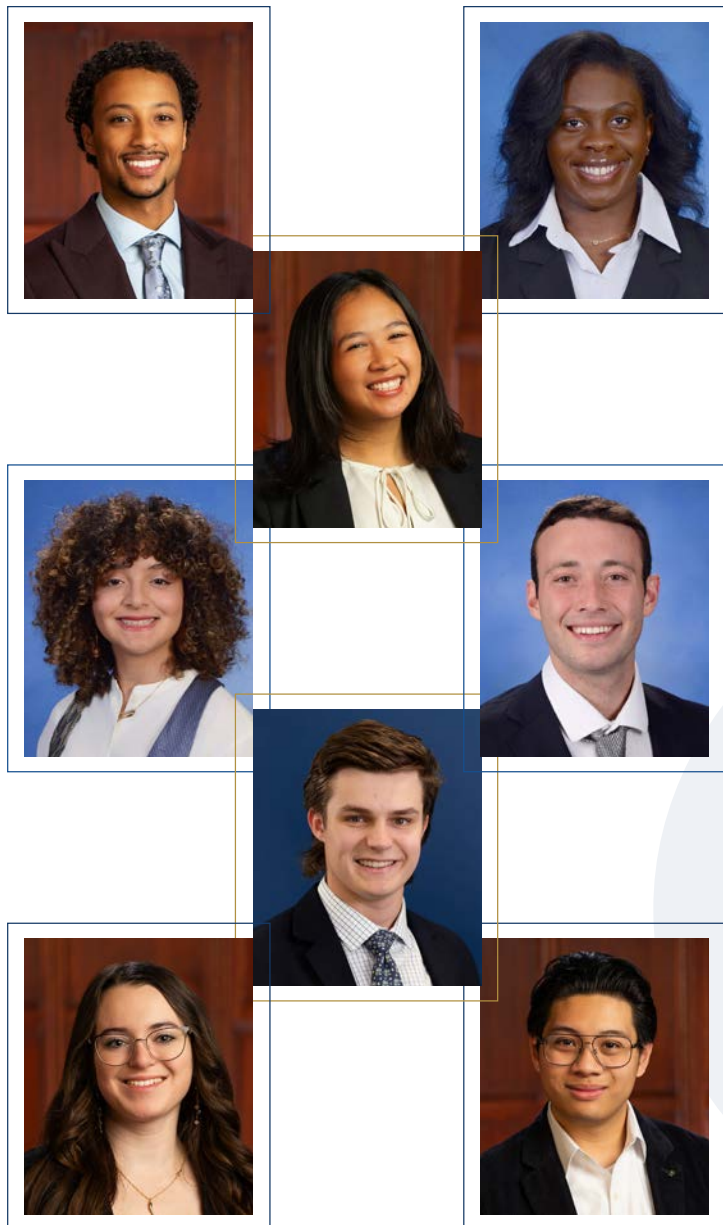




UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

ARTS & LETTERS



2026

SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

Study everything. Do anything.SM

*Dear colleagues, students, and friends,*

I'm delighted to present this College of Arts & Letters book, which exhibits 206 yearlong projects completed by 203 seniors. These original works of research and creativity showcase the ingenuity and initiative of the Class of 2026.

Every senior thesis project begins with a question, and the learning experience is about more than just seeking an answer. It's about determining what a good question is and why the student feels compelled to ask it — then, from that first spark of curiosity, they develop an understanding of why it's important, and what unique answers they can provide.

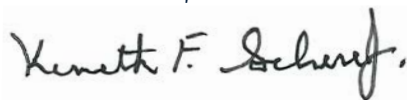
In their theses highlighted in this book, the Class of 2026 asked questions like "How does artificial intelligence shape democratic discourse?" and "Does raising pay keep teachers in the classroom?" Their wonderings ranged from "Can young actors successfully challenge Hollywood norms?" to "What is self-deception?"

In seeking answers to their questions, Arts & Letters students learn to be self-starters, channeling their curiosity as they pursue and manage a massive undertaking from start to finish. It's something they learn in all of their Arts & Letters classes, but there's nothing like a senior thesis when it comes to putting creativity into practice, driven by the ambition a great question requires.

No matter the question, each senior thesis is an act of discovery that is worthwhile every step of the way. I applaud the many faculty members who generously shared their expertise and time to make the enriching experiences described in this book possible.

And to the Class of 2026, I am so proud of all you have accomplished and grateful for your many contributions to the College and our University. I wish each of you blessings as you continue to ask important questions.

