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Huntsman Bolsters Faculty in Ethical Leadership

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by Jaime Caliendo BA '97, MA '15



Dr. Julena Bonner joins the Huntsman School of Business faculty this year as the winner of the Best Student Paper in the Social Issues in Management Division at the 2016 Academy of Management meetings. This is the second year in a row that she has received this honor. The Academy of Management is the leading academic society in the field of management, and her award-winning research focuses on management practices and unethical behavior in the workplace.

Dr. Bonner's 2016 paper, "Punishment Contingency and Unethical Behavior: The Role of Uncertainty and Justice Perceptions," coauthored by Cynthia S. Wang and Rebecca L. Greenbaum, both of Oklahoma State University, presents findings of one experiment and two surveys studying the relationship between punishment and unethical behavior in the workplace. The authors find that different types of workplace punishment affect employee decisions to behave ethically. Employees perceive any punishment that appears random or unconnected to performance (non-contingent punishment) to be unjust and are more likely to behave in unethical ways afterward. Conversely, when punishment is clearly connected to a specific behavior (contingent punishment), employees are less likely to behave unethically after being disciplined. Essentially, non-contingent punishment is rooted in uncertainty, which creates negative feelings about fairness and leads to an increase in employee unethical behavior, and may prove to be organizationally harmful.

One reviewer noted that this paper captures the real-world complexities of workplace policies that have both intended and unintended consequences, and is important because it "helps to shed light on how to implement policies so to maximize the beneficial outcomes while minimizing the potential for deleterious effects."

Dr. Bonner's 2015 paper also focuses on unethical behavior at work. "Employee Unethical Behavior to Shame as an Indicator of Self Image Threat and Exemplification as a Form of Self Image Protection: The Exacerbating Role of Supervisor Bottom Line Mentality" explores how an employee's feelings of shame about an unethical behavior at work translates into exemplification behaviors such as arriving early or staying late to protect and even bolster self-image.

Ethics is a common theme running through her research program. "It's important to be an ethical leader because, in the simplest sense, leadership is the ability to influence people," says Dr. Bonner. Ethical leaders are effective leaders because they get things done in a manner that's beneficial for everyone. Both individuals and organizations have a responsibility to identify core values and stand by these values when making decisions. "There are values that leaders can agree on—honesty, integrity, hard work," she continues. "Good leadership spells good things for the world."

Dr. Bonner received her BA in Business Management and Leadership from Southern Virginia University in 2007. Following college, she worked for the fundraising arm of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Team in Park City, Utah, and also owned a pizza business. These experiences gave her valuable leadership opportunities and the desire to study organizational behavior further. She received her MBA in 2013 and her PhD in Management and Organizational Behavior in 2016, both from Oklahoma State University. She joined the Department of Management in Fall 2016.