

We are **THEM**

2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT

TOURISM, *HOSPITALITY & EVENT MANAGEMENT*

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



We are
THEM
and we are
PROUD



I am honored to lead the only Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management Department at a Top 5 public university. We are THEM and we are proud. I've seen our students, faculty and staff all embrace their roles as pioneers. My promise as Department Chair is to continue to expand educational opportunities, drive cutting-edge research, and deliver meaningful engagement opportunities with the ultimate goal of preparing the future leaders of the industries we love and serve.

I am grateful to all our alumni, industry partners and committed faculty and students for your efforts and support. Together, we will continue to make powerful and positive contributions across the globe. Go Gators!

Rachel J.C. Fu, PhD, CHE

Chair, Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management
Director, the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute
University of Florida



Eric A. Friedheim



THEM

THE ONLY TOURISM, HOSPITALITY & EVENT MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT AT A TOP 5 PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

THEM is a pioneering program. The first of its kind to be housed within a Top 5 institution, which means all eyes are on the University of Florida. Fortunately, our students, faculty and partners live for the chance to shine and push the tourism, hospitality, and event industries forward.

Our Mission

To provide innovative education, cutting-edge research, and meaningful engagement opportunities that prepare tomorrow's industry leaders to create lasting impact throughout their careers.

How We Do It

- Embrace innovation
- Foster connections
- Empower students
- Champion diversity
- Leverage great partnerships
- Strive for consistent excellence



How Did UF Become A Top 5 University?

The rankings are done independently each year by U.S. News and World Report. We're proud to say that for the fifth year in a row, the University of Florida has shot up the rankings, proudly solidifying the #5 position among all public universities in the United



States. For perspective, we've moved up nine spots since 2017. Additionally, UF is ranked 28 on the U.S. News National Universities List, which includes both public and private institutions, a leap of 22 spots in the same period.

Suffice it to say,  never give up!

Current Academic Programs

Undergraduate

BS: Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management
Minor: Event Management
4+1 Program: BS and MS in 5 years

Graduate

MS: Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management

PhD: Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management

Online Degrees

BS: Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management
MS: Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management

**New Undergraduate & Graduate Certificate AI/
Data Analytics in THEM**

Learn more about our programs at

<http://ufl.edu/about/departments/them/academic-programs/>

THE WORLD MAKES *A GREAT CLASSROOM*

Students in the THEM program are fortunate to learn from some of the top scholars and business leaders in tourism, hospitality and event management. Our department gives passionate young minds the opportunity to blossom into the next generation of industry pioneers.

Learning, however, isn't confined to the classroom. Nothing motivates and educates like working the front lines of these dynamic fields, which is why we provide our undergrads with exceptional internship opportunities. Thanks to a network of alums and mentors, our students enter the workforce with a minimum of 600 hours of real-world experience.

They're also given opportunities to plan festivals, earn industry certifications, and much more. Tomorrow's leaders are already out there moving our industries forward.

THEM **ON THE RISE**

**Total Enrollment
Increases 2020-2025**

↑
235%

GRADUATE DEGREES

35%

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Scholarships
225 +
**SCHOLARSHIPS
AWARDED**