In Notre Dame,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth F. Scheve".

Kenneth Scheve

I.A. O'Shaughnessy Dean, College of Arts & Letters



2026

SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

**Justin Aguiar**

Hometown: Miami, Florida

- Majors: Political Science and Marketing
- Advisor: Susan Rosato

Connected Online, Acting Alone: The Influence of Social Media on Lone-Wolf Terrorism

This thesis examines the role of social media and the internet in the rise of lone-wolf terrorist attacks. As online platforms have expanded, terrorist organizations have increasingly used them to disseminate propaganda to broader audiences. Through a qualitative analysis of post-9/11 cases in the United States, this study evaluates how individuals are radicalized across different groups, media channels, and contextual factors. The findings suggest that exposure to online propaganda contributes to radicalization among individuals who fit certain demographic profiles and possess underlying domestic political grievances, ultimately motivating them to carry out lone-wolf attacks.



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**Nicole Aguirre**

Hometown: Joliet, Illinois

- Major: Philosophy
- Supplementary Major: Education, Schooling, and Society
- Advisor: Steven Alvarado

Beyond Student Background: Explaining Differences in Advanced Placement Success across Indiana High Schools

Access to higher education in the United States remains unequal despite programs like the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) initiative. In Indiana, economically disadvantaged students make up 47% of the student population but only 18.8% of AP participants, revealing gaps in access. Performance disparities also persist, with only 57% of exams earning passing scores. This study examines whether AP performance differs among students with similar backgrounds and whether school-level factors explain variation using 10 years of Indiana Department of Education data.



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**Adam Akan**

Hometown: Dyer, Indiana

- Majors: Political Science and Global Affairs
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Daniel Lindley

Reevaluating the 'Model Partner': How Islam Has Impacted U.S.-Turkish Bilateral Security Relations

Turkey has long stood as a crucial strategic partner in securing American foreign interests abroad. However, recent decades have seen the U.S.-Turkish bilateral security relationship gradually shift in nature. Little existing research has explored how Islam may be contributing to these shifts. This project gathers and examines hundreds of primary source documents across four principal case studies as it seeks to establish a connection for how Islamic elements have exerted effects on this critical partnership. In doing so, it reaches an empirically based conclusion that rejects many observers' preconceived notions of Islam's role.



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**Madelyn Alford**

Hometown: Benton Harbor, Michigan

- Major: American Studies
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Jennifer Huynh

Jury-Mandering: How the American Jury System Limits (In)justice

This thesis examines how the American jury system both advances and constrains justice through its structure and implementation. Although juries are meant to reflect a fair cross section of the community, selection processes often distort who serves. The project proceeds in three parts: a historical analysis of the jury system; qualitative fieldwork in St. Joseph County, Indiana, examining jury selection in practice; and a comparative analysis of jury policies across all 50 states. It argues that despite shared constitutional foundations, local practices shape outcomes, ultimately filtering community representation and raising concerns about equity and representativeness.



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**Emma Allen**

Hometown: Fairfax, Virginia

- Majors: Political Science and Sociology
- Minor: Education, Schooling, and Society
- Advisor: Anna Haskins

Selection or Protection?: Exploring Impacts of Adolescent Extracurricular Participation on Early Adulthood Criminal Justice Contact

This project examines whether participation in school-based extracurricular activities during adolescence influences the likelihood of criminal justice contact in early adulthood. Using longitudinal data from the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study, it analyzes how activity participation at age 15 relates to police contact by age 22. While initial findings suggest extracurriculars may reduce arrests, these effects disappear after accounting for demographic, socioeconomic, and early behavioral factors. This study argues that extracurricular participation alone is not a protective factor and instead emphasizes the importance of addressing broader structural inequalities and early-life conditions as the core to shape life outcomes.



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**Annabelle Alton**

Hometown: New York City, New York

- Major: Sociology
- Supplementary Major: Global Affairs
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Kevin Christiano

Israel's 'Constitutional Revolution' and 'Dignity': An Analysis of *The Jerusalem Post* Archives

This project examines how conceptions of "dignity" within Israeli and international legal frameworks transformed society throughout the 1980s and 1990s. By analyzing the use of "dignity" in *The Jerusalem Post* archives, I examine how Israel's constitutional revolution reshaped public discourse and social order.



