Researcher Profile

An Interview with Russell James, JD, Ph.D., CFP®

Russell James is a professor and the CH Foundation Chair in Personal Financial Planning in the Department of Personal Financial Planning at Texas Tech University, where he is also the Director of Graduate Studies in Charitable Financial Planning. His research is focused on encouraging generosity and satisfaction in financial decision-making.

Keywords: James; financial planning; charitable financial planning; financial therapy

Q. Tell us a bit about yourself.

A. I grew up in Kansas City, Missouri and attended the University of Missouri (MU) for undergraduate (B.A., Economics) and graduate school (Ph.D., Consumer & Family Economics). Prior to completing a Ph.D., I attended law school at MU. After law school, I spent several years as a practicing estate planning attorney and six years as the Director of Planned Giving for a small residential college (Central Christian College, Moberly, Missouri). After taking a brief sabbatical to accelerate the completion of my Ph.D., I was asked by the board of Central Christian College to serve as president of the college, which I did for 5 ½ years. Since then, my career has focused on research and academics. Prior to joining the faculty at Texas Tech University where I am currently a professor, I was a faculty member at the University of Georgia.

Q. Define what you do professionally.

A. I am a professor in the Department of Personal Financial Planning at Texas Tech University. I teach courses related to charitable financial planning as well as a course on behavioral finance. My research focuses on financial decision-making, primarily in the area

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of charitable decision-making. Within this specialty my most common topics relate to charitable bequest decision-making. My primary research methodologies are econometric analysis of large datasets and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).

Q. What activities encompass your professional responsibilities?

A. Standard professor stuff: teaching, research, service.

Q. How long have you been engaged in your professional activity?

A. I started as an estate planning attorney and director of Planned Giving in 1994. My experience related to my current focus on bequest giving research goes back at least that far.

Q. What led you to your professional calling?

A. My current focus is driven by I Timothy 6:18 "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share."

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Q. How are you compensated?

A. As a salaried professor.

Q. Do you work alone or do you have a team? Please explain.

A. I work with others on specific projects where we have common interests. I have been fortunate to work with talented co-authors and researchers from the U.S., Europe, and Australia.

Q. What theoretical framework guides your work when dealing with clients and/or conducting research (e.g., some practitioners use a solution-focused theoretical framework while others are more eclectic)?

A. Eclectic theory is useful only to the extent that it successfully predicts outcomes (in this case, human behavior), but is often too closely defended for its inherent complexity and beauty. As a researcher who publishes in a wide variety of fields (e.g., economics, psychology, marketing, sociology, public administration, etc.), I have to remain open to those models held dear by various groups.

Q. What needs to happen so that 10 years from now we can say that financial therapy is a respected field of study?

A. More full-time faculty positions with this focus.

Q. What benefits can the Financial Therapy Association provide to others doing work that is similar to your professional activities?

A. The annual conference is a great opportunity to gain exposure to a wide variety of approaches.

Q. If others are interested in finding out more about you personally and professionally, where can they obtain this information?

A. Those who are interested in learning about my work and graduate studies in charitable financial planning can visit: www.EncourageGenerosity.com.

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