\$1K-\$4K
**SCHOLARSHIP
RANGE**

**Enrollment
Spring 2025**

298

STUDENTS

45

MS STUDENTS

352

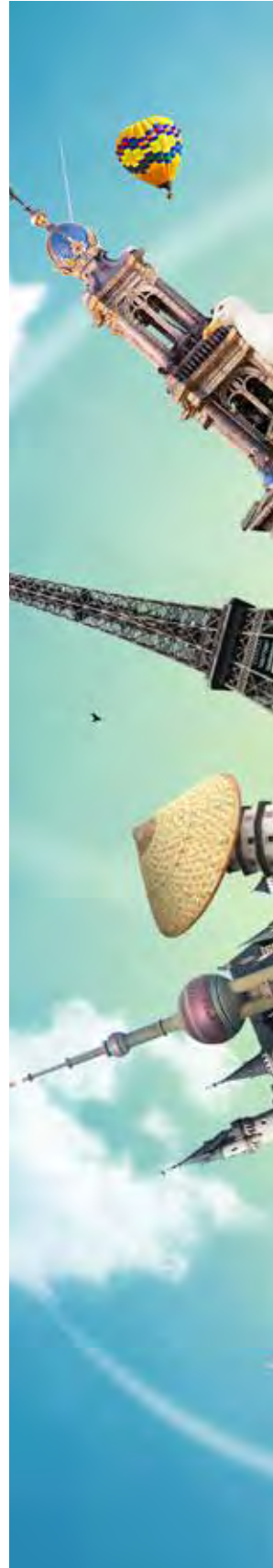
Graduated
BS STUDENTS

98

GRADUATED
MS STUDENTS

13

PhD
STUDENTS





SPOTLIGHT

THEM STORIES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

FOR THEM HAD A BIG IMPACT ON GATORS' DECISIONS.

"Now, as a new UF alumni, I am so very glad to have earned my degree as a Gator. The flexibility of earning my master's online allowed me the time to continue building my work experience while still receiving a top-notch education from professors who are leaders in the industry. From gaining invaluable connections through networking with my professors to having the power of the UF brand on my resume, I have had so many doors and experiences open to me. This online master's program at UF has set me up for success in the tourism industry and I look forward to representing the Gator Nation for the rest of my career. Go Gators!"

