

University of Central Florida

STARS

High Impact Practices Student Showcase Fall
2023

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Fall 2023

Military & Veteran Student Success

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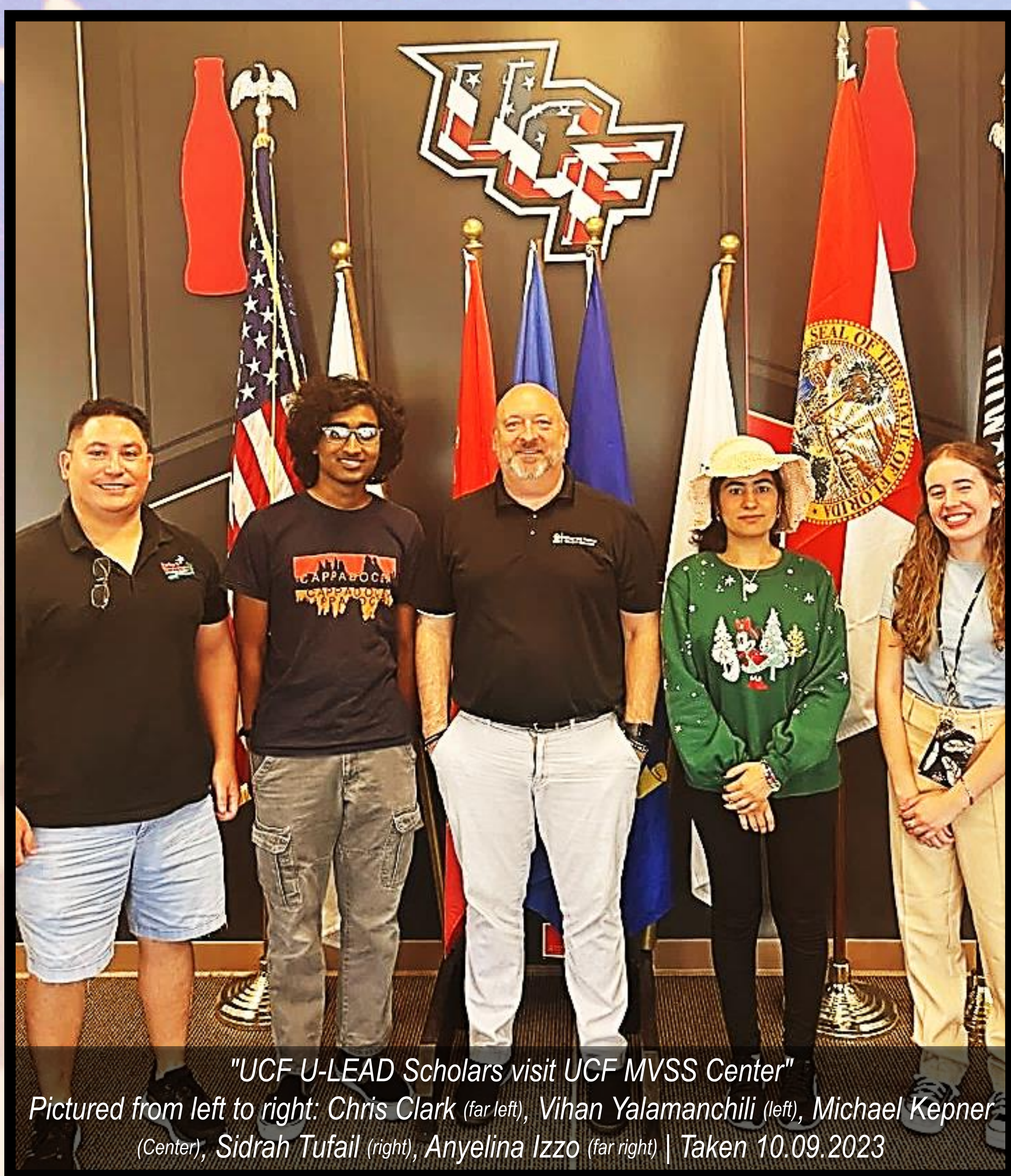
Military & Veterans Affairs Service-Learning Project

