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.
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.
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.
Robert Chesnut's distinguished career journey through the U.S. Justice Department, eBay, LiveOps, Chegg, and Airbnb disclosed an approach to legal and ethical considerations. 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 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.