

Research Grant Recipients | Spring 2026

Mental health among leaders: determining contributing character traits and brain mechanisms

This multidisciplinary project proposal is designed to contribute significantly to the academic literature by focusing on two domains that have received relatively less attention: i) mental health in leaders and ii) the brain basis of leadership. Furthermore, this project is expected to answer practical questions by identifying factors that impact mental health among leaders, which may inform recruitment screening criteria to select the most resilient leaders and/or identify focus areas for leader coaching to proactively address modifiable risk behaviors. Study 1 will determine the association between leadership and mental health (1A) and identify character factors that moderate the leadership-mental health relationship (1B), and Study 2 will elucidate the brain basis of leadership (2A) and identify potential shared brain correlates of leadership and mental health (2B).

Submitted By:



Janine Bijsterbosch, Associate Professor of Radiology
School of Medicine

Research Grant Recipients | Spring 2026

Growing Leadership in St. Louis: Understanding How Urban Farming Builds Community Leaders
Co-Investigator: Mary Cox, Graduate Student, Psychological and Brain Sciences

First, we will provide a thorough investigation into how community leaders describe the process of urban farming, and how taking the initiative to improve their community promoted their leadership development. Second, we will characterize leadership within the St. Louis community through interviews with an underrepresented group within past leadership research. Third, building from our qualitative and quantitative work, we will develop better measures that can be used to inform more nuanced empirical investigations into prosocial purpose development in the future.

Submitted By:



Patrick Hill, Professor

Arts & Sciences

Research Grant Recipients | Spring 2026

Called to Serve: How firefighters sustain a sense of calling amidst the challenges of their work

The purpose of this project is to study the phenomenon in the context of professional firefighting, a job that embodies meaningful, impactful, and incredibly challenging work. In my preliminary research, I found that firefighters have strong affinity for their profession and are passionate about their work. They feel that they contribute to society in a meaningful way, which leads to a sense of personal fulfillment and satisfaction. They also cite several workplace challenges that influence perceptions of the work they perform (e.g., demographic differences and tensions, conflict with the STL city, physically and emotionally demanding nature of the work). However, in general, firefighters are able to navigate the challenges and persist in their work in meaningful ways. Thus, my research aims to dive deeper into these work experiences to elicit new knowledge of how workers in extreme contexts can sustain calling.



Submitted By:

Mac Strachan, PhD Candidate

Olin Business School

Research Grant Recipients | Spring 2026

Narrating Power: How Organizations Can Shape Power Holders' Perceptions and Behaviors through Promotion Narratives

In this project, I examine how promotion narratives—the personalized explanations organizations give to promoted individuals about why they were selected—shape leaders' interpretations of the role of others in obtaining their promotions, and how they interact with others in their promoted positions. Through demonstrating the impactfulness of promotion narratives, my objective is to offer organizations a way to exert direct, immediate influence over how promoted formal leaders enact their leadership through using these narratives, even after the promotion decision has already been made.



Submitted By:

Hyun Jung Yoon, PhD Candidate

Olin Business School

Research Grant Recipients | Spring 2026

Sorry or Not Sorry: How CEO Responses to Corporate Transgressions Impact Employee Activism

Our research investigates how a CEO's response following a corporate transgression serves as a critical leadership signal that shapes downstream employee activism. Specifically, we examine how CEO apologies versus silence influence particular employee emotions (i.e., contempt, anger, disgust) and perceptions (i.e., justice, corporate hypocrisy, behavioral integrity), which, in turn, determine the type of activist behaviors employees will engage in. This work helps leaders understand how to navigate rising bottom-up pressure from internal stakeholders and how their communication choices directly impact broader organizational change and ethical standing.



Submitted By:

Jaina Zhang, PhD Candidate

Olin Business School

Research Grant Recipients | Spring 2026

Purposeful Leadership in the Age of AI: How Perceived Status Shapes Evaluations of AI-Using Professionals

The overarching objective of this research is to advance understanding of how purposeful leadership can be developed in the context of AI use. Through a series of experiments, the project examines how AI-use disclosure and perceived professional status jointly shape evaluations of professionals, including perceptions of independence and willingness to collaborate. In doing so, this research responds to the Bauer Leadership Center's call to help leaders intentionally cultivate leadership presence while exercising human values, judgment, and responsibility in their use of AI.



Submitted By:

Nayong Quan, PhD Candidate

Olin Business School