

The Maverick Minute: Gina Ligon, Ph.D.

Description: Gina Ligon, Ph.D., head of UNO's National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE), joined Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., to recognize the one-year anniversary of the center's announcement.

Transcript

Gold: Hello, I'm Jeff Gold, and thank you so much for joining us today for this very special Maverick Minute. Our guest today probably needs very little introduction but it's my pleasure to introduce her anyway and that is Dr. Gina Ligon, who is director of NCITE. And for those of you that may not be aware, NCITE is the National Counter Terrorism Innovation Technology and Education Center. Boy, that's a bit of a mouthful Dr. Ligon, but certainly, as the only Department of Homeland Security Counter Terrorism Center in the United States, it's great to have it here at UNO and it's great to have you as the director. Thanks so much for being with us today.

Ligon: Thank you.

Gold: So, I have a number of different questions, but it's been just about six months since the Department of Homeland Security designated NCITE as the national center and talk a little bit about the changes that have occurred, particularly as it relates to your role with the federal government and of course, to our students and faculty as well.

Ligon: Thank you so much, you know, our goal is to be the premiere institution in an academic university in the United States for research, technology, and education on counter terrorism. We really want UNO to be the place where students and faculty will come to learn about counter terrorism. We're well on our way. We already have 24 accepted publications in peer review journals that were sponsored by NCITE researchers and we've already engaged 114 different students as part of our program here at UNO.

Gold: So, let's unpack that a little bit, 114 students- are these undergraduates, graduate students, are they in different colleges and disciplines and what might be some examples?

Ligon: Yeah, that's a great question, you know, we always say from music to medicine, from communications to computer science, we want all of UNO to see how their degrees can help counter terrorism and national security and we've put our projects where that goal is, in that we are actually trying to fund and engage students all across the campus and across the whole

NU system to be honest, to use their specific training and their expertise they're getting here at UNO for national security.

Gold: And I understand that you focus not only on what some people might think to be just the international counter terrorism work, but also domestic counter terrorism work as well. Is that not true?

Ligon: Yeah, so we're sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security so we are really charged to look at any and all ideologically violent threats to the United States and that includes, unfortunately, groups here right at home- domestic terrorism groups is what we would call those.

Gold: Well, certainly that's filled the media an awful lot recently. Another exciting addition is that you're about to move into the Rod Rodan Innovation Center- the extension of Mammel Hall, that must be pretty exciting.

Ligon: Yeah, next month we should be all moved in with students from all across the campus. It's a wonderful collaborative space with lots of technology. We actually have something called a Violent Extremist Organization Visualization room where we're combining a lot of our holograms and data visualization technology to really help understand this problem with cutting edge technology here at the university.

Gold: You know, I guess it's sort of a shame that we need to have such a robust and well thought out plan to deal with counter terrorism but the good news is that you and your team and the UNO community are really here to try to be maximally helpful to our government and at the end of the day, to make our communities as safe as possible.

Ligon: Yeah, chancellor. It's the greatest honor of my career to be able to lead this center. I think that just the events in the past month have really put us on the center stage because we already had projects looking at some of these violent groups who've been engaging in violence right here in the U.S. from Portland all the way to D.C. and it's important that our state understands that we are a resource for the federal government, the state government, local community partners for our expertise on these issues and it's a very important mission that our university is engaged in.

Gold: So, I remember it when was almost yesterday that you were competing- we collectively were competing for this honor, to be designated by the Department of Homeland Security as the national center and I remember- just days of testimony and documentation and other such things. All I can say is they made the right choice.

Ligon: Thank you.

Gold: Well, congratulations on everything that you've done, congratulations to your team. Thanks so much for being with us today on this Mav Minute.