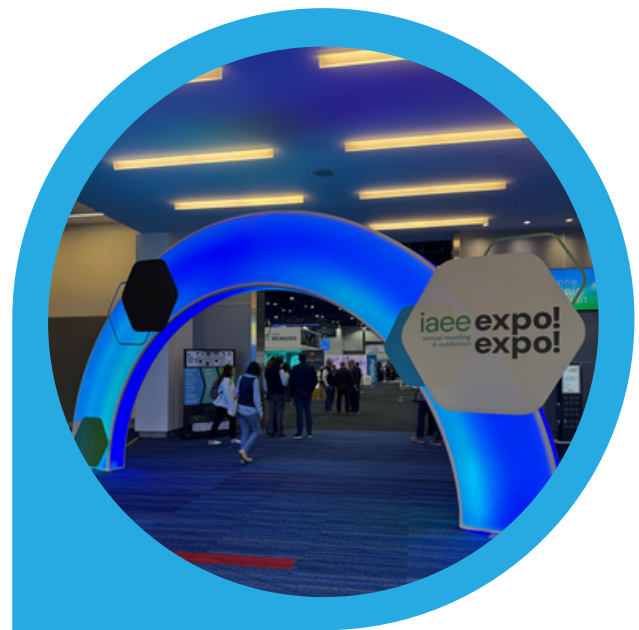
Her first session, The Science Behind the Experience: Research-Driven Strategies to Maximize Attendee Engagement, explored how behavioral science, flow theory, and McGuire's Information Processing Model inform experience design strategy. The 60-minute session for executive and VP-level professionals sparked thoughtful discussions about applying academic research to real-world trade show challenges, demonstrating the direct applicability of scholarly frameworks to industry practice.

# Bridging Academia and Industry

The second session, Design Thinking for Trade Show Impact: Tools to Rethink Strategy & Spark Engagement, brought design thinking principles, the same concepts Dr. Wiitala teaches at High Point University, to industry practitioners. This 45-minute hands-on session covered empathy mapping, ideation frameworks, and human-centered design, drawing a standing-room-only crowd of 100+ attendees to the final session of the day.

## The Value of Faculty-Industry Connection

The enthusiastic response from industry professionals reinforced a critical truth for hospitality and event management faculty: the theoretical frameworks we teach in the classroom have immediate real-world application, and industry practitioners are actively seeking this academically grounded content. In a field as global, fast-paced, and ever-changing as events, maintaining strong connections between faculty expertise and industry practice isn't just beneficial—it's essential.



**Welcome to Expo! Expo! 2025**



**Dr. Wiitala's view from the stage,  
waiting to welcome the attendees  
for The Science Behind the  
Experience**

# Bridging Academia and Industry

Dr. Wiitala serves as Chairperson Elect (2026) for IAEE's Faculty Advisory Committee, where she will work to strengthen these vital connections between academic programs and the exhibitions industry. She is currently developing industry-focused educational initiatives, including customizable workshops and continuing education programs that bridge research and practice, translating the learning theories, cognitive science, and design research taught daily in event management programs into practitioner-focused strategies. This experience highlights meaningful opportunities for faculty to influence professional practice through industry conference presentations, workshops, and association partnerships, demonstrating that our academic expertise extends beyond traditional consulting to serve as a catalyst for advancing the industry we are preparing our students to enter. Dr. Wiitala looks forward to bringing High Point University students to the 2026 conference in Milwaukee, providing them with direct access to industry leaders and exemplifying this vital bridge between classroom learning and professional practice.



**Dr. Wiitala presenting The Science Behind the Experience**



# Sharing Professional Insights



## Dr. Seden Dogan

**Director of Industry Services  
SECSA CHRIE**

**Assistant Professor of Instruction**

**School of Hospitality and Tourism Management  
Muma College of Business  
University of South Florida**



Dr. Seden Dogan provided expert commentary on the evolving landscape of travel technology, specifically discussing how travelers are leveraging AI for itinerary planning in a Fox 13 news story, and offering insights on best practices for booking travel accommodations in a WalletHub article.



# Celebrating Achievement



**Dr. Wei Wei**

**Director of Research  
SECSA CHRIE**

**Associate Professor**

**Rosen College of Hospitality Management  
University of Central Florida**



Dr. Wei Wei has been selected as a Faculty Fellow at UCF's Faculty Excellence for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Known for her dynamic leadership, innovative research, and commitment to elevating the academic community, Dr. Wei brings a wealth of expertise to the fellowship. In her new role, she aims to leverage the collective talents and insights of faculty across the university to create initiatives that foster professional growth, enhance scholarly impact, and strengthen UCF's position as a leader in higher education.

