

2024-25 | Year in Review



Advancing Values-Based Leadership



WashU Olin Business

Bauer Leadership
Center

Letter from the Center

The 2024-2025 academic year was an important one for leadership at WashU. Building on pilot programs spearheaded through WashU Olin's [Bauer Leadership Center](#) (BLC), this year we launched the university-wide [George and Carol Bauer Leaders Academy](#) to offer leadership development opportunities for all WashU students. WashU Olin's Bauer Leadership Center is a key partner in this effort, collaborating closely with the Academy on a range of initiatives—including curricular innovation grants, research projects, and program evaluation.

Indeed, there has never been a more exciting time for leadership development at WashU. The Bauer Leadership Center's mission and purpose are aligned well with and support critical university priorities. These include implementing [WashU Leads](#)—a signature initiative of [Here & Next](#), WashU's 10-year strategic plan. And these include the University's recently launched capital campaign, "[With You](#)." One of the four points of focus for the campaign is developing "[Future Ready Leaders](#)." The programs and resources provided to students, faculty, and staff by the Bauer Leadership Center have and will continue to play an important role in these efforts.

We hope you enjoy learning about the progress that we made in the past academic year. Through curricular programs, extracurricular programs, faculty research grants, and support for executive education, the Bauer Leadership Center differentiates the Olin Business School, and WashU more broadly, as the premier higher education institution for developing purpose-driven leaders of character and capability.

Andrew Knight, Director | Amy VanEssendelft, Program Manager



Developing Knowledge and Insight

Leadership Research Grants

In the fall of 2024, the Bauer Leadership Center awarded nine grants totaling over \$60,000 to faculty and students across the university. These grants support both new and ongoing research that offers fresh insights into leadership, influence, character, and/or purpose. The Center welcomed proposals from researchers across all departments, divisions, and schools within the University, supporting studies that employ any empirical method, whether quantitative or qualitative.

▶ [Follow this link for specific research details.](#)

What Leadership Looks Like Today: Insights from Bauer Leadership Center Fellow Alumni

We recently surveyed 56 MBA alumni who participated in the Bauer Leadership Center's Fellows program between 2018 and 2024. The results reveal a compelling picture of values-driven, purpose-filled leadership. Alumni reported that they were drawn to the Bauer Leadership Center to grow personally, gain hands-on experience, and learn how to effectively manage and influence others.

Currently, these alumni are making a meaningful impact across industries, but especially in consulting, finance, and technology. They influence more than 20 individuals on average, despite many having no direct reports. The most valued leadership skills developed and now used are critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

Graduates describe transformative moments—from projects leading to job offers, to the confidence to pursue purpose-aligned roles, to mentoring across educational levels. This collective experience highlights a shift: today's leaders are not just managing teams, they're shaping values, mentoring others, and leading meaningful change.

Special thanks to Arpit Arya, MBA 2025, for his dedication to this project and being selected through Poets & Quants as MBA: Best & Brightest | Class of 2025!



"The program gave me confidence to say no to roles that didn't align with my purpose."

Arpit Arya, MBA 2025
Selected by Poets & Quants as
MBA: Best & Brightest | Class
of 2025

PhD Student Associate Support



Note from Sophie: "I'm a PhD student in psychological and brain sciences, planning to graduate in spring 2026. At the Bauer Leadership Center, I support data assessment and reporting, helping to streamline large datasets, reduce errors, and improve the overall efficiency of our analytics pipeline. I enjoy seeing the back end of how reports are generated and contributing to work that helps people better understand themselves through data. This role has also strengthened my communication skills and ability to translate complex data across teams."

[Sophie Su](#), PhD Candidate in Psychological and Brain Sciences, Washington University in St. Louis

Educating and Inspiring the Next Generation

Bauer Leaders Academy | Purpose & Strengths Workshop

In August 2024, we collaborated with the Bauer Leaders Academy on a new program for all first-year undergraduate students at WashU. Students engaged in a 90-minute "Purpose & Strengths Workshop," designed to help them explore their personal values, sense of purpose, and strengths. In the first half, 1,684 student participants reflected on their values and submitted a personal purpose statement. The most commonly cited values across all schools were kindness, honesty, empathy, respect, and compassion, though variations appeared by school. Analysis of purpose statements revealed four key themes: making a positive community impact (39.6%), empowering self and others through academic and personal growth (24.8%), discovering passions and improving the future (23.9%), and pursuing healthcare careers to help others and give back (11.8%).