- Lauren Brown/MS '24

Jeffrey was instantly drawn to UF's online program because it offered a specialized degree focused on tourism and hospitality that would help him build a solid theoretical foundation to complement his extensive real-world experience. Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu, his advisor and department chair, also played a pivotal role in solidifying his decision to attend the University of Florida. Her warm disposition and willingness to answer all his questions made him feel welcomed and supported.

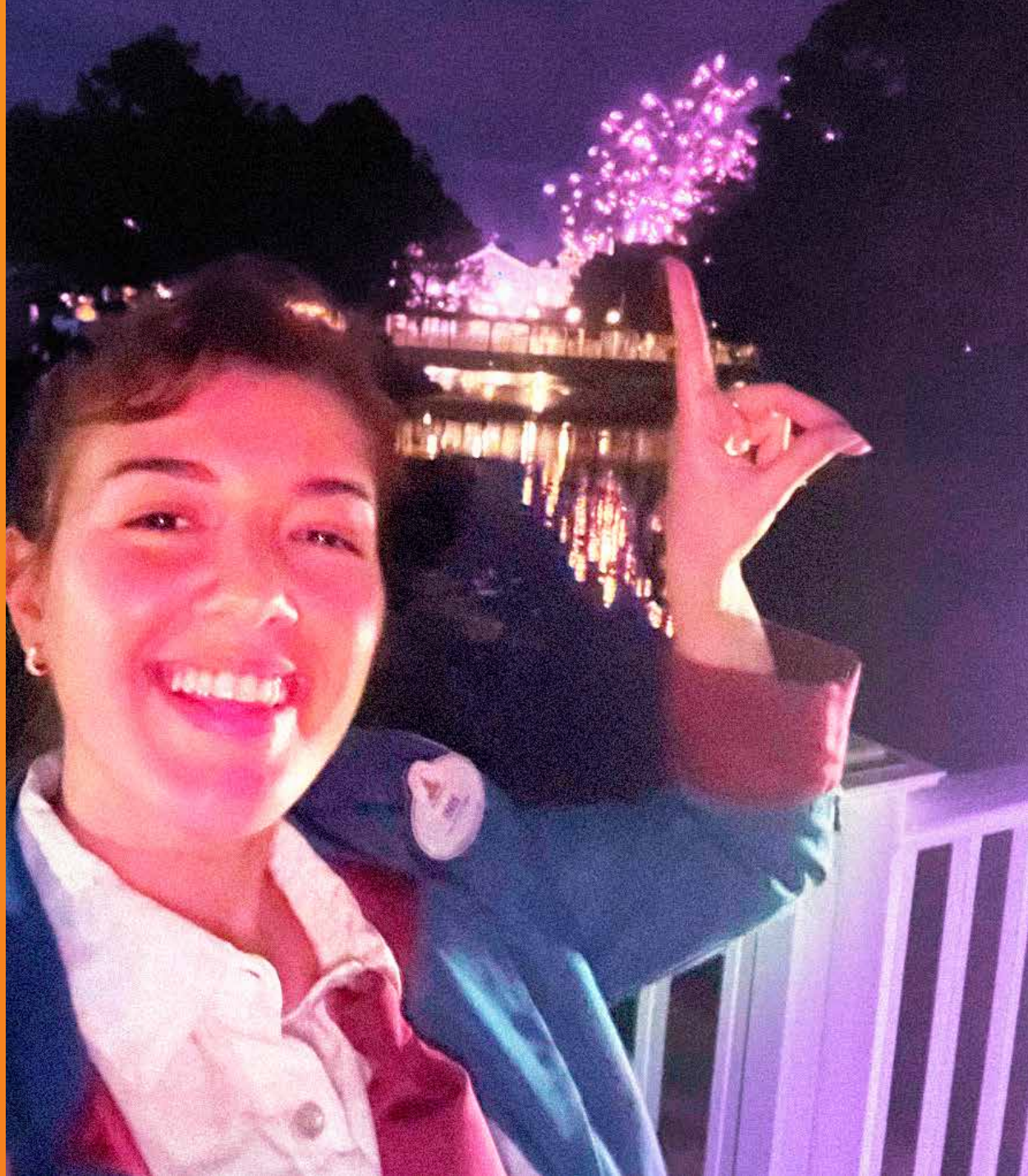
"When you couple UF's sterling reputation with the program's affordable cost and the convenience of being able to take the courses in the comfort of your home, it's a can't-miss opportunity."

