**Downing Applications for Spring 2024-Spring 2025 Awards**

**Professor: Bryan Buechner**

Title*: The Downside of Self-Control*

50 years ago, Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel and his colleagues completed an experiment which placed children alone in an empty room besides a single marshmallow set on a table in front of them. The researchers told the children if they could go 15 minutes without eating the marshmallow, they would be allowed to eat the marshmallow plus a second one. The objective of the research was to investigate factors that facilitate self-control behaviors, and more specifically, the role of impulse control. In the decades following, self-control has widely been accepted as critical to human behavior. Successful self-control is intricately linked to enhanced consumer welfare, including goal achievement, improved physical health, and financial well-being, whereas a lack of self-control can lead to suboptimal behaviors like impulsive purchases, unhealthy food-related decisions, and indulgent consumption.

Collectively, research largely studies self-control as a single behavior (impulse control). However, emerging research suggests that two unique factors facilitate successful self-control: impulse control and adapting to a changing environment. While these factors can be complementary, their independence suggests they can also conflict. As such, this project investigates if and under which circumstances the factors conflict, and because of this conflict, make engaging in self-control difficult. We hypothesize that while impulse control may facilitate self-control in some circumstances, it can paradoxically lead to self-control failure if relied upon in other circumstances. In other words, this proposed conflict is not despite self-control success but precisely because of it; a paradox deemed as the “downside of self-control”. Building on the self-control literature, we will investigate this possible conflict and seek to deepen our understanding of consumers’ self-control in managerially relevant contexts, such as diet and weight loss management, self-improvement, and habit modification.

For this project, we will develop experiments (e.g., online surveys), collect data, analyze data, present our results to academic audiences, and submit a manuscript to an academic journal.

Completion of MKTG 300 is required and completion of or enrollment in MKTG 302 and MKTG370 is strongly preferred.

**Professor: DJ Steffensen**

Title: *I Get By With a Little Help from My Policies: How Leaders Benefit from Good HR Strategy*

Can good business practices make up for poor leadership? Can an effective leader mask the negative effects of weak business practices? This study will explore these important questions in the context of leader implementation of human resource strategies and practices. Together, you and I will engage in an immersive, hands-on research project by developing hypotheses, wrangling and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and sharing our findings. 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!

**Professor: Brian Webster**

Title: *Getting the best out of difficult employees*

This project examines how leaders can attempt to get the best out of “difficult” employees, specifically individuals who hold the personality trait of “Machiavellianism” – one who manipulates and exploits others and is indifferent to morality. As you can imagine, “Machs” are typically not the best employees to work with. Thus, the question is – how can leaders attempt to get the best out of their Mach employees? I currently have data collected from 173 employee-supervisor dyads that show Machs respond positively to supervisors who use intimidation in the workplace. Although off-putting for most employees, Machs actually view the supervisor as being more competent because the supervisor is willing to do something off-putting in order to get results in the workplace. In this project, you would help me analyze and write-up this data. And, we would attempt to replicate this finding in a laboratory setting. Thus, you would also gain experience working on the “front end” of a research study in terms of research design, vignette development, understanding manipulation of variables, scale selection, as well as learn about ethics required in conducting research involving human subjects. The goal would be to submit this study to a national research conference and a peer-reviewed journal. There is a rich history of academics and practitioners (HR, consultants, I/O psychologists etc.) using personality traits to predict important workplace behaviors. Thus, I think it will be beneficial for whichever career you pursue. This study will allow you to see how personality traits resonate in the workplace and help you understand how to solve a practical problem by studying managerial actions that could deter the detrimental effects of “dark personality traits,” such as Machiavellianism.

**Professor: Alan Jin**

Title: *Generative Artificial Intelligence: Potential Opportunities, Challenges, and Threats to Business Schools - The Case of Greater Cincinnati Universities*

The call for research in this new area is loud and clear. In the past several months, generative artificial intelligence applications (GAI, e.g., ChatGPT) has attracted a lot of attention. It will not be surprising that soon enough more and more such applications will emerge. Their impact on higher education has already begun to be felt by the students, faculty, and parents. While there are a lot of discussions and debates going on around this topic, there lacks an in-depth, firsthand exploration into the potential threats and opportunities that this wave of technologies is bringing to higher education institutions, in particular, to business schools.

The challenges ahead are exciting, because there is so much about the GAI for us, both the faculty and the students, to find out and experience. The goal of this project is to explore the ongoing and potential threats and opportunities of generative artificial intelligence to higher education institutions, in particular, business schools including the Williams College of Business. It will also tap into potential strategies to mitigate the threats and leverage the opportunities.

**Professor: Richie L. Liu**

Title: *Brand Relationship Norms in Relation to the Self*

Contributing to recent investigations on consumer-brand relationships, the current research aims to examine consumers’ favorite brands in relation to the self within the context of brand relationship norms. Building on Aggarwal’s (2004) application of social relationship theory to consumer-brand relationships, we will examine the interactive effects of brand relationship norms and consumers’ tendencies to define their self-concept with relevant brands (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009). We would expect to find that the importance of brands as part of the self-concept moderates the effect of brand relationship norms on brand attitudes. Specifically, we predict that people with a lower (versus higher) likelihood to incorporate brands in their self-concept tend to place more value in the adherence to, or violation of, brand relationship norms. Over the course of three semesters, we will test these ideas using an experimental research methodology. The main aspect that the undergraduate student needs to have for this research project is a desire to learn about consumer brand relationships in the marketplace. No previous research background is needed for this project since it is my intent to train the undergraduate student on the research process from the beginning to the end. Additionally, only a basic familiarity with statistical knowledge is expected since I will also train the undergraduate student to conduct statistical analyses in SPSS.

**Professor: Gwen White**

Title: *Small Business Disaster Recovery Planning using AI*

This research project is designed to uncover the reasons most small businesses do not have disaster recovery plans. The project will have two components: First, the development of research questions, hypothesis, and surveys. Second, the creation of a disaster recovery plan for one business with the aid of AI. Expect to improve Excel, survey design, SPSS and writing skills.

You will research the following questions:

1) What is the impact of small business failure on society?

2) Why do small businesses lack a disaster recovery plan?

3) Do small businesses believe they are invincible before or will be after disaster?

4) Can AI be used as a support tool to create a disaster recovery plan?

Expected Skills: Basic Excel, excellent writing skills, good reading comprehension skills.

**Professor: Jarrod Humphrey**

Title: *The Ripple Effect: How IPOs Shape Managerial Futures*

Join me in a cutting-edge research project where we'll delve deep into the strategies of emerging growth companies, mainly focusing on the lesser-explored aftermath of major entrepreneurial exits, including initial public offerings (IPOs). Together, we'll uncover how these pivotal moments influence the entrepreneurial decisions of top managers by analyzing their career paths using real-world data from company filings and LinkedIn. I'm seeking students with a keen analytical mind, a knack for data collection, and a genuine curiosity about entrepreneurial finance. In return, I offer mentorship, hands-on experience, and a unique opportunity to contribute to a growing, vibrant area of research. Let's make a significant scholarly impact together!