

CENTER FOR ETHICAL ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES



AUBURN
Harbert College of Business

FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER



JOIN THE STUDENT CENTER FOR PUBLIC TRUST

Experience **interaction** and **networking** with staff, local leaders and executives

Obtain **unique** skills, set yourself apart as an ethical leader and differentiate yourself from other potential job candidates

Have the opportunity to participate in training sessions, community service projects, conferences and a unique ethical certification

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



O.C. Ferrell, Ph.D. | James T. Pursell
Sr. Eminent Scholar in Ethics

The **Center for Organizational Ethical Cultures** focuses on the development of ethical leadership, providing resources and activities for students, faculty, and other stakeholders.

The **National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) Center for the Public Trust** student chapter is sponsored by the Center. This student organization sponsors two speakers each semester for all Harbert students, attracting hundreds of student attendees. Faculty teaching resources on ethical leadership include cases, behavioral simulations, and debate issues. The Center supports and encourages academic publishing and trade articles on issues related to ethical leadership. Now, all Harbert students have access to the NASBA Center for the Public Trust Ethical Leadership Certification. This newsletter highlights some of our recent activities.



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<https://harbert.auburn.edu/research-faculty/centers/center-for-ethical-organizational-cultures/>

STUDENT CENTER FOR PUBLIC TRUST

Molly Hinsley | M.B.A. | Auburn University Chapter President



"It's been an honor to serve as the president of the Student Center for Public Trust (SCPT) during my time at Auburn's MBA program. Engaging with O.C. and Linda Ferrell as well as esteemed speakers like Robert Chestnut has not only enriched my understanding but has also left a mark on how I view the role of integrity in professional settings. As I prepare to graduate, I will bring the lessons learned here into my career. To the members of the SCPT, know that your participation in this organization is more than just an extracurricular activity; it's an investment in your personal and professional growth. The principles of ethical decision-making, transparency, and leadership integrity that you will learn and discuss here are critical skills that will guide you throughout the rest of your careers. These opportunities have the power to shape you into leaders who can make a positive and ethical impact in whatever path you choose."

Duda Schramm Seifer | M.B.A. | Auburn University Chapter Vice -President



"As Vice President of the Auburn Student Center for the Public Trust (SCPT), I am thrilled to be part of this organization dedicated to foster business ethical leadership and values-driven decision-making. Together with our President and our dedicated faculty advisors, O.C. and Linda Ferrell, we are committed to ensure that our members have access to the best resources, opportunities, and experiences. I'm excited about the journey ahead and eager to see our organization grow as we engage with inspiring speakers, expand our network, and develop the ethical leadership skills that will set us apart in our careers. I encourage you to get involved, together, we'll continue to build a community of impactful leaders at Auburn University."

HARBERT COLLEGE REQUIRES ETHICAL LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATION FOR GRADUATES

Auburn University's Harbert College of Business now requires all students to complete a new course in business ethics and pass an independently administered ethical leadership certification prior to graduation. The certification will be conducted by the NASBA Center for the Public Trust. The new requirements are designed to better prepare young professionals to handle the ethical dilemmas they will face in their careers. According to Alfonzo Alexander, ethics and diversity officer of NASBA and president of the Center for the Public Trust, Auburn is the first university in the country to require its business school graduates to complete ethical leadership training and attain independent certification. The new course and curriculum were developed by a panel of leading business ethics professors from across the country, including Drs. O.C. and Linda Ferrell from Auburn's Harbert College of Business, as well as NASBA's Alexander. According to O.C. Ferrell, James T. Pursell, Sr. Eminent Scholar in Ethics and Director of the Center for Ethical Organizational Cultures at Auburn University, instilling ethical conduct is critical to shaping organizational culture in today's highly competitive business environment. Students are required to complete the online certification program's six modules and pass an exam at the conclusion of each section. Read the full article to learn more.

GUEST SPEAKERS SERIES



November 2023 | Robert Chesnut | Intentional Integrity

Rob Chesnut is the former Chief Ethics Officer at Airbnb. He previously led eBay's North America legal team, where he founded the Internet's first e-commerce person-to-person platform, Trust and Safety team. He was the general counsel at Chegg, Inc. for nearly 6 years, and he served 14 years with the U.S. Justice Department.



April 2023 | Danny Smith | Corporate Environmental Compliance

On Tuesday, April 4, 2023, the Student Center for the Public Trust was eager to commence our 2023 Guest Speaker Spotlight event series by welcoming Danny Smith. As Corporate Environmental Compliance Manager at Carnival Corporation, Mr. Smith directs a diverse range of environmental compliance matters for a fleet of nearly 100 cruise ships across Carnival's nine international brands. As a professional lawyer and engineer, he provided vast regulatory, compliance, risk, and policy insight. Mr. Smith discussed the challenges of multi-jurisdictional compliance requirements across worldwide operations, along with essential components for success.



September 2022 | Alfonzo Alexander | The Truly Sustainable Leadership

As the Chief Ethics & Diversity Officer of the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) and President of NASBA's Center for the Public Trust (CPT), Alfonzo oversees strategic diversity initiatives, ethics, compliance, and facilitates special projects with the CEO. Under his leadership, the CPT has cultivated new partnerships and nearly 100 campus programs. Distinctive to the Harbert College of Business experience, his leadership established the Ethical Leadership Certification & Training Programs, while advancing the Being a Difference Award.