In the second half of the workshop, 1,560 students completed the CliftonStrengths assessment to identify their top personal strengths. The most common strengths across students were Relator, Empathy, Achiever, Learner, and Developer, with different emphases depending on school affiliation. These insights provide a foundation for better supporting students' personal and academic development throughout their college experience.



▲ WashU First-Year Student Values

Provost Office | Purpose & Worldview

In 2025, the Provost Office was funded by the Frick initiative to support a set of creative events around purpose. In January 2025, the team ran an event with 75 of our first-year students, providing them with an opportunity to revisit a purpose statement as well as a set of measures around worldview complexity captured in the first-year experience. The Bauer Leadership Center team turned that data into an individualized report for the students as a moment in time specific to their purpose exploration. The hope is that this event (and report) will become a pilot for a long-term plan for events like these, captured in a "purpose portfolio" for students to have and update around their time at WashU. A further extension of this work will take place next year to extend it to more students.



◀ Professor Peter Boumgarden

Defining Moments Course: Lessons in Leadership and Character from the Top



Gisele Marcus

Successful leaders often highlight key moments in their careers that shape their character, career, or company. In this course, students engage with these leaders, study leadership, participate in discussions, and create a personal leadership statement reflecting their core beliefs and values. This year, over 60 graduate and undergraduate students took part, guided by Gisele Marcus, Professor of Practice, and Rik Nemanick, Adjunct Lecturer in Organizational Behavior.

Class Speakers, Spring 2025

David Peacock, CEO, Advantage Solutions

Sharon John, President and CEO, Build-A-Bear Workshop

Tony Cheng, President and CEO, Reinsurance Group of America, Incorporated (RGA)

Amy Shaw, President and CEO, Nine PBS

Kimberly McKinney, CEO, Habitat for Humanity Saint Louis

Col Catchings, Director, Manpower & Personnel, United States Transportation Command

Aaron Powell, Chief Executive Officer, Pizza Hut Global



Rik Nemanick

Women in Leadership Course:

Under the guidance of Hillary Anger Elfenbein, John Wallace Jr. and Ellen A. Wallace Distinguished Professor, students have the opportunity to learn from influential female leaders and engage in reflection on their own leadership paths. This year, over 70 graduate and undergraduate students completed the course.



Hillary Anger Elfenbein

Class Speakers, Fall 2024

Maxine K. Clark, CEO, Clark-Fox Family Foundation Founder, Build-A-Bear Workshop; Chief INspirator, The Delmar DivInE

Alaina Macia, President and CEO, MTM

Geena Malhotra, Managing Director, Signet Excipients Ltd.

Vanessa Okwurawe, Principal, Edward Jones

Lorenza Pasetti, CEO, Volpi Foods

Jennifer Smith Abella, Chief Talent Officer, RubinBrown LLP

"Being a leader means being able to stand up for yourself, your values, and your people. It means building relationships with people you can trust and who can trust you. And I learned that you have to love what you do because life is too short to be miserable."
—Anonymous quote from Defining Moments student

Educating and Inspiring the Next Generation

Extracurricular Student Leadership Engagement

The Bauer Leadership Center has been a proud supporter of various extracurricular initiatives across campus. Our team participated in the inaugural WashU Leadership Week fair, hosted by the Bauer Leaders Academy, and took part in several related activities. Additionally, we collaborated with Olin's Graduate Programs Office and Career Center on leadership development for student groups, providing support through student council initiatives, resource fairs, workshop engagement, and a role-playing exercise focused on navigating the first 90 days in a new job or internship. We look forward to even more opportunities for collaboration in the year ahead.

"The Bauer Leadership Center Fellows opportunity challenged me to lead with purpose, listen with intent, and act with courage. Completing this program has sharpened my vision and strengthened my commitment to driving positive change wherever I serve."

—Anthony Kifue, MBA 2025



Students Commit to Leadership in Practice

Leadership in the Trenches Cohort: This course is taught by Erik Dane, Professor of Organizational Behavior, and is a mandatory course for students pursuing the Bauer Leadership Center Fellows Award. It provides the foundational framework for students as they engage in the 70/20/10 leadership model, which encompasses experiential learning, coaching, and coursework. As part of the program, students take on the role of team lead for the Center for Experiential Learning Practicum course, participate in leadership coaching sessions, and enroll in a course focused on leadership development. This year, 21 students completed the course and 15 graduating students earned the Bauer Leadership Center Fellows Award, which involves completing additional leadership development requirements.



Members of the Leadership in the Trenches Cohort



"Being named a Bauer Leadership Center Fellow has been an incredible honor. This fellowship has been a transformative chapter in my journey, helping me refine my leadership style and deepening my commitment to lead

with purpose, authenticity, and impact—and to inspire others to make a positive difference."

