2026 RESEARCH

Sykes College of Business

THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

SYKES COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

Table of Contents

03
Message from the Dean

05
A Multidisciplinary Theory Repository and Assurance Ecosystem Framework to Facilitate Research
Becca Baaske
Assistant Professor, Accounting

06
The Student-Led Digital Wellness Initiative: A Collaborative Approach to Increase Digital Wellness in High Schools
Ellen Campos Sousa
Assistant Professor, Marketing

07
Differential Interpretation of Entrepreneurial Signals Across Genders: The Role of Institutional Context
Veronika Ciarleglio
Assistant Professor, Management and Entrepreneurship

08
A Deep Dive into Perseverance: The Role of Self-Leadership in Progressing Through Long-Term Stressful Experiences in U.S. Navy SEAL Training
Deirdre Dixon
Associate Professor, Management and Entrepreneurship

09
An Empirical Investigation of Users' Engagement in Online Health Communities for Chronic Diseases
Yanyan Shang
Associate Professor, Information and Technology Management

10
Differences From Differencing: Should Local Projections With Observed Shocks Be Estimated in Levels or Differences?
Thomas Stockwell
Assistant Professor, Economics

11
Opportunity Zones and the Importance of Banks in the Community
Yeosong Yoon
Assistant Professor, Finance

12
Cognitive Impacts of Explainable AI in Cybersecurity Incident Response: Challenges and Propositions
Chen Zhong
Assistant Professor, Information and Technology Management
Alper Yayla
Professor, Information and Technology Management

13
Intellectual Contributions

Message from the Dean

Research is an important part of an academic institution's portfolio. Faculty are trained in conducting research early in graduate school and disseminate their continued research to the students they teach. All faculty, whether participating or supporting, bring their intellect into class. Some do this through their basic research, some through their applied research and some based on their professional qualifications as practitioners.

Business schools with various missions achieve their intellectual contribution goals through a variety of methods. Most of the research that is acceptable in modern internationally accredited business schools are often measured by the quality of the peer reviewed outlets, their impact on various entities and the overall populace.

The general guidelines of AACSB's new standards on research emphasize the impacts of these activities. These impacts can be measured in various ways:

- Does the research add value to the overall body of knowledge?
- Does it benefit the society and environment?
- Does it somehow influence policy and possibly policy makers?
- Does the research help corporations solve their problems and make them more efficient?
- And most important for a school whose mission is primarily connected to teaching, does it support improved pedagogy in the classroom?

You will see throughout this brochure how the faculty at Sykes College of Business are engaged in doing impactful and high-quality research. The various short synopses in these pages show that faculty are providing benefits to companies and corporations, providing classroom support through case studies, influencing policy makers and advancing their field of business overall.

I am proud of our faculty and colleagues at the Sykes College of Business and am happy we are part of a vibrant and dynamic University of Tampa. Thank you for your support and continued friendship.

F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.
Dean, John H. Sykes College of Business, University of Tampa


JOHN H. SYKES COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

A Multidisciplinary Theory Repository and Assurance Ecosystem Framework to Facilitate Research

Becca Baaske
Assistant Professor, Accounting

"A Multidisciplinary Theory Repository and Assurance Ecosystem Framework to Facilitate Research," authored by Becca N. Baaske, Hilda E. Carrillo, Lisa Milici Gaynor, and Jaime J. Schmidt, examines how multidisciplinary theory can be better used to strengthen audit and assurance research. While theory plays an essential role in explaining and predicting real-world phenomena, Baaske et al.'s (2026) research shows it is not always utilized in assurance-related studies. At the same time, assurance work itself has become increasingly complex, involving multiple stakeholders, evolving technologies, and diverse reporting environments that may not be fully captured by the traditionally utilized psychology and economics theories.

To address this, the authors introduce a conceptual framework of the assurance ecosystem, which highlights the interconnected roles of individuals (such as auditors, management, and regulators), environmental factors (including regulations, organizational settings, and emerging technologies), and the assurance process itself. Using this framework, the authors organize their own multidisciplinary theory repository consisting of over 200 theories drawn from fields such as psychology, information systems, sociology, law, and marketing (www.theoryfinder.com). They then demonstrate how these theories can be applied by providing examples of theory-based research questions and illustrating how underutilized theories can offer new insights into assurance-related issues.