"I'm truly thrilled to embark on this new academic year as a Faculty Fellow," Dr. Wei shared. "This is an incredible opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, spark meaningful conversations, and drive changes that will positively impact faculty—not just at UCF, but across the broader academic landscape."

Dr. Wei's appointment reflects UCF's continued investment in faculty leadership development and its commitment to advancing a culture of excellence, innovation, and collaboration.

# Celebrating Achievement



## **Dr. Soyoung Park**

**Director of Networking  
SECSA CHRIE**

**Assistant Professor**

**College of Business  
Florida Atlantic University**

Dr. Soyoung Park was selected as one of four inaugural faculty leaders in Florida Atlantic University (FAU)'s first Vertically Integrated Projects (VIP) program. Supported by a \$2.2 million U.S. Department of Education FIPSE grant, the VIP initiative marks FAU as the first university in Florida to join the international VIP Consortium.

Park's project, Smart Sensors and Artificial Intelligence for Coastal Destination Resilience, received \$46,500 in seed funding to launch a sustained research pipeline that integrates undergraduate and graduate student involvement across disciplines. The initiative is co-led with Jinwoo Jang, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatics Engineering and FAU Sensing Institute fellow within the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

Together, Park and Jang will utilize IoT sensors, real-time environmental monitoring, AI-driven analytics, surveys, and focus groups to assess visitor-resident interactions and strain on coastal environments to support development resilient beach destinations.



# Owen's Legacy on Wheels



## O's Cool Bike Foundation: Continuing Owen's Legacy

In April 2022, following the unexpected passing of their son, Owen Wayne Lewis, Drs. Heather and Onick Lewis of Troy University established the O's Cool Bike Foundation, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The foundation's mission is twofold: to provide balance bikes to Head Start programs in lower socio-economic communities and to award scholarships to first-generation college students.

To support these philanthropic efforts, the foundation—together with Troy University's School of Hospitality, Sport, and Tourism Management (HSTM)—hosts the annual O's Cool Bike Ride and Walk. The event takes place on the Troy University campus each year on the last Saturday in April. Since the inaugural ride in 2023, participation has nearly doubled in just three years.



# Owen's Legacy on Wheels



Thanks to the generosity of supporters, the foundation has donated more than 200 balance bikes and helmets to Head Start programs across six Alabama counties. It has also awarded the Owen Wayne Lewis Memorial Scholarship to four students through its current scholarship fund and has successfully endowed the Owen Wayne Lewis Memorial Scholarship at Troy University. This endowment ensures that up to three scholarships will be awarded each year to first-generation college students majoring in Hospitality, Tourism, and Event Management, Social Work, and Human Services, supporting the students that Heather and Onick mentor through their respective programs.

We are deeply grateful for the continued encouragement and support from the SECSA Federation. If you would like to participate in the 2026 O's Cool Bike Ride and Walk, registration is open—and virtual participation is available for those who cannot join us in Troy. To learn more about the foundation, register for the ride, or to get involved, please visit [www.oscoolbikefoundation.org](http://www.oscoolbikefoundation.org).



**ICHRIE Eta Sigma Delta (ESD) H&A Undergraduate Student Research Symposium**  
26-27 February 2026 | Boston University School of Hospitality Administration | Boston, Massachusetts USA



# 2026 ICHRIE Eta Sigma Delta (ESD) Undergraduate Student Research Symposium



**26–27 February 2026**



**Boston University,  
School of Hospitality Administration**



**Open to ALL undergrads in ICHRIE–affiliated  
programs (not just ESD members)**

**FREE Registration: [tinyurl.com/esd-26ug](https://tinyurl.com/esd-26ug)**



# 11th Annual SECSA-CHRIE Conference

hosted by

## University of South Florida

Muma College of Business

School of Hospitality and Sport Management

### March 19-21, 2026



### Attendee Classification & Cost

Faculty: \$150

Student: \$75

Industry Professional: \$150

Registration link:

[https://secure.touchnet.com/C20235\\_ustores/web/store\\_main.jsp?STOREID=327](https://secure.touchnet.com/C20235_ustores/web/store_main.jsp?STOREID=327)



Deadline: February 1st, 2026

# 2026 ICHRIE Global Conference

*Save  
The  
Date*



**When: 15–17 July 2026**

**Where: Las Vegas, Nevada, USA**

**Deadline: 18 January 2026 (11:59 PM ET)**

**Submission info & guidelines: <https://lnkd.in/eRxdN5B4>**

# Call for Content

## SHARE

- What's new in your program
- Members professional and personal accomplishments and milestones
- Research and education hot tips
- Health and wellness tips
- Important dates and announcements



## E-mail Dr. Haemi Kim with submissions



### Dr. Haemi Kim

Director of Marketing  
SECSA CHRIE

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