



**U.S. Catholic Sisters  
Against Human Trafficking**

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## Experts weigh in on how Human Trafficking Impacts College Campuses

Every Fall, students embark on a new journey of independence as they navigate the unknown waters of college life while others continue their academic trajectories and return to universities.

“Attending college is a pivotal time that involves meeting new people and testing the waters of independence,” said Celia Williamson, who works on anti-trafficking studies with the University of Toledo. It can also be a time of increased vulnerability.

“In addition to the disproportionately higher rates of sexual assaults occurring on college campuses, there is also the risk of sex trafficking,” Williamson said. “In some instances, it is also a time when some learn about human trafficking in their classes and decide to become anti-trafficking advocates.”

U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT) will host a webinar on Sept. 13 at 1 p.m. EST that focuses on human trafficking with particular attention to what is happening on college campuses across the United States.

“Key to our efforts in the work to end human trafficking is prevention through education,” said Katie Boller Gosewisch, USCSAHT Executive Director. “We want to empower students and educators with the tools they need to properly protect themselves and each other,” said Boller Gosewisch.

In 2020, there were 16,658 victims of trafficking identified in the United States, according to [The Polaris Project](#). There were 10,359 trafficking situations reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2021 with a total of 16,554 likely victims of trafficking identified. Although exact numbers are unknown since they are vastly underreported, there have been confirmed cases of human trafficking on U.S. college and university campuses, according to Campus Safety.

Three long-time advocates and scholars will discuss how they and their students are working to serve victims and survivors and disrupt human trafficking across the United States.

Panelists will include Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, associate professor at Arizona State University, Celia Williamson from the University of Toledo and Tony Talbott, director of Advocacy of the Human Rights Center at the University of Dayton.

“Colleges and universities are key actors in the fight against human trafficking as well as locations where trafficking may occur,” Talbott said.

According to the Dept. of Homeland Security, traffickers have increasingly turned to the internet to identify and lure victims, but they do still utilize physical meeting spaces for recruitment as well. Below are some examples of how traffickers may reach victims on college campuses.

- **POPULAR MEETING PLACES:** This can include places like student unions, bars, off-campus parties, or anywhere else large numbers of students may congregate regularly.
- **SOCIAL MEDIA, ONLINE, AND DATING APPS:** Traffickers often use the internet to reach victims because they can take advantage of personal information shared online to exploit perceived hardships or insecurities to gain trust.
- **PEER-TO-PEER RECRUITMENT:** Campuses have many young people in one place, which can create opportunities for traffickers to coerce their victims into recruiting their peers. Victims who are made to recruit other victims are typically called “bottoms.”
- **DECEPTIVE OFFERS OF EMPLOYMENT OR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS:** Traffickers can take advantage of the economic instability of college students by offering them jobs, such as modeling, that may be too good to be true. Entering romantic relationships or providing emotional support are also common ways for traffickers to control and manipulate their victims.
- **TAKING ADVANTAGE OF FINANCIAL INSTABILITY:** Traffickers may take advantage of students by coercing them into opening up lines of credit and then running up their debt. Traffickers may then tell their victims the only way to pay off this debt is to engage in sexual acts for money.

One way USCSAHT works to end human trafficking is by providing educational resources, giving presentations and raising awareness. “It’s been amazing to see the very genuine commitment to end human trafficking from sisters all over the world,” Williamson said.

To register for the webinar, visit <https://bit.ly/455WmKg>. For more information, call 267-332-7768 or email [Info@SistersAgainstTrafficking.org](mailto:Info@SistersAgainstTrafficking.org).

**Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, Ph.D.,** is a social scientist focused on developing innovative and impactful research on emerging social issues, especially those affecting girls and women. Her scholarship is grounded in theories and methods exploring relationship dynamics, the impact of trauma, and intervention development. She is an Associate Professor at the Arizona State University of Social Work and the founder and director of the ASU Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research. In 2018, Dr. Roe-Sepowitz presented a TedX titled *Hidden in Plain Sight: Sex Trafficking Next Door* at Perryville Prison. She leads numerous initiatives working with community partners including law enforcement, social service providers, and survivor support organizations in multiple states. Dr. Roe-Sepowitz is also the co-creator and Clinical Director of Phoenix Starfish Place, a HUD-funded supportive permanent housing program for sex trafficking women and their children that opened in 2017. She is an appointed member of the Arizona Governor’s Human Trafficking Council and the City of Phoenix Human Trafficking Task Force. She is the Principal Investigator on numerous state and federal grants and is the Principal Investigator on a five-year NSF Grant exploring illicit networks that facilitate human trafficking.

**Tony Talbott** is the Director of Advocacy of the Human Rights Center at the University of Dayton. He is co-founder and director of Abolition Ohio, the Miami Valley Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition. He also

lectures on Human Rights, Political Science, and Sustainability. He serves on the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission and researches and writes on Southeast Asia, nationalism, human rights and human trafficking. Originally from Dayton, Talbott joined the military and served a total of 13 years in both the Army National Guard and the US Navy. He traveled extensively throughout the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean regions—including Asia, Australia, and Africa. While finishing his tour of duty he earned a BA in History and Government from Columbia College. He then left the service to attend graduate school. He earned an MA in International Affairs from Ohio University and studied for a PhD in Political Science at Arizona State University.

**Dr. Celia Williamson** has been engaged in anti-anti-trafficking work for over 30 years. She has published numerous articles, books, and reports. She founded one of the first anti-trafficking programs in Ohio in 1993 and directly worked with victims in Toledo for several years. She has completed numerous federally funded studies. Additional accomplishments include: Founding the oldest and largest annual academic conference on human trafficking in the world titled, the "International Human Trafficking and Social Justice Conference;" founding the Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition; and serving as President of the Global Association of Human Trafficking Scholars. She also produces a podcast called the Emancipation Nation Podcast and founded a global network of advocates called the Emancipation Nation Network. Finally, she serves as a G100 and is the global chair for human trafficking.

*USCSAHT was founded in 2013 by a group of Catholic Sisters committed to ending human trafficking and supporting survivors. They dreamed of creating a national network of resources and support made up of many different congregations and other mission-aligned partners. Today, this member-based organization has grown to include more than 110 congregations of women religious and another 70+ individuals and groups spread throughout the United States. USCSAHT is also the U.S. member of Talitha Kum, an international network of consecrated life working to end human trafficking.*

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