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**Maximilian Amend**

Hometown: San Jose, California

- Major: English
- Minor: Education, Schooling, and Society
- Advisor: Sara Marcus

Exhausted Love: Queer Depletion in James Baldwin's *Another Country*

This thesis introduces “queer depletion,” a framework for understanding the cumulative exhaustion produced when queer subjects sustain the relational worlds of others through continuous self-expenditure. Engaging Leo Bersani, Elizabeth Freeman, Lee Edelman, and Frank Wilderson III, it argues that James Baldwin's *Another Country* exposes the limits of both antisocial refusal and reparative kinship. Through Rufus Scott, Baldwin reveals how racialized masculinity and intimacy function as sites of extraction. His death marks the terminal point of depletion, where the accumulated labor of performance, healing, and belonging renders selfhood unsustainable.



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**Mason Atwell**

Hometown: Evergreen, Colorado

- Majors: Economics and History
- Advisor: Darren Dochuk

When It Happened Here: Antisemitism and Resistance in 1930s Los Angeles

In the years leading up to World War II, Los Angeles saw an influx of Midwestern Christians, Eastern European Jews, and German immigrants, creating conditions where antisemitism would spread. Groups like the Friends of New Germany and the Silver Legion targeted Jewish communities and planned for threatening pogroms across the city. In response, Jews organized a spy network to counter threats and prevent violence. Today, antisemitism is rising across the political left and right. The Anti-Defamation League reports a 900% increase in incidents over the past decade, with recent attacks underscoring a troubling normalization. A sanitized view of American history has obscured this legacy, weakening accountability and honest engagement.



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**Theo Austin**

Hometown: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

- Majors: Philosophy and Theology
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: Nicholas Lombardo

Material Continuity: A Vision for Resurrected Bodies

"There is no article of the Christian faith which has encountered such contradiction as that of the resurrection of the flesh." Christian belief in the resurrection necessitates a material and bodily resurrection, rather than a mere immortality of the soul. This thesis argues primarily for complete material continuity between the remains of an individual in their death and their body that is resurrected. Secondly, this thesis argues for a particular vision of resurrected bodies as incorruptible and impassible. Finally, this thesis presents recommendations on to the proper treatment of bodies, both of the saints and all the faithful departed, on the basis of the system presented.



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**Tess Barrett**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Advisor: Robert Goulding

'We Must Cultivate Our Garden': On the Wisdom of *Candide's* Final Charge

In my thesis, I explore the meaning of "cultivating one's garden," a phrase that occurs in the final chapter of Voltaire's *Candide*, and ask whether it satisfactorily addresses the problem of evil around which the novel is framed. I answer this question by examining how the novel builds toward the conclusion, ultimately arguing that Voltaire acknowledges the power of small acts of care throughout the novel, implying an optimistic and service-oriented reading of the garden.



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**Carlos Basurto Martinez**

Hometown: Monterrey, Nuevo León,
Mexico

- Majors: Computer Science and
Philosophy
- Advisor: Edward Elliott

The Untenable Cost of the Behaviorist Account of Decision Theory

Decision theory is a model of rational human behavior. The account under which decision theory is interpreted will determine the character of its claims, modifying the implications of the model. One of the dominant readings, the behaviorist account, presents an untenable cost by sacrificing the intuitive basis necessary for the aims of decision theory. This paper argues the behaviorist account fails to provide the rich descriptive and normative accuracy necessary to capture meaningful agentic behavior. It contends instead that a functionalist account is a superior alternative, capturing fundamental commitments of folk psychology constitutive of agency required for descriptive and normative claims without losing theoretical prowess.



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**Jalisa Batemon**

Hometown: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

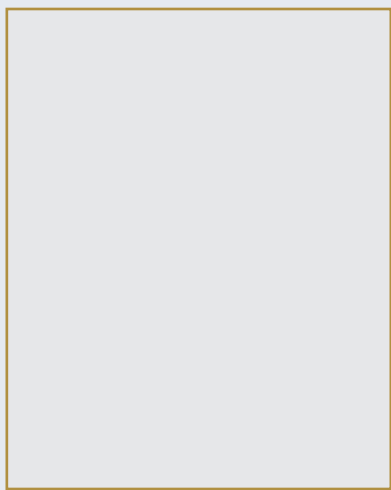
- Major: Sociology
- Supplementary Major: Africana Studies
- Advisor: Maria McKenna

There is No University without 'U': The Importance of Representation, Literacy, and Belonging for Black Students Navigating PWIs

This project explores the role of representation in children's literature and how it shapes literacy engagement, identity development, and educational aspirations among Black and Brown youth. Grounded in critical race theory and arts-based research, it combines critical examination with an original children's book, *Dream Goes to College*, which reflects my journey as a young Black woman navigating higher education at a predominantly white institution (PWI). By addressing themes of imposter syndrome, access to opportunity, and belonging, this project demonstrates how culturally relevant literature can build confidence, deepen literacy engagement, and help young readers imagine broader possibilities for their futures.



