



Professor of Entrepreneurship Adds Momentum to Contributions by Social Sciences, Humanities, Arts

GLENYS YOUNG | MAY 19, 2021

Ronald Mitchell won the Texas Tech Parents Association's Bernie E. Rushing Jr. Faculty Distinguished Research Award for Social Sciences, Humanities and Creative Arts Disciplines.

In March, the [Texas Tech Parents Association](#) announced the recipients of its 2021 faculty awards. We are highlighting the seven [Texas Tech University](#) faculty members who were recognized.

Increasingly the research, teaching and service activities of business school professors add momentum to the contributions made by the social sciences, humanities and the arts. The work of Texas Tech University's [Ronald K. Mitchell](#), a professor of entrepreneurship and the Jean Austin Bagley Regents Chair in Management within the [Jerry S. Rawls College of Business](#), makes a convincing argument that business can contribute substantially to the social and creative fabric of society.

After all, business is not simply about cold, hard numbers. It's about people interacting with people – ideally, in mutually beneficial ways. With his early-career background in both management and accounting, Mitchell knows that.

More importantly, he knows sometimes reaching a mutually beneficial outcome requires some creativity.

For instance, he says, look at the trend of technological advancements through which machines have replaced many of the mundane, repetitive tasks we used to have to do. It's now up to us to create new opportunities for each other that capitalize on our unique abilities as human beings. Through such work, we can improve not only our society but also our own quality of life.

This outlook is just one reason why Mitchell won the Texas Tech Parents Association's 2021 Barnie E. Rushing Jr. Faculty Distinguished Research Award for Social Sciences, Humanities and Creative Arts Disciplines.

Can you describe your research and its impact, both in academics and society?

In my research I am actively investigating questions in multiple fields of study. For example, in the field of entrepreneurship, I developed fundamental constructs of entrepreneurial expertise used in the study of entrepreneurial cognition – how entrepreneurs think. This work in entrepreneurial cognition has spurred a great deal of work by other scholars. I also have been engaged in research in the area of stakeholder theory, with particular emphasis on stakeholder identification and salience, answering the question of how managers decide to allocate their time and resources across multiple constituencies. This stakeholder-focused research has received significant citations. More 15,000 research articles or textbooks use these ideas, and they also have generated a great deal of scholarship by others. Our seminal paper on this topic routinely is cited as one of the most important papers in the field of management.

In a newer area, stakeholder accounting, I am somewhat unique in my capability to contribute, because of my background in management and accounting – I also am a Certified Public Accountant. In this research, I have mapped out the terrain for those thinking about how managers and accounting systems would account for benefits and costs to different types of stakeholders in a world in which those things are considered. Given the statement last year by the U.S. Business Roundtable essentially advocating for a stakeholder view of the modern corporation, such accounting for stakeholders will become increasingly important.

What projects are you working on at this time?

Presently, I am working on projects that extend and amplify my previous work. In one current project, my co-authors and I have linked the enrollment of stakeholders in new ventures to an iterative process of communications involving: 1. the formation of opportunities through commonality dialogue with other actors, 2. the identification of stakeholders through mutual dialogue with potential stakeholders, and 3. the creation and maintenance of stakes through reciprocity dialogue with identified stakeholders. This is important because, until now, the existence of stakeholders has simply been assumed, whereas identification of the process where they actually come into being adds another explicit step in the creation of new ventures.

In another project, I am working with co-authors to better explain how value is added in global value chains through various processes of stakeholder engagement. Again, this is important because the processes of value aggregation in such vast systems have not yet been specified sufficiently and, as a result, the processes are not as manageable as might be possible.

In a third project, I am working with yet another set of co-authors to advance the conceptual system underlying the Rawls College of Business STEM MBA Integrative Project as a means for increasing the quality of MBA education generally. This is important because, in an era when MBA programs are under scrutiny for the value they add, a clear specification of exactly what is needed in an MBA, and why, will better serve many constituencies of the university and business school. Several other projects are in the various stages of development and peer review as well.

What areas are you interested in for future research?

In my view, future research in entrepreneurial cognition and stakeholder theory will increasingly investigate the mechanisms that enable value creation by many more members of society. As technology advances to replace many mundane or repetitive tasks that we as human beings have undertaken by necessity, it now becomes our challenge in the organization sciences to envision a future where the exceptional capabilities of human beings can better be engaged to create increasing quality of life – both work life and life in general – such that the human experience can continue to be one of hope.

What rewards do you get from teaching?

In my view, all scholarship is teaching-focused. Research work discovers and teaches fellow scholars, and this is rewarding through the advancement of our respective fields. Engagement with students enables the rising generation to build upon the discoveries and knowledge of mankind by being transmitted in ways that most effectively enable its members to flourish. The rewards that come from this engagement arise as the talents of each individual surface and are magnified. As a senior scholar, my challenge has been to continually reinvent the methods whereby each new student's mind is captivated, so highly effective learning results. It is highly rewarding when these methods come to fruition.

What motivated you to pursue a career in academia?

My wife, Cynthia, saw in me the promise as a teacher of young adults and encouraged me to leave my work as an executive and CPA to return to graduate school. While in my doctoral program, I was introduced to the research enterprise. Its continuing challenge and variety impressed me so much that a career in academia – the creation and transmission of new knowledge – became and remains highly motivating.

How has Texas Tech helped you advance your research and teaching?

Texas Tech has helped me advance my research and teaching in three key ways. First, part of my recruitment included a Regents Chair: The J.A. Bagley Chair in Management. The funding from this endowment has enabled me to assist doctoral students, work with colleagues worldwide and not be limited in what I might envision in research and teaching. Second, the present leadership in the Rawls College of Business and Texas Tech has provided ample opportunities for me to design courses and programs based on my research findings. For example, the STEM MBA Integrative Project results directly from the theories of value creation I have advanced and tested. And third, the people environment at Texas Tech is truly remarkable. I am surrounded by talented people in all roles, I am motivated and recognized for my achievements (e.g. the Rushing Award), and I am rewarded commensurate with my accomplishments.

Who has had the biggest impact on you and your career, and why?

I know in the eyes of some, the answer to this question should be a specific person. However, I am a person of faith, and I would indeed be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge the source of all inspiration as most influential. I firmly believe the key insights and opportunities that have animated my career are heaven-sent, and it is my hope that my contributions to my fellow beings will be those that will lift and ennoble.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond. I am very grateful for the honor of receiving the Barney E. Rushing Jr. Faculty Distinguished Research Award for Social Sciences, Humanities and Creative Arts Disciplines.

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