Looking back at nearly 10 years as Chair of the SmartState Center in Tourism & Economic Development, I can be very proud of our accomplishments. From the beginning, the whole SmartState concept was a unique and innovative one. In 2002, in order to stimulate a knowledge-based economy in South Carolina, the General Assembly appropriated $200 million from the South Carolina Education Lottery to establish new research centers in the state’s three big research institutions. As of 2018, over 70 world-renown researchers have been recruited to South Carolina, and the SmartState Program is responsible for helping to create and support about 15,000 jobs in South Carolina, which is associated with over $2.8 billion in economic activity. The state should be proud of such a successful and pioneering program – I know of nothing like it around the world.

Our objective in the SmartState Center for Tourism has always been to conduct research that will assist the tourism industry in South Carolina, an industry that is responsible for over $21 billion a year, employing one in ten South Carolina residents. In the last nine years, we have partnered with numerous agencies to conduct research - from Chambers of Commerce, to DMOs, to private sector companies - and we have brought in over $650,000 in grants to fund this research – an average of about $75,000 per year: no mean feat in our field. In addition to many industry reports produced as an outcome of these grants, we have published dozens of quality journal articles from our research, and two members of the team have won prestigious Breakthrough Research Awards, presented each year by the Office of the Vice President for Research to recognize outstanding researchers and scholars at the University of South Carolina.

As you will see from the contents of this newsletter, 2018 was another bumper year for the SmartState Center in Tourism & Economic Development. Despite losing a fine research associate (David Cardenas) to the clutches of administration, the team was extremely productive, generating many high quality research papers, receiving internationally prestigious awards, and winning a couple of sizeable grants. One of them, funded by the SC Department of Agriculture, was to look at the economic impact of the equine sector in the state (see page 2). What we found was that this sector generates a whopping $1.9 billion annually in South Carolina, and is responsible for 28,545 jobs. And that’s straight from the horse’s mouth!

Simon Hudson
In 2018, the Center's team published a number of high quality articles in peer reviewed journals. One was written as a direct outcome of a funded project we profiled last year that looked at African-American tourism in South Carolina. The paper, called "Racial Discrimination in Tourism: The Case of African-American Travelers in South Carolina", was accepted by Current Issues in Tourism. In the paper, we explore issues of racial acceptance in South Carolina two years after removal of the confederate flag from the state capitol grounds. The results show that racism ideology is restricting African-Americans' mobility and accessibility to South Carolina's tourism destinations, as it is in other parts of America. Although the image of South Carolina had improved after the removal of the flag, we that suggest there needs to be further collaboration with the African-American community and increased marketing effort promoting African-American heritage.

Kevin So received the University of South Carolina's 2018 College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management Patricia G. Moody Researcher of the Year Award. Simon Hudson was voted as one of the world's most Awesome Scholars in Tourism by Women Academics in Tourism.

Kevin So received the Best Track Chair Award at the 2018 Global Marketing Conference in Tokyo Japan.

Kevin So received the 2018 W. Bradford Wiley Memorial Best Research Paper of the Year Award. This was for their article, "Motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers: Findings from a mixed-methods approach", published in Tourism Management. The award was presented at the 2018 ICHRIE conference in Palm Springs. In this paper, the authors investigated a comprehensive set of motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers finding that for motivations, price value, enjoyment, and home benefits significantly explain overall attitude toward Airbnb. As for constraints, distrust is the only factor that significantly predicts overall attitude, while insecurity is directly related to behavioral intentions. Overall attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms, such as social influence and trend affinity, predict behavioral intentions. The study simultaneously examined the predictive power of both motivations and constraints of Airbnb consumers in explaining overall attitude and purchase behavior.

Kevin So and PhD student Somang Min received the 2018 ICHRIE Best Research Paper of the Year Award. This was for their article, "The role of customer engagement in building consumer loyalty to tourism brands" published in the Journal of Travel Research, with 6169 downloads from Jan 2017 to May 2018, was ranked the most downloaded article published in JTR.

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Kevin So received the Best Track Chair Award at the 2018 Global Marketing Conference in Tokyo Japan.
Jing Li is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the SmartState Center and is planning to complete her degree in August. Her research interests include lodging shared economy experience, impulse buying behavior and destination branding and marketing. In 2018, Jing published a paper on the sharing economy with Dr. Hudson in the Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Cases, and has other papers under review. She presented papers at both the SETTRA and the Annual Grad Conference.

Hengyun (Neil) Li successfully completed his doctoral study and earned his Ph.D. degree in July 2018. He immediately started a tenure-track Assistant Professor position in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Neil spent four years on his doctoral study with his major advisor Fang Meng, and working as a research assistant in the SmartState Center on multiple research projects. We wish you a bright future Neil!

Ali Iskender joined our team as a PhD student advised by Dr. Hudson after completing his masters’ degree at Univ of Florida. His major research interest is film-tourism. We welcome him!

In May, Simon Hudson was invited to give a keynote speech in Lanzarote in the Spanish Canary Islands. The title of his talk was “From MAMILS to Millennials. Keeping up with the Evolving Sport Tourist” and was delivered to attendees at the Tourism & Leisure Studies Conference. In his talk, Simon looked at the future for sport tourism as the golfers give way to the MAMILS (Middle-Aged Men in Lycra), and the MAMILS are replaced by Millennials. He discussed the latest consumer trends influencing the world of sport tourism, covering topics such as the addiction to engagement and connectivity, the desire for authenticity, the influence of artificial intelligence and virtual reality, and the move towards ethical consumerism.