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**Charlie Battendieri
Suplicy Mason**

Hometown: São Paulo, Brazil

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Korean and Theology
- Advisor: Emma Schmidt

Participation or Mediation: Democracy in the Age of Digital Populism

The rise of social media in the 21st century has reshaped how citizens throughout the world interact with political information. Scholars have produced a body of research on digital populism, disagreeing about whether these new forms of communication ultimately strengthen or undermine democracy. I argue that this conflict is a result of not empirical findings that are inconclusive but rather the use of different standards and definitions of democracy, which are rooted in long-standing theoretical traditions. These findings suggest that disagreements over digital populism reflect deeper, unresolved questions about the nature of democracy itself.



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**Ava Batz**

Hometown: Glen Ellyn, Illinois

- Major: Psychology
- Minor: Gender Studies
- Advisor: Caitlin Clements

Measuring Effort in Preschoolers with a Novel Progressive Ratio Task

Progressive ratio tasks (PRTs) can feasibly measure effort in animals and adults. However, minimal research has been conducted regarding child-friendly PRTs. The present study examined a novel PRT, pressMORE, designed to be developmentally appropriate for children of varying ages and support needs. Ninety-eight participants aged 3-5 years successfully completed two rounds of pressMORE. Five minute press, the number of presses in the first five minutes of the session, was significantly correlated with pressMORE outcome variables, consistent with prior research. This research may assist in clarifying the mechanisms underlying effort and reward progressing in both neurotypical and neurodivergent children.



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**Sofia Benigno**

Hometown: Rancho Cucamonga,
California

- Majors: Neuroscience and Behavior and Theology
- Advisor: Kimberly Belcher

***For Eden*: Integrated Musicianship as a Theological Approach to Understanding Sacramentality in Song**

This thesis examines the musician's vocation to create sacramental song in the framework of collaborative Catholic praise-and-worship album *For Eden*. An original creative endeavor undertaken in communion, *For Eden* infuses powerful contemporary Christian music with rich theological truths, explicitly bringing to life the sacraments — the seven core vantage points of divine grace — to a younger Catholic audience. Co-author Thomas Mazzurana and I present an overview of musicianship as vocational, incarnational, and sacramental; define the inherent sacramentality of music as a whole; and analyze how the lyricism and musical composition of each of our seven songs capture the theological essence of each sacrament.



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**Evan Birks**

Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

- Major: Classics (Concentration in Latin)
- Supplementary Major: Medieval Studies
- Minor: History
- Advisor: Brian Krostenko

The Guise of Caelius: An Investigation of Caelius in Cicero's Letters

Marcus Caelius Rufus, a Roman politician from the first century B.C.E., is often derided for his personal character and colloquial Latin. He worked alongside the orator and politician Marcus Tullius Cicero, and the two exchanged 27 letters over the course of 51-49 B.C.E., our greatest evidence of Caelius's extant writings. This project analyzes Caelius's language in the letters under a sociolinguistic model, understanding them not as a mark of his character or poor writing but as an intentional tool to negotiate his political relationship with Cicero, especially when asking for favors. Finally, it compares Caelius's and Cicero's methods in the letters, demonstrating how the two are alike in their techniques, not dichotomously opposed.



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**Elizabeth Borowiak**

Hometown: Apex, North Carolina

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Constitutional Studies and French
- Advisor: James Curry

Polarization in 280 Characters: Extreme Congressional Position-Taking on Twitter, 2020-22

Over 1 million tweets were posted by members of the 116th and 117th Congresses between Jan. 1, 2020, and June 30, 2022. Focusing on five policy areas — abortion, guns, immigration, health care, and climate and energy — representatives issued over 75,000 issue-specific posts in the timeframe that encapsulates the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 presidential election, and the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Using quantitative analysis of textual data in R, this project seeks to find patterns among members of the House of Representatives in extreme position-taking on social media through the lenses of political parties and their leadership, gender, and time.