The primary contribution of the study is to provide researchers with a broad, multidisciplinary set of theories and a framework to help identify and apply them in assurance contexts. By connecting each theory to the assurance ecosystem, the paper offers a way to guide theory selection and supports the integration of new and emerging perspectives. Overall, the study aims to encourage and facilitate the use of multidisciplinary theory in assurance-related research and to strengthen the cohesiveness and impact of work in this area. More broadly, the authors hope this resource proves useful to researchers across disciplines who are interested in applying diverse theoretical perspectives to complex, real-world problems!

Citation: Baaske, Becca N., Hilda E. Carrillo, Lisa Milici Gaynor, and Jaime J. Schmidt. 2026. A Multidisciplinary Theory Repository and Assurance Ecosystem Framework to Facilitate Research. *AUDITING: A Journal of Practice & Theory 45* (1): 27-48.

The Student-Led Digital Wellness Initiative: A Collaborative Approach to Increase Digital Wellness in High Schools

Teenagers today spend nearly five hours a day on social media — and the consequences are serious. Research consistently links excessive use among adolescents to anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, and even suicidal ideation. Yet despite growing alarm from policymakers and public health officials, most schools lack practical, affordable programs to address this crisis. "Schools are uniquely positioned to reach every student," says Ellen Campos Sousa. "But they need solutions that actually fit their realities — limited budgets, overstretched teachers, and students who won't engage with programs that feel imposed on them."

To fill that gap, Campos Sousa and co-author Garcia-Collart developed the Student-Led Digital Wellness Initiative (SDWI) — an eight-stage school program that puts students themselves in charge of building healthier digital habits in their communities. Rather than relying on teachers to deliver wellness content, the SDWI trains a student-led group to assess their peers' social media habits, co-create solutions with outside professionals, and implement mindfulness-based practices schoolwide. The program was shaped through interviews with school administrators and direct feedback from high school students — a process that led to one of the study's most striking findings: administrators unanimously pushed for a student-led model, not out of idealism, but practicality. Students are far more likely to engage with initiatives built by their peers, and schools simply do not have the resources to sustain adult-led programs.

The implications extend well beyond the school hallway. For marketers, the SDWI points to growing consumer demand for digital wellness tools. For entrepreneurs, it offers a replicable blueprint for EdTech products and services. And for policymakers, it provides a low-cost model ready for adoption at scale. At its core, this research is a study in what becomes possible when researchers, educators, and young people build something together.

Ellen Campos Sousa
Associate Professor,
Marketing

Citation: Ellen Campos Sousa & Tessa Garcia-Collart, 2026. "The Student-Led Digital Wellness Initiative: A Collaborative Approach to Increase Digital Wellness in High Schools," *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, University of Chicago Press, vol. 11(1), pages 110-126.

Differential Interpretation of Entrepreneurial Signals Across Genders: The Role of Institutional Context

Veronika Ciarleglio,
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Management and Entrepreneurship

The primary aim of this research is to advance understanding of gender-based signal interpretation by answering a critical question: *How does institutional context affect SIA managers' interpretation of the same signal sent by entrepreneurs of different genders?* The study focuses on external equity funding as a signal because it represents a costly, credible indicator of venture quality that has historically been more difficult for entrepreneurs to obtain. The research objectives are threefold: first, to confirm that gender disparities exist in how external equity funding signals influence SIA acceptance decisions; second, to identify whether national equity funding availability (an economic institutional factor) reduces this gender disparity; and third, to examine whether national gender equality (a social institutional factor) similarly attenuates gender-based differences in signal interpretation.

The theoretical framework posits that while external equity funding should function as a universally credible signal, gender stereotypes may distort how evaluators interpret this signal when sent by women entrepreneurs. Crucially, the study argues that the salience and influence of these stereotypes vary systematically across institutional contexts. In nations with greater funding availability, the lower cost of obtaining external equity funding reduces gender-based concerns about social role incongruence. Similarly, in countries with higher gender equality, weaker gender stereotypes enable more equitable interpretation of entrepreneurial signals. By examining these contextual moderators, the research seeks to clarify when and why costly signals fail to operate effectively for women entrepreneurs despite their theoretical credibility.