—Kalyan Likith, MBA 2025



"The Bauer Leadership Center Fellows program has been a valuable opportunity to integrate leadership theory with insights from real-world executives. It provided a dedicated time for

me to reflect on my leadership strengths and plan for future growth."

—Qie (Michael) Wang, MBA 2025



"This experience showed me that leadership isn't about having all the answers from the start—it's about having the courage to adapt, the humility to listen, and the resilience to keep moving forward even when things don't go as planned."

—Oyeyemi Sonubi, MBA 2025



Maya Chao presenting her Creative Life Manifesto in front of her Value Map (part of the pilot program) with Dr. Cheryl Wassenaar Savage (not pictured)

BLC Faculty Course Grants

We partnered with the Bauer Leaders Academy to provide grants to faculty members to support the development and innovation of coursework that promotes purpose-driven leadership. These grants provide financial and collaborative support to faculty as they design or enhance courses to challenge students to think critically about leadership, character, and purpose. The program was piloted last year.

With leadership defined as something that is independent of formal roles or positions, proposals across all disciplines are encouraged. Sample topics include exploring personal leadership and meaning, using values to make a positive impact, cultivating ethical thinking, and understanding character and strengths for leadership growth.

The initiative aims to create educational experiences that equip students with the tools to lead with integrity and purpose in an increasingly complex world. Collectively, the programs aim to foster personal purpose, ethical reasoning, and values-based decision-making, helping students develop as responsible leaders.

BLC Faculty Course Grants, continued

This past spring, ten new courses were funded and taught, with an impact on over 300 students. They are listed in the chart below.

In fall 2025, a few of the courses that have been funded are “Introduction to Playwriting,” Zachariah Ezer, Arts & Sciences; “Management Communication,” Staci Thomas, Olin Business School; and “Modern Humor Writing,” Heather McPherson, Art & Sciences.



“Bed Time: Knowing the World through Objects”: Students prepared a poster and elevator pitch and engaged with guests (including faculty and graduate students, university administrators, corporate executives, and community members) at the reception. Afterwards, students’ formal assignment asked them to reflect on the experience, particularly on their observations of campus leaders at the reception, their experience presenting their ideas, and their growth edges for leadership. By observing how leaders interacted with them, they were able to analyze the types of leaders. For example, one student mentioned, “I think one of the major lessons that I obtained from observing those leaders is to communicate expertise in an accessible and positive manner.”

“Beyond Boundaries Seminar”: Students share experiences, values, goals, and disciplinary interests that led them to make program choices. As they reflected on this process, one student commented, “Before this class, I had seldom been prompted to ponder my own values, and doing so in this class has made me better realize another facet of my own goals—not only in academics, but for myself as a person.”

Delivering Business Impact

Executive Education: Business Management of Nonprofit Leaders:

The Bauer Leadership Center actively supports the Executive Education program “Business Management for Nonprofit Leaders,” which helps nonprofit leaders apply business strategies to better address organizational challenges and community impact. The program uses a business framework to guide participants through applying business thinking and strategic questioning on topics such as strategy, financials, systems leadership, board management, marketing, and goal-setting. A central component is a capstone project, in which leaders address a real challenge within their organization, working in peer groups and receiving faculty feedback. The Bauer Leadership Center is sponsoring a new leadership module and continuing to provide limited funding for participants nominated by the program’s sponsors: United Way, the Regional Business Council, and Citibank.

Talent Development Impact Lab (TDIL):

This program is a senior leadership program that has successfully enhanced business skills, leading to promotions and new ventures. Its mission is to help develop talent ready to serve in executive roles. TDIL partners with universities around the country, including Olin Business School, to provide courses in key disciplines such as business analytics, finance and accounting, operational excellence, marketing, strategic thinking, and communications. The Olin Business School hosted a three-day session for participants, with the Bauer Leadership Center engaging and sponsoring a dinner at Dean Mazzeo’s home.



Members of WashU and TDIL Team

Connect with Us

Bauer Leadership Center Contact: Amy VanEssendelft, Program Manager

With thanks: We are thankful to our student associates Arpit Arya (MBA), Tanuja Gunapooti (Engineering), Sophie Su (PhD candidate), and Ziyi Zhang (SMP), who served as valuable thought-partners for the Bauer Leadership Center this past year.

LinkedIn: Search #BauerLeadership

Email: bauerleadership@wustl.edu

olin.wustl.edu/blc

On the cover, left to right: Two students participating in Leadership Week; Carol Bauer and Amy VanEssendelft



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