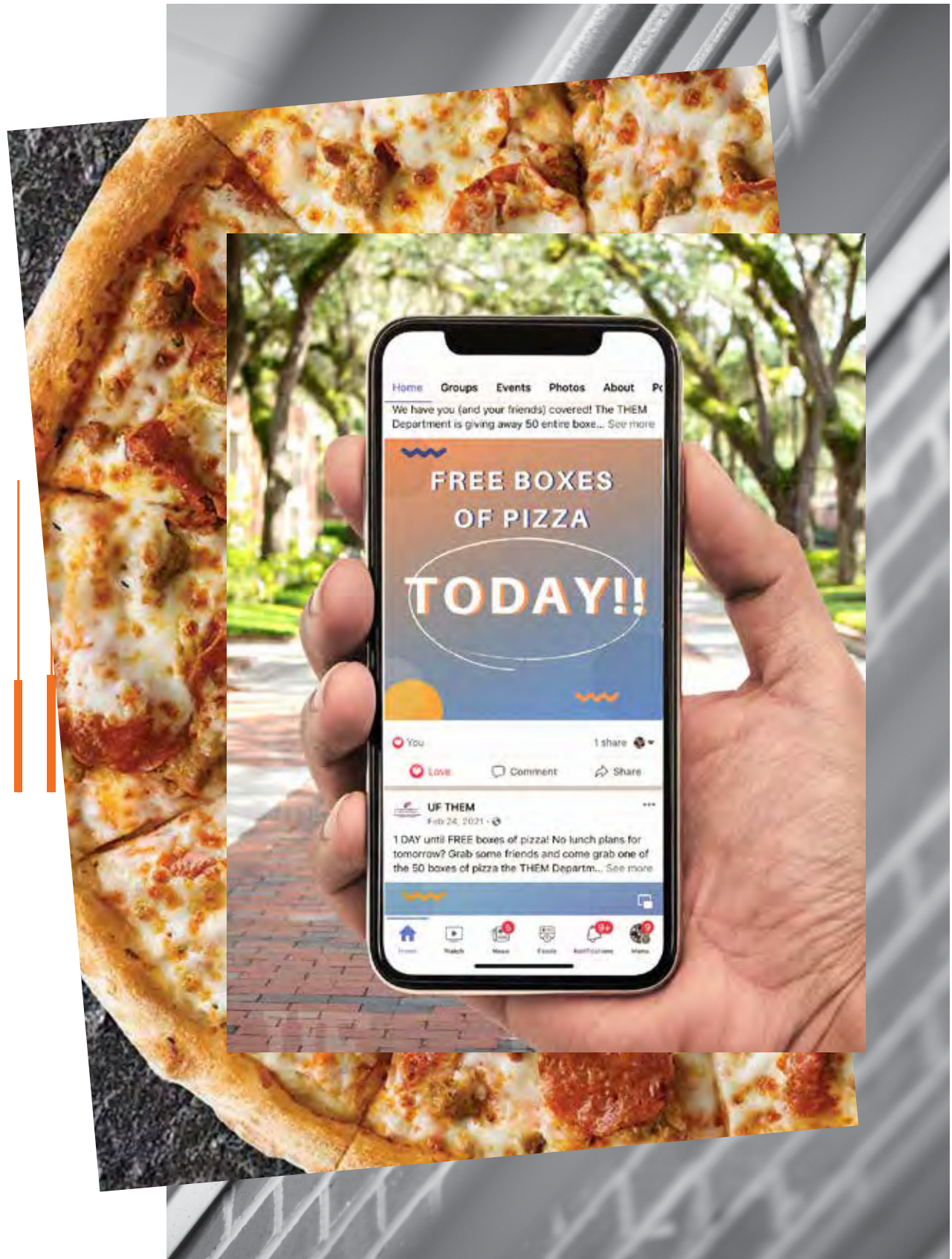
- Jeffrey Martinez/MS '24

"... a guest was thankful for me trying to help. I went back and talked to one of my leaders, and she called the room for me to just double-check that he was able to get into the room. He was, and I could hear him through the phone saying the nicest things about me. I'm not gonna lie I did cry a little bit. I just feel really grateful that I was able to help in some small way. This kind of job offers you the opportunity to talk to people and communicate and try to help them in ways a lot of other jobs might not..." [a Disney Internship Story]

- Inis Kondakciu/BS '22

Disney Internships & Programs







PIZZA WITH **THEM**: INCREASING OUR SLICE OF THE PIE

As a relatively new department at UF, it's up to us to reach out to the student body and invite eager young minds to learn more about THEM. You've probably heard the old adage that when you feed the body, you also feed the mind. Well, our students take it to heart each semester in a program called, Pizza with THEM.

It's pretty simple. The first 100 students who show up to the event get an entire free pizza. However, before the pies are

handed over, each student is required to post about the event and tag THEM on social media.

In case you haven't been on campus in a while, students love pizza! At our latest Pizza with THEM event, all 100 pies were handed over in a matter of 15 minutes!

Call it cheesy, but this organic effort has amplified our awareness and continues to bring THEM a bigger slice of student followers. Check out these numbers.

700 PIZZAS

300 BURRITOS

GIVEN AWAY

770%

INCREASE IN
SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWERS

GROUNDBREAKING INDUSTRY RESEARCH

One of the most important ways our department prepares tomorrow's leaders and drives the travel, hospitality and event industries forward is through leading-edge research. Faculty, students, and our valued partners unite to uncover innovative new solutions and answer the most pressing questions our industries face. THEM is proud to be one of the most heralded and trusted research centers in the nation dedicated to providing data and insight to the travel, hospitality and event management communities.

