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PRESS RELEASE

CMU and Pitt Launch Center Dedicated to Combating Extremist Hate

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Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh are jointly launching a new center to study extremist hate. Scholars at both universities will partner through the [Collaboratory Against Hate – Research and Action Center](#) to develop effective tools that inhibit hate's creation, growth and destructive consequences.

The center will bring together the collective expertise from all relevant disciplines – including computer science, data science, social sciences, psychology, psychiatry and the law – as collaborators seek to better understand and combat hatred based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and other prejudices.

The collaboratory is being led by two top experts in extremist hate groups and cybersecurity: Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Bettye J. and Ralph E. Bailey Dean of Pitt's [Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences](#), [Kathleen Blee](#), and [Lorrie Cranor](#), director and Bosch Distinguished Professor in Security and Privacy Technologies in CMU's CyLab. The universities are in the process of building out the center's research team and welcome engagement from experts at each institution, as well as from community groups.

"The spread of extremist hate is undeniably insidious and increasingly dangerous. We have witnessed its violent consequences in our own community, including the horrific attack at the Tree of Life synagogue building, and have also seen this epidemic pose an existential threat to our nation's democracy," said Carnegie Mellon President Farnam Jahanian. "CMU and Pitt have a unique opportunity to work against this socially destructive force and enhance our multipronged efforts against all forms of hatred."

"The University of Pittsburgh is excited to grow our close collaboration with CMU," said Pitt Chancellor Patrick Gallagher. "We've launched Collaboratory Against Hate with a clear purpose: to mobilize our experts and assets together so that we can better understand and address extreme hate – in its many iterations and implications – across the world."

The center aims to develop effective interventions to inhibit every stage in the creation and growth of extremist hate, as well as interventions to minimize its impacts. Researchers will study how extremism originates and circulates, how it shapes extremist views and fosters polarization in society, and how it provokes harmful and illegal acts, with a focus on its effects on minoritized and marginalized groups in society.

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The center will partner with various stakeholders – ranging from victimized communities and advocacy groups to technology companies and policymakers – to better understand underlying issues and design intervention tools. These tools will aim to address different levels of radicalization and can be used by people, groups and institutions with varying needs and agendas.

“This is fundamentally an interdisciplinary problem,” Cranor said. “As our machine learning experts create new ways to detect hate speech and misinformation, it’s important that they partner with social scientists who are researching the thought processes of extremist groups. Together, we can make greater progress toward understanding how these groups communicate, recruit and organize, and, hopefully, create interventions that will help reduce the spread of hate.”

Blee, who has studied white supremacy for more than 30 years, said that extremist hate groups have radically changed the way they operate and mobilize people to advance their agendas. The internet and social media not only provide groups with a vast arena for recruitment, but also places where they can hide.

“They’ve made the distribution, mobilization and spread of online hate much harder to monitor and prosecute. It’s also more difficult to decipher the extent to which virtual communities of hate are simply reinforcing each other or being pushed by organized extremist organizations,” Blee said. “That’s created challenges for researchers and law enforcement who are trying to understand how these groups work and how to intervene.”

The idea for this center came from the long-standing partnership between Carnegie Mellon's President Emeritus Jared Cohon and Pitt's Chancellor Emeritus Mark Nordenberg. While serving together on a committee created by the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh in the immediate aftermath of the attack at the Tree of Life synagogue, they were asked to explore ways in which the community might constructively respond to the hate-fueled violence that occurred that day. Cohon and Nordenberg then worked with a group of faculty members at both universities, who contributed to the establishment of the center.

"I'm enthusiastic because, as with so many other partnerships throughout our history, CMU and Pitt complement each other very well," said Cohon, who is also a CMU University Professor. "Both universities bring great strengths to a large and urgent problem in society. I know we won't solve the spread of extremist hate by ourselves, but I'm confident we can create exciting, effective approaches by collaborating together."

"Before the deadly attack at the Tree of Life synagogue, I rather naively assumed that love always would triumph over hate," said Nordenberg. "As I came to learn more about the powerful tools that are being used to accelerate the spread of hate, however, it seemed clear that in today's world, love needs a helping hand. This center will be positioned to provide badly needed forms of help."

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**Collaboratory Against Hate:
Research and Action Center**

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