To test these propositions, the authors analyze 10,217 startup applications submitted to 232 SIAs across 143 countries between 2016 and 2018, using data from the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) Global Accelerator Learning Initiative. The empirical results confirm significant gender disparities in how external equity funding signals influence SIA acceptance. Men-led ventures that have secured external equity funding demonstrate substantially higher acceptance rates (increasing from 18% to 29%), whereas women-led ventures with identical funding signals show only marginal improvement (from 22% to 25%). This finding replicates prior research while extending it by revealing that this gender disparity is highly context-dependent. Both hypotheses receive empirical support: higher national equity funding availability and greater national gender equality significantly reduce the gender gap in how external funding signals are interpreted. In nations with abundant funding opportunities and strong gender equality, women entrepreneurs with external equity funding experience acceptance rates comparable to their male counterparts. Conversely, in resource-scarce environments with lower gender equality, women's costly signals are systematically undervalued, which is a paradoxical finding given that signaling theory predicts costly signals should be most credible precisely when they are hardest to obtain.

Citation: Zhang, J., Askarzadeh, F., Farrell, M. R., & Ciarleglio, V. (2025). Differential Interpretation of Entrepreneurial Signals Across Genders: The Role of Institutional Context. *International Small Business Journal*, 02662426251389373.

A Deep Dive into Perseverance: The Role of Self-Leadership in Progressing Through Long-Term Stressful Experiences in U.S. Navy SEAL Training

This study examines why some people are able to push through extremely difficult, long-lasting challenges, like U.S. Navy SEAL training, while others do not. The researchers found that perseverance isn't just about being tough or having willpower. Instead, it comes from something called *self-leadership*, which means the ability to guide and motivate yourself through hard situations. People who succeed tend to have a strong sense of identity, a determined mindset, and resilience built from past challenges. Interestingly, things like humor and learning to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations also play a big role in helping people persist.

Another key finding is that perseverance is not just an individual effort; it is also shaped by other people. Being part of a group, wanting to belong, and supporting each other can strengthen a person's ability to push through challenging situations. The study shows that internal factors (like mindset and resilience) and social factors (like teamwork and shared identity) work together. When combined through self-leadership, these factors help people persist even under extreme stress. Overall, the research suggests that success in tough environments isn't just about physical ability, it's about how people think, how they lead themselves, and how they connect with others.

Deirdre Dixon
Associate Professor,
Management and Entrepreneurship

Citation: Dixon, Deirdre P., Celeste Raver, Andrew Ledford, Patti Miles and Grant Miles. "A Deep Dive into Perseverance: The Role of Self-Leadership in Progressing Through Long-Term Stressful Experiences in U.S. Navy SEAL Training." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* (2025). https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518251341400

An Empirical Investigation of Users' Engagement in Online Health Communities for Chronic Diseases

Yanyan Shang
Associate Professor, Information and Technology Management

Online health communities (OHCs) are online social media platforms where people with similar conditions connect to share information, experiences, and emotional support. As chronic diseases remain the leading cause of death worldwide, these communities have become an important complement to traditional healthcare by enabling patients to access medical knowledge and support from both health-care professionals and their peers, manage their conditions, and improve their quality of life. This study focuses on how people engage in OHCs over time, recognizing that participation evolves across different stages, from first joining, to actively participating, to becoming long-term loyal members. In particular, the study explores whether users' early activities and motivations, such as seeking information or emotional support, can predict how they will engage later, and what factors encourage them to stay active or drop out.

Using the user-generated data from an online diabetes community, the study finds that people's initial goals strongly shape their engagement journey. Users who primarily seek information tend to participate early on but are less likely to stay long-term, while those seeking emotional support are more likely to remain active and committed, especially when they receive meaningful support from others. The results also show that interaction matters: users who receive responses and actively engage in conversations are more likely to continue participating. Overall, the study highlights that engagement in online health communities depends on a combination of user motivations, the type of support they receive, and how they interact with others. These insights can help designers and healthcare providers build more supportive and engaging online environments for individuals managing chronic diseases.

Citation: Yanyan Shang, Xin (Robert) Luo. "An empirical investigation of users' engagement in online health communities for chronic diseases." *Information & Management* 62, no. 8(2025): 104213

Differences From Differencing: Should Local Projections With Observed Shocks Be Estimated in Levels or Differences?