201 ACADEMIC
PAPERS IN

JOURNALS (2020-25)

\$161,294

RESEARCH
FUNDING AWARDED

5.5 AVERAGE
NUMBER

OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED
BY FACULTY MEMBER

RECENT RESEARCH & STUDIES

FORECASTING THE DEMAND & ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ATTRACTIONS

Rachel Fu, PhD, CHE

\$59,633

EVALUATING ATLAS OF TOURISM GIS APPLICATIONS

Jin-Won Kim, PhD

\$24,800

STRATEGIES TO RECOVER AND PROMOTE PATIENT TRUST IN AI HEALTHCARE SERVICE ROBOTS

Oscar Hengxuan Chi, PhD

\$20,000

LEADING ST. AUGUSTINE HISTORY FESTIVAL

Rachel J.C. Fu, PhD, CHE

\$16,000 (service grant)

SPORT TOURISM IMPACT OF GAINESVILLE

Heather Gibson, PhD **\$24,861**

HOW AI/DATA SCIENCE CAN ASSIST IN ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR TOURISTS AND RESIDENTS IN COASTAL COMMUNITIES (Awarded with Supercomputer Space and Technical Support)

Rachel Fu, PhD, CHE

\$49,838 (in-kind support)

UTILIZING AI TO ASSESS VISITOR EXPERIENCES AT HOTELS

Andrei Kirilenko, PhD

Svetlana Stepchenkova, PhD · Ron Gromoll

\$2,000

AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE APPROACH TO MINDFULNESS: Immersive Human- Environmental Interactions on Nature Sounds, Natural Destinations and Guided Meditation

Yao-Chin Wang, PhD

\$20,000





STUDENT **RESEARCH**

INSIGHT FROM TOMORROW'S LEADERS

Our faculty aren't the only pioneers in their respective fields. The students of THEM are hands-on when it comes to research, and we are proud to honor some of their outstanding achievements.

EFTI Advisory Board's Selected White Papers

LODGING

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and smart devices in hotels: Applications and trends. Ling Ding & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

Exploring hotel responses during natural disaster. Yuting An & Dr. Andrei Kirilenko [advisor]

RESTAURANTS

Robot applications in the restaurant industry: Comparative analyses. Ling Ding & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

EVENTS

Event planning in the age of AI: Understanding the factors that drive adoption and its impact on event success. Rayven Crisafulli & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

Exploring factors influencing host community members' Mega event experience. Rayven Crisafulli & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

DESTINATIONS

The interplay between mega sport events and hotel performance: An empirical investigation into causal dynamics. Tianyu (Bell) Pan & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

Twitter text analysis during and after COVID-19 lockdown: A case in S. FL. Jiping Cao, Jiwoo Jung, Dahye Jung, Darcy Lu, & Dr. Andrei Kirilenko [advisor]

THEM INDUSTRIES

Cruise tourism markets and price optimization: A longitudinal study in the U.S. Tianyu (Bell) Pan & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

Analysis and evaluation of factors influencing video game price: Sensitivities using mutual information. Olivia P. Dizon-Paradis, Tianyu (Bell) Pan, Mengdi Zhu, Avanti Bhandarkar, Daniel e. Capecci, Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor], & Dr. Damon L. Woodard [co-advisor]

Psychological mechanism of consumption behavior in traveling during Product-harm crises: the role of health beliefs and mental readiness. Tianyu (Bell) Pan & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu

Seasonal vs. non-seasonal time series decomposition and forecasting: Improvements with Machine Learning (ML) and the role of transfer learning (TL). Tianyu (Bell) Pan & Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu [advisor]

SOCIAL MEDIA

Whom should I trust when traveling: AI recommender or customer review? Shizhen (Jasper) Jia & Dr. Oscar Hengxuan Chi (advisor)

Exploring social media Influencers' impacts on tourists' pro-environmental consumption behaviors: A case study in China. Zixuan Xu, & Dr. Andrei Kirilenko [Advisor]

What attracts mid and later life adults to a cycling event and what factors contribute to their continued participation? An exploratory study of bike Florida. Dahye Jung & Dr. Heather Gibson [advisor]

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THESE AND
ALL OF OUR THEM STUDENT LEADERS.
LET'S KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING!**





ERIC FRIEDHEIM TOURISM INSTITUTE
**WHERE IS TRAVEL
GOING?** CLIMB IN
AND FIND OUT



THEM is proud to be the home of the
Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute (EFTI), the first and only
endowed tourism institute in the United States. EFTI is
committed to furthering tourism research
and helping shape the next generation of industry leaders.