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**Tess Brennan**

Hometown: Wheaton, Illinois

- Major: Psychology
- Minors: Irish Studies and Science, Technology, and Values
- Advisor: Dawn Gondoli

From Flying Under the Radar to Seeking Help: Exploring the Motivators and Outcomes of College Students Recently Diagnosed with ADHD

Research on attention-deficit disorder (ADHD) has found the impairments and experiences differ for individuals diagnosed later in life compared to those diagnosed in childhood or early adolescence. However, individuals who are initially diagnosed with ADHD while attending college have not been specifically studied. Through semi-structured interviews, this study investigated the experiences of college students who were first diagnosed with ADHD while in college, focusing on the factors that motivated them to seek a diagnosis, their perceived quality of life before and after diagnosis, and the impact of receiving a formal diagnosis on their academic, social, and psychological functioning.



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Matthew Broder

Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri

- Major: Neuroscience and Behavior (College of Science)
- Supplementary Major: Classics
- Advisors: Luca Grillo and Nancy Michael

(Num) Senectus Ipsa Morbus?: Roman Comedy and Cognitive Aging in Cicero's Cato Maior De Senectute

Old age is a biological reality but also a cultural role. My thesis examines how Cicero's *De Senectute* responds to ancient anxieties about aging by directly challenging the comic figure of the *senex*, or old man, in Roman comedy, especially in Plautus and Terence. Against this familiar caricature of the old man as weak and foolish, Cicero offers a vision of old age that is still marked by dignity and purpose. By placing these contrasting literary portrayals in conversation with modern neuroscience and gerontology, particularly research into cognitive aging, dementia, and experience-dependent plasticity, I explore how the process of aging is shaped not only by decline, but also by environment, adaptation, and cultural expectations.



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**Jennifer Cadet**

Hometown: Florence, Kentucky

- Major: Sociology
- Minors: Latino Studies and Business Economics
- Advisor: Karen Richman

Beyond Tradition: The Konbit as an Adaptable Logic for Survival and Innovation in Modern Haiti

My thesis examines the Haitian Konbit cooperative labor system amid ongoing national crises. The research assesses whether this practice is an outdated practice or a flexible survival strategy. I conducted remote interviews with members of the U.S. Haitian diaspora, which revealed shifting labor values and changing economic roles. The findings show that extreme violence and severe resource shortages threaten physical agriculture, but the core ethic of *tet ansanm* endures. This solidarity has developed into transnational survival strategies. Aid organizations need to move away from top-down development models that foster dependency and instead incorporate indigenous Haitian mutual aid frameworks to achieve sustainability.



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**Will Calder**

Hometown: Lenoir City, Tennessee

- Majors: Arabic and Political Science
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Susan Rosato

When States Normalize: A Theory of Converging Incentives in International Relations

This thesis argues that states normalize relations when economic incentives, diplomatic assurances, and shared threat perceptions converge to make cooperation more beneficial than continued hostility. The thesis defines normalization as a multidimensional and gradual process measured across diplomatic, economic, security, and societal domains. Through a comparative analysis of the Abraham Accords, U.S.-Vietnam, and U.S.-China, the thesis demonstrates how variation in the intensity and alignment of these variables explains both the timing and depth of normalization. The findings show that high convergence accelerates normalization, while uneven or lower-intensity variables prolong the process but can still produce eventual cooperation.



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**Vincent Calzante**

Hometown: Addison, Illinois

- Majors: Italian and Applied & Computational Mathematics & Statistics
- Minor: Actuarial Science
- Advisor: Sara Boezio

Depicting Italian America(s): Pride and Shame in Italian Travel Writing

My thesis examines how early 20th-century Italian travel writers interpreted Italian immigrant communities in North and South America. Focusing on Alberto Pecorini's *Gli Americani nella vita moderna osservati da un Italiano* (1909) and Gina Lombroso's *Nell'America Meridionale* (1908), I analyze how travel writing became a tool for negotiating Italy's national image after the Unification of 1861. I argue that these authors interpret migrant communities through the lens of the North-South divide that shaped Italy itself, where a modern, "European" Italy is defined in contrast to the marginalized and "backward" South. In the transatlantic context, these tensions are reworked, offering a new perspective on Italy's internal divisions.



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**Jaclyn Camp**

Hometown: Carol Stream, Illinois

- Majors: English (Concentration in Creative Writing) and Spanish
- Advisor: Xavier Navarro Aquino

Blue Licorice

My project is a script adaptation of a short story I wrote sophomore year. I have transformed the plot from a short narrative, to the length of a feature film. In addition to this work, I have mastered set designs, shot lists, and character sketches.



