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### **Two UWF professors join human trafficking task force**

**Pensacola, Fla. – Nov. 22, 2016** – Drs. Andrew Denney and Melinda Lewis, faculty members in the University of West Florida College of Education and Professional Studies, have been asked to serve as members of the Pensacola Task Force for Human Trafficking.

Organized by the Florida Department of Children & Families and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the task force aims to bring together government agencies and community partners to better address human trafficking issues in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties. It is one of several task forces across the state mandated by House Bill 7141, passed in early 2016.

“Human trafficking does happen in our area, and a lot of people think it doesn’t,” said Denney, an assistant professor in the UWF Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice. “Many people are aware of sex trafficking, but there is also a labor aspect, especially with the number of hotels and attractions on the Gulf Coast and our proximity to New Orleans, Atlanta and other larger cities.”

Denney said the task force will initially meet monthly as it works to develop community outreach programs and initiatives.

“To help out in any capacity and affect change in the local community is exciting,” he said.

Through his work with the UWF Criminal Justice Student Association, Denney previously has helped to place student interns with the Pensacola-based KlaasKIDS Search Center for Missing & Trafficked Children.

“Dr. Denney's appointment to the Human Trafficking Task Force is a wonderful example of our department’s commitment to engage with the community to develop solutions for our most pressing societal issues,” said Dr. Matthew Crow, professor and department chair. “We are proud to have him represent UWF and share his expertise as a taskforce member.”

Dr. Melinda Lewis, assistant professor in the UWF Department of Social Work, will join the Human Trafficking Task Force at its second meeting, to be held Thursday, Nov. 17.

“As an instructor of human trafficking courses at UWF, I am passionate about spreading the word on various forms of modern day slavery,” Lewis said. “The prevention of human trafficking is such an important cause and I am pleased to be a part of this new multi-agency interdisciplinary task force in Florida’s First Circuit.”

As an Emerge Faculty Fellow in the College of Education and Professional Studies, Lewis has been instrumental in creating high-impact learning opportunities for UWF students on the subject of modern day slavery. One such collaborative high impact practice activity, entitled “From the Underground Railroad to Modern Day Human Trafficking,” took place on a weeklong learning journey in 2014 as students, faculty, and staff traversed rural portions of the historic Underground Railroad across several states.

For more information about the Florida Department of Children & Families’ efforts against human trafficking, visit their [website](#). For more information about the UWF College of Education and Professional Studies, visit [uwf.edu/ceps](http://uwf.edu/ceps).

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