April 2022 | Nicole Sherwin | Athletic Compliance & Student-Athlete Advocacy

As the Assistant Director of Compliance at Auburn University, Nicole Sherwin addressed the hot topics of Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) and the Transfer Portal. Highly knowledgeable in each bylaw and the relationship to ethical conduct through each layer, she addressed her obligation to student-athletes, coaches, the department, Auburn University, and our community.



March 2022 | Greg Jackson | Supply Chain Recycling & Circular Economy

As the founder and CEO of Groundz Recycling and Urban Farmer, the world's first organic waste recycling company for supplying urban farm composting, Greg Jackson addressed his innovative model, which recycles organic waste such as coffee grounds and eggshells, converts the matter to compost, and distributes the compost to urban farms. He is also launching a bird-friendly cocoa certification program.

INSIGHTS FROM GUEST SPEAKER ROBERT CHESNUT

With a thought-provoking guest speaker, we had the privilege of sitting down with Robert Chesnut, a distinguished professional with a wealth of experience that spans the U.S. Justice Department, eBay, LiveOps, Chegg, and Airbnb. As a guest speaker at the Center for Ethical Organizational Cultures on November 1st 2023, Chesnut shared insights that resonated deeply with the audience, offering a glimpse into his dynamic career and his perspectives on the critical role of integrity in the corporate world.

Chesnut's career began with a stellar occupation at the U.S. Justice Department, where he served as an Assistant United States Attorney, handling major crimes and high-profile cases. His transition to eBay marked the start of a transformative phase, eventually leading him to pivotal roles at Chegg and Airbnb. Each step in his career showcased not only his legal prowess but also his ability to adapt to evolving corporate landscapes.

Chesnut's journey at eBay marked a crucial phase in his career, where legal decisions were not merely about individual perspectives but involved intricate group dynamics. He revealed that different perspectives within the team added layers of complexity, prompting the development of criteria that extended beyond legal and financial measures of success. This criteria became a guiding force, encompassing ethical considerations, potential impacts on various stakeholders, and the long-term reputation of the company. Chesnut provided valuable insights into how eBay's legal decision-making embraced a proactive approach, considering the ethical implications of their decisions. This shift aligned with the company's overarching commitment to a long-term perspective on success, highlighting the maturation of eBay's approach to ethical and legal considerations.

Chesnut shared insights into a critical juncture during his journey at Airbnb when the company faced accusations of discrimination. As the General Counsel, he found himself in a complex position, researching and reflecting on the company's mission. The conflict centered on whether Airbnb, dealing with private houses, had the autonomy to make decisions that aligned with its mission, even if those decisions conflicted with certain individuals' beliefs. At the core of the challenge, as Chesnut explained, lay Airbnb's fundamental mission to connect people. He underscored that any departure from this mission would signify a failure for the company, regardless of financial outcomes.

Chesnut's responsibilities transcended the legal domain, evolving into a realm of morality and ethics. The proactive stance adopted by Airbnb's CEO played a pivotal role in shaping this ethos, emphasizing that the company's prosperity wasn't exclusively measured by financial metrics. Chesnut discussed the CEO's forward-thinking approach, challenging the conventional notion of pursuing profit at any cost. He expressed that fixating on a simple "number on the wall" goal could erode integrity and ethics. For Airbnb, it became a question of morality, and the CEO's visionary approach led the way for a shift in defining success beyond monetary metrics.

One of the key outcomes of this transformative period was the establishment of the five Airbnb stakeholders – the host, the guest, the community, the employees, and the shareholders. Chesnut stated that this holistic approach was not just an innovative business strategy but a commitment to long-term success. It aimed to create a symbiotic relationship where all stakeholders played a crucial role, ensuring the sustainability and ethical standing of Airbnb.

Chesnut, when talking about his journey with Chegg, addressed the common perception of Chegg as a "cheating machine," acknowledging the stereotype that has surrounded the platform. However, he emphasized that Chegg's primary goal is far from promoting academic dishonesty. Instead, the platform aims to empower students by providing them with the tools and resources needed to understand and solve complex problems. Chegg's distinctive approach emerges from the recognition that not all students can afford tutors or additional academic support. Chesnut highlighted Chegg's commitment to making education accessible by offering step-by-step solutions. These solutions act as a valuable supplement to traditional learning methods, enabling students to grasp challenging concepts at their own pace.

Chesnut emphasized Chegg's broader mission of democratizing education. His insights into Chegg's mission unravel the layers behind the "cheating machine" stereotype. Chegg emerges as a dynamic force in education, striving to be a learning assistant for students. In the face of criticism, Chesnut detailed Chegg's commitment to ethical learning practices. The platform actively addresses concerns related to academic integrity and continually refines its services to strike a balance between supporting students and upholding the principles of honest academic engagement.

Robert Chesnut's distinguished career journey through the U.S. Justice Department, eBay, and Airbnb disclosed an approach to legal and ethical considerations. At eBay, Chesnut played a pivotal role in shaping decisions beyond traditional success metrics, embracing a proactive stance on ethical implications. The challenges faced by Airbnb, including accusations of discrimination, highlighted Chesnut's commitment to the company's mission and a broader definition of success, driven by morality rather than financial metrics. The establishment of the five Airbnb stakeholders showcased a holistic commitment to long-term success through symbiotic relationships. Chesnut's insights into Chegg's mission revealed a dynamic approach to education, challenging stereotypes and emphasizing a commitment to democratizing learning while upholding ethical principles. Overall, Chesnut's experiences offer valuable lessons for navigating the complexities of corporate ethics and success.