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**Gabrielle Canzoniero**

Hometown: Sparta, New Jersey

- Major: Art History
- Supplementary Major: Education, Schooling, and Society
- Advisor: Elyse Speaks

The Simply Strange and Strangely Simple Facets of Gertrude Abercrombie

Gertrude Abercrombie was a Surrealist artist in Chicago and therefore presented with a unique opportunity to benefit from a variety of different influences. She involved herself fully in the blossoming bop music scene and its community, becoming one with artists who practiced mediums different from her own. She additionally could express her struggles with conventional life because she was in a city that allowed for deviation from the norm. Further, she could interact with so many artists who experienced similar frustrations and successes in the Midwestern art scene, relying on them as not only artistic collaborators, but as true friends. Chicago served not only as Abercrombie's home, but as her connection to her entire sphere of influence.



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**PJ Carroll**

Hometown: Traverse City, Michigan

- Majors: Program of Liberal Studies and Mechanical Engineering
- Advisor: Matthew Rickard

Expansion of Intuition: An Experiential Examination of Physical Expertise under Standards of Baruch Spinoza's Third Kind of Knowledge

Baruch Spinoza's "Ethics" identifies intuitive knowledge as a pathway to unification with God or nature. This state of unification has been central to historical debate surrounding "Ethics" but has thus far been understood solely in the context of academic intuitive knowledge. This project seeks to expand the current understanding of Spinoza's definition of intuition, and therefore the understanding of what makes unification with God possible. The project draws on textual evidence and interviews with mathematicians and athletes, including free ride skiers, surfers, and ballerinas. This expansion offers new ground for understanding Spinozan intuition and new significance for physical expertise.



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**Sarah-Jane Carten**

Hometown: Derry, Ireland

- Majors: English and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: Matthew Payne

Mousetrap: A *Severance* Speculative Screenplay

This thesis consists of an original, speculative screenplay for the Apple TV series *Severance*. Positioned as a mid-to-late episode in the upcoming third season, this project expands upon the show's existing mythology, providing exposition that explores protagonist Helena Eagan's upbringing and relationship with her father.

In shifting focus to the outside world, this script unveils how the trauma of Lumon transcends the physical office, showing the outie version of Helena reconciling with Mark Scout and, individually, the severed parts of themselves. "Mousetrap" delves into questions of autonomy and how a person never really leaves Lumon, nor does it leave them.



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**Annie Chen**

Hometown: Rochester, Minnesota

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Minor: Chinese
- Advisor: Paul Ocobock

Motivations to Mobilization: Adaptive and Community-Driven Climate Justice Advocacy in Minnesota

Minnesotans, known for their reverence to the natural environment, led the environmental movement in the late 1900s. Since then, calls for environmental justice have only risen. Minnesota, as the headwaters of vast wetland systems, plays a crucial role in shaping nationwide commitments to land and water stewardship.

The goal of this paper is to reflect on how Minnesota's history and current political landscape shape climate justice activism. In particular, activists remain in a high-effort, low-yield cycle, as sustained mobilization rarely translates into proportional gains. This inspires the central research question: What motivates Minnesotans to continue fighting for climate justice despite the challenges and limited gains they achieve?



**Chloe Chun**

Hometown: North Andover,
Massachusetts

- Major: Psychology
- Minors: Business Economics
and Chinese
- Advisor: Kathleen Bergman

Maternal Self-Esteem in the Digital Age: A Key Psychological Mediator between Social Media Use and Mother-Child Emotional Relationships

The digital age is reshaping parenting, creating new challenges for first-time mothers' identity and emotional well-being. Maternal mental health affects children's emotional development, yet self-esteem, often destabilized by online comparison, is understudied. This study argues digital culture increases self-evaluative pressure, reducing emotional availability vital for children's empathy and regulation. Using attachment and emotional availability frameworks, it views maternal self-esteem as relational and dynamic. Integrating digital culture, ecological systems, and social learning theories, it shows how online comparison shapes maternal identity and calls for interventions focused on digital literacy and mental health support.



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**Nick Cichoski**

Hometown: Maple Grove, Minnesota

- Majors: Computer Science and Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics)
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Christopher Mills

The Effect of Salary on Teacher Retention

Does raising pay keep teachers in the classroom? High-quality teachers are instrumental in generating positive student outcomes. However, retaining teachers remains a challenge, particularly in disadvantaged schools. My research evaluates the impact of statewide salary increases on turnover rates. Using event study and instrumental variables models, I establish an upper-bound estimate for how effectively higher wages can keep teachers in classrooms.