EFTI AT A GLANCE

KEY RESEARCH INITIATIVES

- Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics
- National Risk Prevention and Crisis Management
- Sustainable Business and Development
- Community Festivals and Sports Events

EFTI PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Industry organizations call on EFTI to provide proprietary research, data, and insights. We do the studies that help drive their success. Learn more at uftourism.org/our-partners

30

INDUSTRY ADVISORY BOARD



45

GUEST SPEAKERS ON EFTI WEBINARS



162+

PAID
INTERNSHIPS TO
THEM STUDENTS



THEM In The Field: **STUDENTS PLAN AND HOST THE ST. AUGUSTINE HISTORY FESTIVAL**



Talk about making history! Two classes: "Tourism and Hospitality Business Perspectives" (instructor: Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu) and "Event Management" (instructor: Rayven Crisafulli) came up with ideas that were both an awesome travel promotion and an ambitious concept to pull together. In an effort to drive tourism and promote the rich history and diverse heritage of St. Augustine, Florida (America's oldest city), they proposed the first annual St. Augustine History Festival.

Held in May of 2022 & 2023, the events were entirely driven by the students and supported by our distinguished UFHSA Board. Our THEM team took on every responsibility leveraging what they had learned about the elements of an excellent event in class and taking these skills out into the real world.



Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu leads and secures the St. Augustine service grants. As the festival date approached, the students stepped into the role of event managers, quickly sourcing vendors, budgeting for the festival's Opening Day Celebration, reviewing contracts, designing menus, placing F&B orders, developing timelines, and dealing with everything right down to the floral arrangements. (Look closely and you can see the fresh oranges incorporated into the floral arrangements!)

The students were back on campus for exams and then three were selected to return to St. Augustine to run the on-site operations. Under the mentorship of Rayven Crisafulli, CMP, MS, their instructor and industry veteran, the students oversaw and set up everything, from table linens to AV gear. They welcomed speakers and attendees, served as concierges to the event stakeholders and VIPs, worked the show tirelessly, and broke everything down at the end of the evening. The event was a rousing success and is sure to be the first of many.

Vice President Emeritus, Ed Poppell

"The creativity and execution of [their] plan was truly remarkable and when our guests learned it was done primarily by students it was even more impressive. Most of our UFHSA Board members are UF Alumni and they were particularly proud to see the real-world application of [the student's] studies being used in an event sponsored by UFHSA. [We are] so fortunate to have such wealth of talent available through the College of Health and Human Performance's THEM department."

Tarra Parrish, Student

"Coordinating the St. Augustine History Festival was an amazing opportunity that I knew I did not want to miss. Working alongside my professor allowed me to take what I learned in class and see how it is applied in the field. The tips and tricks that you learn while putting together an event is something you cannot learn from a textbook. I am grateful for a program that gives their students incredible opportunities to prepare us for our future careers."

Ashley Lane, Student

"Working with my event management class to help plan an event was such an amazing experience in many ways. I will always remember the pride and achievement I felt and couldn't have done it without the guidance and patience from my team."



LEADING ORGANIZATIONS WHERE THEM STUDENTS HAVE INTERNED

THEM students are exceptionally talented and passionate, and employers are recognizing this excellence. Our students’ classroom experiences help them become high-impact employees after graduation, and the experiences they gain during their internships help them stand out amongst the competition. Below is a small excerpt of the amazing organizations our students have interned with the past year.



PROPELLING STUDENTS FORWARD

Here is some of what our students accomplished:

123,200

INTERNSHIP
HOURS EARNED

256

CHIA CERTIFICATIONS
EARNED FROM STR-ALHA in
THEM's REVENUE
MANAGEMENT CLASS

\$8,400

AVERAGE STIPEND
FOR PAID
INTERNSHIPS

61,600

FIELD EXPERIENCE
HOURS EARNED

96%

OF FULL-TIME
INTERNSHIPS
ARE PAID

\$1.4 Million

TOTAL STUDENT EARNINGS
FROM PAID
INTERNSHIPS

THEM & EFTI IN THE NEWS

Our Chair and Director, Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu has been featured on some of the world's premier news outlets, and our department has made headlines in premier business and industry publications.



