



CHRIE FutureFund™ Introduces Aili Wu



Hello, ICHRIE community!

My name is Aili Wu, and I am now an Assistant Professor of Management in the College of Business and Technology at Northeastern State University. Just last month, in July 2026, I completed my Ph.D. at the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management. As I wrapped up my doctoral studies and transitioned into my faculty career, I was deeply honored to receive support from the ICHRIE Future Fund and recognition through the Best Dissertation Proposal Award.

To me, hospitality is more than an industry. It is a way of treating people. I have always found happiness in helping others and creating experiences that make them happy. This belief led me to select International Hospitality and Tourism Management as my undergraduate major at the City University of Macau, China.

Macau, often described as a small Las Vegas, is a unique destination where people from around the world come together. Studying there allowed me to experience the global nature of hospitality and tourism firsthand. As an undergraduate student, I also had the opportunity to study at Florida State University as an exchange student and participate in the Disney College Program. Disney showed me how thoughtfully designed experiences can bring people together and create happiness. Being part of that experience and helping make others happy was incredibly fulfilling. It strengthened my desire to continue my education and eventually pursue both master's and doctoral degrees in hospitality management at UCF.



My journey into research began during my master's program at UCF. Although much of that experience took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, I received tremendous support from the faculty, who helped me understand what research could accomplish. Through that experience, I fell in love with research.

I realized that I naturally approach the world like a researcher. I enjoy asking questions, exploring why something happens, and identifying practical solutions or better ways of doing things. My first research project grew from my strong interest in environmental sustainability. I wanted to understand whether gamification could motivate hotel guests to conserve energy. For this project, I designed a game interface that encouraged energy-saving behavior, and the study later became my master's thesis.

That project helped me discover my passion for gamification research. I love designing things, but I am equally fascinated by how thoughtful design can influence people's learning, motivation, and behavior. This interest eventually led to my dissertation, for which I taught myself how to design and develop a prototype game for anti-human trafficking education. Through this work, I explored how gamification could be used not only to engage people but also to educate them about a complex and socially important issue. Gamification has now become one of my primary research streams.

My second research stream focuses on organizational behavior in hospitality. Before entering academia, I worked in several hospitality roles, including club lounge service, in-room dining, food and beverage, and merchandise. These experiences made me curious about the psychological reasons behind employees' attitudes and behaviors and how organizations can help employees work more effectively. My research therefore explores organizational behavior topics at the intersection of emerging technology, employee psychology, and workplace management.

Now, as an assistant professor at Northeastern State University, I am excited to broaden my understanding of business and bring my hospitality expertise into an interdisciplinary academic environment. As an educator, I want to continue learning from my colleagues, students, and the broader ICHRIE community. I strive to become a better version of myself so that I can better support my students and help prepare them for their own paths. Looking ahead, I hope to contribute meaningfully to the future of hospitality and tourism scholarship while remaining grounded in the idea that first brought me to this field: hospitality is about caring for people and creating happiness.

I am sincerely grateful to the ICHRIE Future Fund for supporting and recognizing me during this important transition in my career. In the future, I hope to pass that support forward by helping other students and emerging scholars recognize their potential and pursue their own goals.

Thank you, ICHRIE, for giving me the opportunity to share my story.