David Steffensen

Abstract of Project

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policies in Higher Education

How might an organization best "walk the talk" when it comes to its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies? What do upper-level leaders need to do to ensure that their DEI policies actually mean something, and are not simply just "on the books"? This study will explore these important questions in the context of gender and racial representation found within colleges and universities in the United States. Together, you and I will study the demographic makeup of upper-level leaders (e.g., presidents, provosts, deans, etc.) of colleges/universities to see the effects on student demographics, student success, and organizational reputation. A successful participant will have an inquiring mind, a willingness to voice their opinion, and a desire to develop their analytic, critical thinking, and communication skills. These research questions are at the forefront of this area and you will be an active participant in making contributions of new knowledge to management science!

Alan H. Jin

Introduction to the Project and Expectation

Generative Artificial Intelligence: Does It Enhance Learning? *–The Students' Perspective*

(To the Student)

This project focuses on students' perceptions of GAI's (Generative Artificial Intelligence) benefits and potential downsides. Despite ongoing debates, there is a lack of in-depth, firsthand research exploring how GAI affects student learning outcomes. Specifically, this project aims to understand how business students, particularly those in institutions like the Williams College of Business, perceive the benefits and negative impacts of GAI on various aspects of their education, including subject-specific influences. It also seeks to uncover strategies that students believe could optimize these benefits and mitigate the drawbacks. The study will address three key questions: What are the perceived benefits and negative impacts of GAI on students' learning, especially for business students? Which factors, such as subject matter or the nature of coursework (quantitative vs. qualitative), shape these perceptions, and why? And finally, what strategies do students suggest to leverage GAI's advantages while minimizing its challenges? This research will offer educators insights into developing methods to harness GAI effectively for enhanced student learning, providing essential preparation for business schools facing an uncertain technological future. The study will proceed in two stages: an initial qualitative case study involving semi-structured interviews with the students, particularly the business students, followed by a quantitative analysis to test the initial findings and generate broader insights. The project adopts a discovery-oriented, multi-case approach, aiming to fill a gap in current literature with new, insightful findings on this rapidly evolving technology.

Expected skills: Strong writing skills; Good communication skills; Interest in open-ended, exploratory study; Good work ethics; Good logical thinking skills; Good reading comprehension skills; Interested in co-authoring a journal publication (not required though).

Stefan Wuorinen, PhD, Department of Management and Entrepreneurship

How Companies Drive Sustainability Through
Acquisitions & Innovation

Student Abstract:

Are you passionate about environmental sustainability and interested in how businesses can truly make a difference? Join an exciting research project that explores a critical question facing today's firms: How can companies drive genuine, long-lasting sustainability through acquisitions and innovation? This project will investigate two distinct approaches, the acquisition of entire "green" organizations versus acquiring individual sustainability-related patents, and examines which strategy delivers more impactful and systemic results. In this research, you'll gain hands-on experience working with real-world data to answer this question. You'll dive deep into the motivations behind these distinct approaches and their impact on sustainability practices, helping us uncover whether firms are genuinely embedding sustainability into their operations or simply greenwashing. We'll use both qualitative and quantitative approaches, including data collection, statistical analysis, and theoretical discussions. Best of all, you'll have the chance to contribute to the design of research questions and hypotheses, giving you a full and immersive experience in academic research. If you're ready to study something that truly matters, develop critical research skills, and explore innovative ways to tackle environmental challenges, this project is for you.

Kate Loveland, Associate Professor of Marketing
Ashley Stadler Blank, Associate Professor of Marketing

Jack and Mary Kay Downing Scholarship Program Application
Spring 2025-Spring 2026

Appendix 3: Abstract   The Impact of Nostalgia on Brands

In this research, we are interested in how nostalgia affects brands. Nostalgia is "a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) towards objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger" (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). While prior work examines the impact of nostalgia on consumers, we are not aware of any work that examines the impact of nostalgia on brands. For example, does nostalgia increase perceptions of the brand's authenticity, warmth, and competence; brand personality; brand trust; and consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and word of mouth? For this project, we will develop experiments, collect data, analyze data, present our results at academic conferences, and submit a manuscript to an academic journal. Completion of MKTG 300 is required and completion or enrollment in MKTG 302 (or equivalent experience) is preferred.

Downing Project Information for Students

<u>Research topic: Investigating the Usage of AI in Business Management and Its Impact on Business Education</u>

Are you passionate about the intersection of technology and business? Do you want to explore how cutting-edge AI is transforming the future of business management and education? Join me in an exciting three-semester research project that will delve into the role of artificial intelligence in business management, its impact on business education, and the essential skills that future business graduates will need to succeed in an AI-driven world.

In this project, we will investigate one or more of the following topics:

- AI applications in business: How AI is reshaping various business functions like marketing, operations, and finance?
- AI and business education: What AI technical skills are crucial for business students, and how can these skills be effectively taught in school?
- Ethical challenges: We'll explore the growing concern of students using AI tools for cheating and develop strategies to prevent it.

As we focus on the business applications of AI tools, no technical background or specific major is required for the student. All majors are welcome. You will gain hands-on experience in business research, interact with faculty, and contribute to solutions for some of the above pressing issues. If you're excited to explore this rapidly evolving field, this project is the perfect opportunity!

Appendix A:

Abstract for Downing Undergraduate Student

The aim of this research project is to extend the nomological network of the dispositional branded-self. For over a decade, much work has been published in understanding the influences contributing to the formation of the branded-self and its impact on consumption responses in the marketplace. Interestingly, the branded-self is not influenced by one's overall self-view and leads to higher recall of one's branded possessions. Additionally, the dispositional branded-self results in a willingness to wait longer for the release of innovative products from preferred brands. Building on Sprott et al.'s (2009) work focused on developing and validating the dispositional branded-self, this proposed research project aims to further understand the downstream psychological effects of the branded-self. In particular, this research will focus on examining the extent to which the branded-self will influence consumers' likelihood to express their favorite brands to others and in an outward manner. Much of the existing theoretical underpinnings of the branded-self consider underlying psychological mechanisms, while this research will take a varied approach by investigating the effects of the branded-self that can be seen by others.

During the Downing Scholarship Program, we will investigate the research questions via an experimental methodology. The main aspect that the undergraduate student needs to have for this research project is a desire to learn about the role of brands in one's self-concept and consumers' likelihood to express preferred brands. It is not expected that the undergraduate student has previous research experience for this project since I will be training the Downing student on the entire research process.

Sierra Arnold

Dept. of Economics

Downing Faculty Application

Fall 2024

Title: Public Transportation Access and Prenatal Care

Quality healthcare is a basic human need, yet barriers to access are a significant issue, particularly for vulnerable populations including expectant mothers and newborns. Reliable transportation is essential to accessing prenatal care, and public transportation infrastructure plays an important role in this access for mothers in urban areas without cars. This project will study the impact of changes in public transportation networks in Florida on the frequency with which expectant mothers utilize prenatal healthcare appointments. This represents the first study to study the impact of changes in transit access over time on individual level health outcomes, which is a major contribution to the literature. This project will use a unique dataset of public transportation stops and routes over the years 2008-2020, as well as the universe of prenatal care visits for expectant mothers in Florida over the same period. For this project, we will analyze the existing literature on the topic, collect and clean relevant data, perform analysis, and present findings to academic audiences.

Completion of or enrollment in ECON 307 is strongly preferred.