Abstract:
We often equate keeping teens safe online to shielding them from experiencing online risks – such as information breaches, cyberbullying, sexual solicitations, and exposure to explicit content. Therefore, a number of researchers have approached online safety with a lens of risk prevention, suggesting approaches that involve revoking access, detecting and shutting down risks, or increasing teens’ privacy awareness and behaviors to prevent risk exposure. In contrast, another popular approach has focused on parental mediation as a way to reduce risk exposure, often at the expense of violating teens’ online privacy. On one hand, we are telling teens they need to care about their online privacy in order to stay safe, and on the other, we are taking their privacy away. On both accounts, we assume teens have no personal agency when it comes to their own online safety, and that they cannot effectively manage online risks by themselves. Yet, developmental psychologists have shown that some level of autonomy and risk-seeking behaviors are a natural and necessary part of adolescent developmental growth. In fact, shielding teens from any and all risks may actually be detrimental to this process. Therefore, my research leverages this theoretical framing to challenge some of the assumptions that have been made about adolescent online safety and moves toward new approaches of empowering teens to engage with others online safely through by employing risk-coping, resilient, and self-regulatory behaviors in online spaces.

Bio:
Dr. Pamela Wisniewski is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Central Florida. She graduated from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a Ph.D. in Computing and Information Systems. She was recently a Post-Doctoral Scholar at the Pennsylvania State University, working for one of HCI’s founding fathers, Jack Carroll. Dr. Wisniewski also has over 6 years of industry experience as a systems developer/business analyst in the IT industry. Dr. Wisniewski’s research interests are situated at the juxtaposition of HCI, Social Computing, and Privacy. An emerging theme across her research has been regulating the boundaries between how individuals manage their relationships with technology and how they manage their social interactions with others through the use of technology. Her goal is to frame privacy as a means to not only protect end users, but more importantly, to enrich online social interactions that individuals share with others. She uses an interdisciplinary approach to address these research questions by integrating literature in HCI, social psychology, and information systems in order to develop relevant theories and suggest design practices that better support how humans engage with and through technology. Her work has won best papers (top 1%) and best paper honorable mentions (top 5%) at premier conferences in her field.