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**Martha Cleary**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Majors: Program of Liberal Studies and Theology
- Advisor: Jennifer Newsome Martin

Within These Walls: The Basilica of San Clemente as a Testament to Living Theological Tradition

In this thesis, I put forward a theological account of the development of tradition as an integrated outpouring of the revelation of Christ in and through the Church. I then turn to the Basilica of San Clemente as a testament to this revelation as it unfolds in a particular time and place. I pay particular attention to the felt experience of aesthetic continuity and spiritual unity present within the living church/Church, as evident in its art, architecture, and liturgies. With this hermeneutical lens, San Clemente thus becomes a concrete testament to, and even a test case for, an intuited, embodied, lived sense of the tradition as it is experienced in the human particulars of the faithful who have prayed within its walls.



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**Annie Coffey**

Hometown: Omaha, Nebraska

- Major: Psychology
- Advisor: Kaylin Hill

Bailey's Family Guide: Supporting Family Participation in Psychophysiological Research

The present study evaluated *Bailey's First EEG: A Family Guide* as a tool to support caregiver understanding, reduce anxiety, and facilitate informed decision-making about child participation in EEG research. Quantitative and qualitative results suggest that while the guide statistically significantly improved caregivers' perceived familiarity with EEG and helped prevent increases in anxiety, it did not statistically significantly increase conceptual knowledge or willingness to enroll. These findings indicate that *Bailey's Family Guide* is helpful, but a more comprehensive communication approach may be needed to influence caregiver enrollment decisions.



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**Rocío Colón Cotto**

Hometown: San Juan, Puerto Rico

- Majors: Art History and Chinese
- Advisor: Elyse Speaks

Uncovering a Noble Past: Examining a 16th-Century Carta Ejecutoria de Hidalguía

Cartas Ejecutorias de Hidalguía are among the most undervalued types of illuminated manuscripts. Issued by the Spanish Crown, these unique certificates of nobility legitimized an individual's noble status and served as a visual declaration of hidalgo identity. Despite their historical and artistic significance, Spanish *Cartas Ejecutorias* remain understudied. This project in art conservation examines a *Carta* from Notre Dame's Rare Books and Special Collections. Drawing on evidence from visual analysis, X-ray fluorescence, and energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy, the project explores the significance of the manuscript's iconography and materiality. Its findings may serve as an aid for future conservation treatments.



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**Lizbeth Cordova Lopez**

Hometown: Sylmar, California

- Major: Psychology
- Supplementary Major: Education, Schooling, and Society
- Advisors: Elizabeth Shewark and Andrea Christensen

Academic Resilience in Context: The Joint Impact of Parent and School Involvement on Youth Academic Resilience

Academic resilience is the ability of youth to achieve success despite socioeconomic challenges like neighborhood deprivation and family poverty. This study uses longitudinal data from the Adolescent Brain and Cognitive Development Study to examine the bridge between home support and student outcomes. Through structural equation modeling, the research analyzes how parental involvement at age 11 influences academic resilience at age 16. Findings reveal that early parental support significantly increases school involvement by age 15, which in turn drives academic success. This highlights the middle school transition as a critical window for fostering the family-school partnerships necessary for long-term thriving.



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**Joseph Cresson**

Hometown: Madisonville, Louisiana

- Majors: Theology and Finance
- Advisor: Daniel Machiela

Deuteronomy and the Two Joshuas: An Examination of Divinely Commanded Violence

In the book of Joshua, God leads Israel in conquering the land of Canaan. The Israelites take city after city, annihilating the citizens of each according to God's command in Deuteronomy 20:16, "You must not let anything that breathes remain alive." This violence has inspired a long and complicated reception history. Some readers understood Joshua's violence symbolically, while others took it as a historical precedent that could justify warfare. This thesis explores Joshua's literary and historical context alongside patristic, rabbinic, and modern interpretive methods to understand how the book of Joshua should be read today.



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**Kaden Cunningham**

Hometown: Wheeling, West Virginia

- Major: Anthropology
- Minor: Business Economics
- Advisor: Catherine Bolten

Root and Ridge: Kinship, Memory, and the Landscape of West Virginia

Central Appalachia has long functioned as an internal extraction colony, a region where the economic reliance on natural resources actively degrades the physical and social landscape. The impact of this structural violence and state neglect can be analyzed through the oral histories of residents who navigate the impossible paradox of maintaining kinship with a land that simultaneously sustains and wounds them. These ethnographic accounts are beneficial for redefining rural endurance beyond traditional narratives of victimhood or urban flight. This project uses testimonies from across the state, culminating in the catastrophic 2025 flooding, to explore “holding ground” and solidarity economics as generative strategies for resilience.