Kate Rumisek, Anyelina Izzo, Sidrah Tufail, Chris Clark & Vihan Yalamanchili

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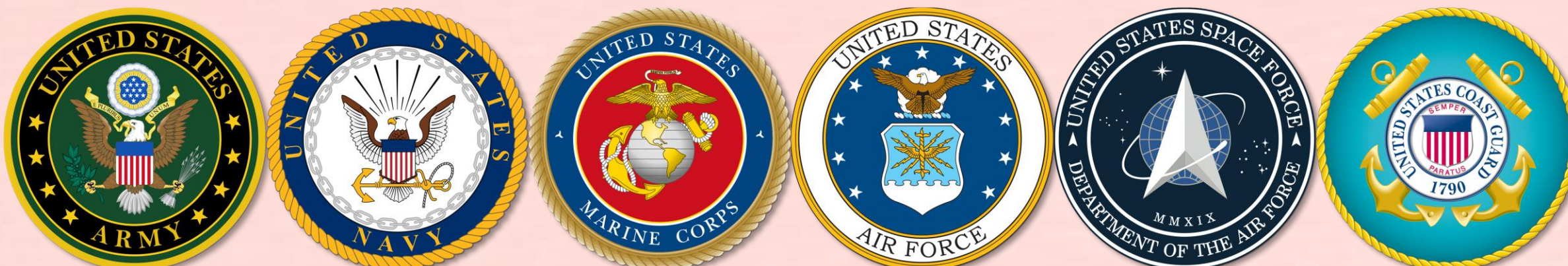
★ Background ★

Our U-LEAD group collaborated with Mr. Michael Kepner, UCF's Director of Military and Veteran's Student Success (MVSS). The mission of the MVSS is to create an enriching and inclusive environment for military-affiliated students to achieve educational and career goals through academic success and community partnerships.



"UCF U-LEAD Scholars visit UCF MVSS Center"
Pictured from left to right: Chris Clark (far left), Vihan Yalamanchili (left), Michael Kepner (Center), Sidrah Tufail (right), Anyelina Izzo (far right) | Taken 10.09.2023

In keeping with its mission, MVSS places miniature U.S. flags on campus every year since 2013. The number of flags on display corresponds to the military/veteran students attending UCF in Fall—1,400 flags were planted in 2022. This helps military-affiliated students through best practices, policies, and culture.



★ Service-Learning Project ★

Our "flag placement service" occurred November 6 and November 9, 2023. On November 6, 2023, at 7:30am, our group, along with about 40 volunteers from U-LEAD, UCF Student Government (SG) Military Caucus, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and the Community Veterans History Project (CVHP) met on-campus at UCF's Memory Mall. Collectively, the groups planted more than 1,400 flags at locations specified by MVSS.

On November 9, 2023, at 4:00pm, our group and other volunteers returned to Memory Mall to pick up the flags while preserving as many as possible for next year (reusability/sustainability). Additionally, Mr. Kepner hosted our group on a tour of the MVSS Center—helping to inform us about the facility, the staff, daily operations, and additional developments.



"UCF Memory Mall During Veteran's Week"
Photo Credit: UCF Today | Circa 11.06.2022

★ Impact ★

In previous years MVSS has lacked volunteers for flag placement—10 volunteers last year. This year, around 40 volunteers signed up. Support is important as the impact of the flags are symbolic and assist with veteran health—they represent reflection, admiration, and solidarity of service and sacrifice (past and future). Specifically, each Flag and the support behind it recognizes and supports a UCF military/veteran student with the intent to be welcoming and inclusive. This gesture helps veteran mental health which can prevent suicide deaths through positive coping skills—feeling connected to other people.

★ Interesting Facts ★

- In 2020, **suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death** among "all veterans (male & female)" under the age of 45 (VA, 2022).
 - 6,146 veteran suicide deaths in 2020—averaging 16.8 per day
 - PTSD and depression has strong links to suicide among veterans
- Veterans Day was ratified a national holiday November 11, 1954
 - formerly Armistice Day in 1919 (unofficially) and 1926 (officially) (VA, 2022).
- UCF's Veterans Week leads to Veterans Day November 6-9, 2023.
- November 10, 2023, is the U.S. Marine Corps' 248th Birthday.
- UCF designated "**Purple Heart ♥ University**" November 16, 2022—an institution that "develop purposeful approaches to supporting...the military-affiliated population" (UCF, 2022-a; McCoy, 2023).
- CHVP is a Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories (RICHES) of veterans—this initiative has conducted "nearly 600 interviews to date" (UCF, 2022-b).

★ References ★

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★ Acknowledgements ★

We thank UCF MVSS, Mr. Kepner, and UCF U-LEAD for their support and dedication during this opportunity. Also, we would also like to thank the UCF veteran student population and the active, reserve, and military/veteran community for their service and sacrifice.