Thomas Stockwell
Assistant Professor, Economics

When an economist is trying to measure how something affects the economy over time, should they run the model with the data as is (what we call levels) or should they "difference" the data and run the model using growth rates? In time-series, this is an important choice. Leaving the data in levels can make it hard to find causality between variables because most economic data have a time trend. Authors using a local projections models can deal with this by adding a time trend to the model or differencing the data. The question is, which is the correct specification for the model?

In "Differences From Differencing: Should Local Projections With Observed Shocks Be Estimated in Levels or Differences?," Thomas Stockwell (Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Tampa) and Jeremy Piger (Professor of Economics, University of Oregon) explore which specification is correct using both analytical and simulation-based results. They show that when researchers are working with an externally identified ("observed") shock to the model, that using the difference specification reduces estimation bias and significantly improves confidence interval coverage. These improvements increase for more persistent processes, the longer the time period of interest, and the smaller the sample size is.

Citation: Piger, J., and T. Stockwell. 2025. "Differences From Differencing: Should Local Projections With Observed Shocks Be Estimated in Levels or Differences?." *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 759–787. https://doi.org/10.1002/jae.70003.

Opportunity Zones and the Importance of Banks in the Community

This study explores whether a U.S. government program designed to encourage investment in low-income areas actually helps local businesses and communities. The program, created under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017, gives tax benefits to investors who put money into selected neighborhoods called Opportunity Zones. The authors examine what happens to small business lending and bank activity in these areas by comparing them to similar neighborhoods that were eligible but not selected. They find that lending to small businesses increases after a neighborhood becomes an Opportunity Zone, but the effect is modest. On average, each area sees about $400,000 more in loans, which is roughly $100 per resident, along with a small increase in the number of loans. This suggests that the program does help bring more financial support to local businesses.

The paper also shows that bank deposits increase by about 6–10% in these areas, which is a sign of stronger local economic activity. In simple terms, more money is flowing into and staying within these communities. The results remain consistent even after accounting for other factors, such as pandemic-related support programs like the Paycheck Protection Program. Overall, the study highlights that banks play an important role in helping these policies work by providing loans and supporting local businesses. While Opportunity Zones do bring some positive changes, the improvements are gradual and vary across locations.

Yeosong Yoon
Assistant Professor, Finance

Citation: Hartarska, Valentina, Jitka Hilliard, and Yeosong Yoon. "Opportunity Zones and the Importance of Banks in the Community." *Journal of Financial Services Research* (2025)

Cognitive Impacts of Explainable AI in Cybersecurity Incident Response: Challenges and Propositions

Chen Zhong
Assistant Professor, Information and Technology Management

Alper Yayla
Professor, Information and Technology Management

When a company's systems are breached, cybersecurity analysts race to investigate, sifting through thousands of automated alerts, correlating clues across systems, and piecing together how an attack unfolded, all under extreme time pressure. Organizations have increasingly turned to artificial intelligence to help manage this workload. But AI systems are often "black boxes," delivering decisions without explanations. Explainable AI, or XAI, was developed to address this, showing analysts why the AI flagged a threat, not just that it did.

Chen Zhong and Alper Yayla set out to understand whether these explanations actually help analysts do their jobs better. Using a two-study approach, the researchers first interviewed 18 working cybersecurity professionals about their cognitive challenges and expectations for AI. They then observed six analysts completing a live investigation task using a custom AI-powered dashboard that provided real-time explanations for each alert. What they found was surprising: while analysts appreciated having explanations, those same explanations sometimes made the job harder — leading analysts down unproductive paths and, in some cases, causing them to over-rely on the AI rather than applying their own expertise.

The study concludes with six concrete design principles for how AI tools in cybersecurity — and beyond — should be built. The core insight is that transparency alone is not enough; when and how an explanation is delivered matters just as much as what it says. These findings have implications for any organization deploying AI to support expert decision-making under pressure.

Citation: Zhong, C., & Yayla, A. (2025). Cognitive Impacts of Explainable AI in Cybersecurity Incident Response: Challenges and Propositions. Information Systems Frontiers, 1-23.

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