STUDENT AWARDS

Brianna Blassneck, Doctoral Student
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Heather Gibson
 How do Parents Conceptualize Negative Behaviors in Children?
1st Place in THEM @HHP Research Poster Competition

Rayven Crisafulli, Doctoral Student
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu
 Super Bowl LV's Impact on Host Community Sentiment & Destination Perceptions of Tampa, FL
1st place research poster presentation for the Social and Behavioral Science category at the Graduate Student Research Day Symposium

Katarzyna Emin, Masters Student
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Andrei Kirilenko
 UNESCO Brand Awareness in TripAdvisor Reviews
Best student paper award from the Recreation, Tourism and Sports section of the American Association of Geographers

Rayven Crisafulli, Doctoral Student
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rachel J.C. Fu
UF Graduate Student Teaching Award

Jiwoo Jung, Master Student
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jinwon Kim
 Is There a Relationship Between Peer-to-Peer Accommodation and Community Gentrification?
1st Place in THEM @HHP Research Poster Competition

Dahye Jung & Y. Jo, Doctoral Students
Faculty Advisors: Dr. Heather Gibson and Dr. Svetlana Stepchenkova
UF International Graduate Achievement Award

THANKS TO OUR **AMAZING FACULTY**



THEM faculty are on the front lines of tourism, hospitality and event research, finding answers to the industries' most pressing questions. Their research is integral in the development of new and innovative ways for tourism, hospitality and event businesses to thrive.

... ▶ **NASIM BINESH, PHD**

Assistant Professor

... ▶ **OSCAR CHI, PHD**

Assistant Professor

... ▶ **RACHEL J.C. FU, PHD**

Chair & Professor/Director, Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute

... ▶ **HEATHER GIBSON, PHD**

Professor

... ▶ **RON GROMOLL**

Adjunct Lecturer, Internship Coordinator

... ▶ **JIN-WON KIM, PHD**

Associate Professor

... ▶ **ANDREI KIRILENKO, PHD**

Associate Professor, Graduate Coordinator

... ▶ **GIULIO RONZONI, PHD**

Lecturer, Instructional Assistant Professor
Undergraduate Coordinator

... ▶ **SVETLANA STEPCHENKOVA, PHD**

Professor

... ▶ **YAO-CHIN WANG, PHD**

Assistant Professor

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

2022 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI HALL OF FAME: Bob Schalow — BSREC '94

2022 OUTSTANDING YOUNG ALUMNI: Chynna Clayton — BSREC '10

2023 CHARLES S. WILLIAMS SERVICE AWARD: Daniel Rogers, THEM Business Manager

2023 B.K. STEVENS SERVICE AWARD: Alice Norsworthy, EFTI Advisory Board Past Chair

2025 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI HALL OF FAME: Ross Schiling — BSREC '93

2025 B.K. STEVENS SERVICE AWARD: Barbara Gefen Jaffe, EFTI Advisory Board

OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE AWARD, VISIT
GAINESVILLE & ALACHUA COUNTY HOSPITALITY COUNCIL
DR. RACHEL J.C. FU

