



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

# UCF IS BEHIND ORLANDO'S TECH TALENT MACHINE



**Y**ou're familiar with the numbers: More than 70 million people visit Central Florida during a typical year. It's also no secret why most of them come: theme parks. But what visitors and locals alike do not notice at the parks is the software that makes it possible for them to be open and operating.

Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis ranks the Orlando region No. 25 in the nation and **No. 1 in Florida for producing tech talent**, with UCF as the main pipeline. UCF is one of the few universities in the nation offering undergraduate degrees, graduate programs, and certificates in cybersecurity, augmented reality, virtual reality and fintech. The university is ranked nationally and internationally among the best institutions across numerous STEM areas,

as well as 20th in America for innovation, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.

"Students are learning new technologies at the same time we're researching them," says Agere Chair Professor in the Department of Computer Science and AR/VR pioneer Carolina Cruz-Neira. "They're enthusiastic about the material because they have the freedom to apply what they learn in our VR classes to biology, psychology, hospitality, whatever they're interested in."

The success of UCF's programs and graduates is largely due to world-renowned faculty like Cruz-Neira and her husband, Associate Professor of Computer Science Dirk Reiners, who joined because of its reputation in high-impact research and for the chance to be part of a bigger team.

"We were professionally lonely at other institutions," Cruz-Neira says. "Here at UCF, ... every day we're collaborating and tackling answers to larger problems."

Former U.S. National Science Foundation program director of the Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace, Yan Solihin, could have joined any institution in the nation. He chose UCF.

"There's an energy at UCF that you don't find in many places," says Solihin, a professor of computer science and director of the Cyber Security and Privacy faculty cluster. "The faculty is allowed to look to the future without the restrictions of a legacy institution. That's among the reasons we have strong partnerships in the technology sector — major corporations know that we're a growing powerhouse."

The UCF powerhouse sends graduates into careers with companies that have a presence near campus, like Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Siemens, L3 Harris, EA Sports and Google.

**“I’ve only been in Central Florida for a few years and can feel the reputation as a hub of technology is at an inflection point. The corporate world knows it. Other schools know it. I believe everyone is about to know it.”**

**Ajai Singh**  
chair of UCF's Department of Finance

The U.S. government uses UCF's deep pool of tech talent to ramp up the Department of Defense and Department of Energy.

"Innovation, especially in engineering, has always been part of UCF's fabric," says Rob Panepinto, senior strategic advisor and director for Innovation Districts Strategy and Partnerships at the UCF Business Incubation Program. "Now it's a matter of scaling the talent into other fields. Look at the structure of the fintech program. It combines business and engineering, which makes it unlike anywhere else."

Officially launched as a graduate program Fall 2022, UCF has offered courses and a certificate in fintech for years — before Venmo and crypto were on the general public's radar.

Department of Finance Chair Ajai Singh came to UCF in 2015 with the charge of building UCF's finance department into a nationally recognized tech-savvy training ground. To take the fintech program to yet another level, Singh sought to build an all-star team of instructors and researchers, like Associate Director of Finance Christo Pirinsky, who had co-written a paper that everyone in the field held almost as gospel.

Pirinsky had been working with the Securities and Exchange Commission. He'd taught at other universities around the country. But he saw an opportunity to be part of something special at UCF.

"If you look at high-tech centers around the world, they emerge close to universities," Pirinsky says. "So, I believe the fintech program will only make Orlando and UCF more prominent. It's a vibrant scene and the trajectory is upward."



## Developing Smarter, Safer Cities

More than 80% of Americans and more than half the world's population live in urban areas, many of which face challenges that threaten livability, safety and inclusion. Understanding streetscapes — neighborhood streets, sidewalks and public spaces — can provide insight into road and public safety, traffic efficiency, assistive technologies, outdoor work and hyper-local environmental sensing. A team of researchers will play a key role in the \$26 million U.S. National Science Foundation effort to forge livable, safe and inclusive communities with technologies built on advances in wireless communications. UCF will lead one area of the project that is focused on developing computationally efficient and privacy-preserving computer vision and machine learning methods to understand highly complex streetscape scenes in real-time.

NO. 1

► Graduate and 13th undergraduate game design programs in the world  
*The Princeton Review and PC Gamer*

1 in 8

► Employees at EA's Orlando headquarters are UCF alums

1st

► Fintech master's program of its kind in Florida

NO. 1

► Supplier of graduates to aerospace and defense industries for six consecutive years  
*Aviation Week Network*

NO. 20



► Most innovative school in the nation  
*U.S. News & World Report*

NO. 31

► for producing patents among public worldwide universities  
*Academy of Inventors*

4,000+

► The number of computer science related graduates UCF provided to the workforce since 2018

