George & Carol Bauer Leadership Center
Leadership Research Grants: Award Recipients

About the grants

Bauer Leadership Center research grants support new or existing research that provides new insights into leadership, influence, character and/or purpose. Projects may use any empirical method, quantitative or qualitative. Researchers from any department, division or school at WashU may apply.

Grant recipients

Recipients from the Fall 2024 and Spring 2026 grant cycles are listed below.

Spring 2026

Researcher(s)	School	Project	Brief description
Janine Bijsterbosch Associate Professor of Radiology	School of Medicine	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).
Patrick Hill Professor Mary Cox (Co-Investigator) Graduate Student, Psychological and Brain Sciences	Arts & Sciences	Growing Leadership in St. Louis: Understanding How Urban Farming Builds Community Leaders	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.
Nayong Quan PhD Candidate	Olin Business School	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

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			intentionally cultivate leadership presence while exercising human values, judgment, and responsibility in their use of AI.
Mac Strachan PhD Candidate	Olin Business School	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.
Hyun Jung Yoon PhD Candidate	Olin Business School	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.
Jaina Zhang PhD Candidate	Olin Business School	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.

Fall 2024

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Giselle Antoine Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior Crystal Farh	Olin Business School (Giselle Antoine)	Witnessing Public Corrections: When and How Public Punishment Enhances Affective Commitment	In this multimethod study, we explore the effect of witnessing public punishments on observers' perceptions of ethical leadership and affective commitment toward the work group. Using a combination of qualitative interviews, a time-separated field study, and pre-registered experiments designs, we find consistent support for the hypothesis that public corrections enhances witnesses' affective commitment and perceptions of ethical leaders, when it is used to punish severe violations.

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Professor of Management Qiongjing (Jerry) Hu Associate Professor			These effects are explained by a reduction in vicarious shame for witnesses and perceptions that the punishment is fair.
Paola Cepeda, PhD Assistant Vice Chancellor and Director, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Elizabeth Eikmann, PhD Assistant Director of Curricular Innovation	Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Arts & Sciences	Self-Perceptions of Leadership in Postdoctoral Researchers' Career Decision-Making Narratives	This project examines how postdoctoral researchers perceive and develop their leadership potential. By analyzing postdocs' own career narratives, we investigate the relationship between their perceptions of their leadership abilities and the formation of their professional identity and career trajectory.
Amy Gais Lecturer in Political Science and Comparative Literature and Thought	Arts & Sciences	Freedom and Dissimulation in African American Political Thought	My current book project considers how African American intellectuals and activists navigated political resistance in Jim Crow America. In the civil rights campaign, many Black intellectuals and activists were forced to modulate their critiques of racial oppression to make their resistance more palatable to white moderates and evade the very real threat of white supremacist violence. Commentators focus on the efficacy and ethics of dissimulation in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century African American political thought, but my project foregrounds the psychological repercussions of dissimulation as Black men and women navigate the impossible circumstances of Jim Crow.
Patrick L. Hill Professor	Arts & Sciences	Affordances for Purpose Development at University	The current project investigates what students feel they need from their university environments in order to cultivate and develop a purpose in life. This work will provide universities with a survey tool to better understand what students feel is available or missing at their university.
Emily Hsu PhD Candidate in Organizational Behavior	Olin Business School	Up, Down, and All Around: Emotional Whiplash and Its Effects on Interpersonal Trust and Relationships at Work	In this project, I empirically investigate how the experience or expression of emotional whiplash, a sudden and dramatic change in emotions, may influence or be influenced by interpersonal interactions and relationships. By examining interpersonal emotion dynamics more deeply, I highlight the potential for scholars and practitioners to broaden and/or reconsider existing viewpoints on leader emotions by offering insights as to not only why complex emotional experiences such as emotional whiplash may have positive or negative relational effects between leaders and followers but also when such effects may be more or less likely to occur.
Ellen Schaaf MA Candidate, Theater and Performance Studies	Arts & Sciences	Analyzing Leadership Impacts at Regional Cultural Organizations in the Post-Pandemic Landscape	This project examines strategies used by two regional cultural organizations—the Chicago Architecture Center and the World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C.—to bolster audience engagement in the post-pandemic landscape. Through surveys, interviews, and site visits, this research aims to identify how emerging technologies, organizational structures, capital sources, and leadership styles

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			contributed to these institutions' efforts to engage their audiences in innovative ways. The results of this project aim to illuminate how audience development professionals may utilize emerging technologies and adaptive leadership strategies to successfully lead their organizations to new levels of audience engagement.
Mac Strachan PhD Candidate Emily Hsu PhD Candidate in Organizational Behavior	Olin Business School	More than Fashion: Nostalgia's Rose-Colored Glasses for Crisis and Interpersonal Emotion Management	We will investigate how an organizational leader's mobilization of nostalgic rhetoric during times of crisis might influence organizational stakeholders' sensemaking and emotion regulation, as well as downstream attitudes and behaviors.
Hugh Wu Assistant Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship	Olin Business School	The Value of Managing Up: A Field Experiment in the Workplace	This study investigates the effects of managing-up practices in comparison to traditional top-down management approaches on workers' retention, job productivity, well-being, and career prospects. The analysis is based on a long-term randomized controlled trial conducted within a multinational spa chain.
Jaina Zhang PhD Student Giselle Antoine Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior	Olin Business School	Cultural Tightness as a Double-Edged Sword: The Mitigating Role of Ethical Workplace Climate on Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior	This proposed project aims to understand when and how employees' preference for cultural tightness relates to their propensity to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB). Furthermore, the project will explore the role of leadership in mitigating the dysfunctional effects by fostering an ethical climate in the workplace.