BEST CONFERENCE PAPER, ICHRIE
DR. OSCAR CHI & DR. JIN-WON KIM

ARTICLE OF THE YEAR, ENTER25
DR. ANDREI KIRILENKO & DR. SVETLANA
STEPCHENKOVA

FELLOW, WORLD LEISURE ACADEMY
DR. HEATHER GIBSON

AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR,
ALACHUA COUNTY HOSPITALITY COUNCIL
RON GROMOLL

UF FOUNDATION TERM PARTNERSHIP
DR. JIN-WON KIM

UNIVERSITY TENURE
DR. ANDREI KIRILENKO
DR. JIN-WON KIM

UNIVERSITY PROMOTION
DR. SVETLANA STEPCHENKOVA

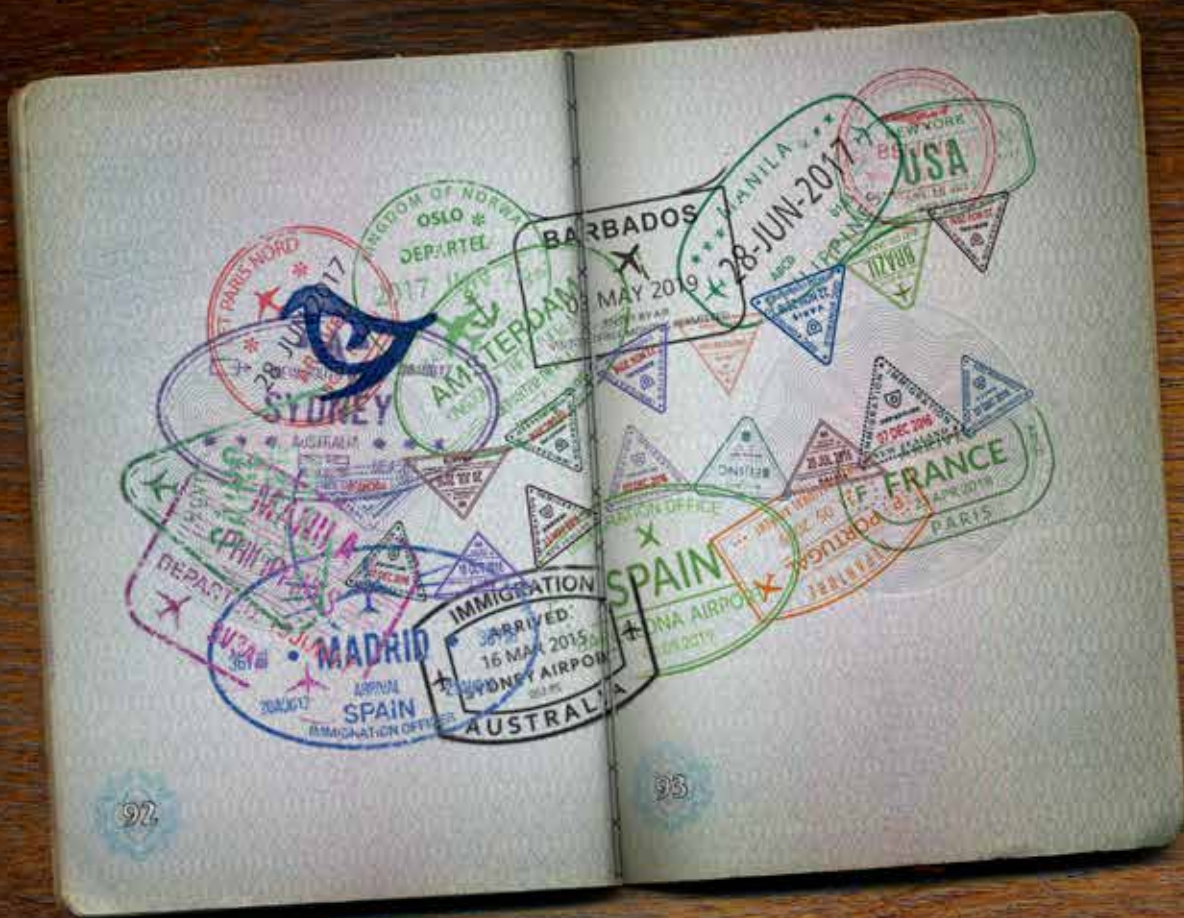




24-25 IMPACT REPORT

GO THEM
GO EFTI
GO GATORS!





THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM
IS HAPPENING HERE.



UF | Tourism, Hospitality
& Event Management
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
hnp.ufl.edu/them



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