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**Cade Czarnecki**

Hometown: Cincinnati, Ohio

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Advisor: Jim Sullivan

Granting an Edge: The Employment Effects of Politically Driven Federal Dollars

I demonstrate that federal dollars allocated to states according to executive branch discretion can produce inequitable employment effects. I construct a novel metric for a state's electoral significance using both the margin of victory in its most recent presidential election and the number of electoral votes it holds. I then use this measure as an instrument in an IV model to examine the extent to which a predicted increase in federal project grant dollars owing to a state's electoral significance causally influences state-level employment. My results indicate that a 10% increase in discretionary project grant funding, driven by electoral significance, leads to a 7.36% increase in employment within a state.



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**Rachel DeGaugh**

Hometown: Casper, Wyoming

- Majors: Spanish and Global Affairs
- Advisor: Maria Rosa Olivera-Williams

Cuidado, Discapacidad y Fragilidad Democrática: Mujeres con Discapacidad en Chile Cuida y la Política Comparada del Cuidado en el Cono Sur

This thesis examines how Chile's Chile Cuida National Care System addresses inequalities affecting women with disabilities in post-authoritarian Chile. The project analyzes government policy documents and NGO reports to evaluate recognition of care work, representation of women with disabilities as caregivers and care recipients, and state implementation capacity. Select comparisons with Uruguay and Argentina provide regional context for care policy development. By situating Chile Cuida within broader Latin American care reforms, this study explores how contemporary democracies institutionalize care and respond to longstanding gender and disability inequalities.



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**Carolyn Dell**

Hometown: Boerne, Texas

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre
- Minor: Musical Theatre
- Advisor: Matthew Hawkins

The Art of Stage Management

Stage management is both a job and an art form. By reflecting on my experience at Notre Dame within the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre, I have written and performed a one-woman show about how stage management has impacted my social, academic, and personal life. I use this show to bring light to the complexities of an underrepresented field in the theatrical community at Notre Dame. Additionally, I make use of lights, sound, projection, and audience interaction to break the traditional mold of live performance to create an experimental exploration of the self.



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**Amanda Dempson**

Hometown: Brookfield, Connecticut

- Major: English (Concentration in Creative Writing)
- Minors: Chinese and Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy
- Advisor: Azareen Van Der Vliet Oloomi

Memory of the Living

Memory of the Living is a first-person narrative following a young biracial woman as she navigates home, identity, and her place within a predominately white town. It rests on the idea that nothing exists in isolation — that who we are is shaped by where we come from and what we inherit, even when we don't fully understand or have access to our past. Throughout the project, readers brush up against themes of generational trauma and encounter both the subtle and systematic echoes of violence that emerge from the racial history of the United States. This story asks us to consider what we owe to those who came before us and what we owe to ourselves, calling into question the ways in which our biases and binaries perpetuate systems of oppression.



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**Eric Derr**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Majors: French and Program of Liberal Studies
- Minor: Chinese
- Advisor: Joseph Rosenberg

Constructive Interference: Allusion, Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,' and French Political Identity

Authors living across various geographies and centuries have used Ovid's "The Metamorphoses" to levy their own critiques and commentaries on the state or regime under which they live. Within France, references to and usage of "The Metamorphoses" and the figure of Ovid have continued despite dramatic changes in its political systems. This project analyses Pierre de Ronsard's 16th-century "Metamorphoses"-laden sonnets, Eugène Delacroix's 19th-century paintings with Ovid as subject and inspiration, and Jean Cocteau's 20th-century adaptations of Orpheus to determine how Ovid and "The Metamorphoses" have been used to mediate the political identity of the artist across various periods of French history.



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**Elena Ding**

Hometown: San Jose, California

- Majors: Philosophy and Physics
- Advisor: Jeff Speaks

Propositions Aren't Everything: Against the Propositional Attitude Thesis

"Intentional," in the philosophical usage of the word, names the property of being about something. Mental states are distinguished by virtue of their intentionality. The state one is in when thinking about the Pythagorean theorem is about the Pythagorean theorem. Paradigmatic intentional mental states, like belief and desire, were regarded, fundamentally, as attitudes toward propositions. Call the claim that all intentional mental states are propositional attitudes the propositional attitude thesis. Why did the propositional attitude thesis become a tacit assumption of many contemporary philosophers? Why might one want it to be true? And finally, is it true? These are the questions that I investigate in this essay.



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**Matthew Dirlam**

Hometown: Gaithersburg, Maryland

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Advisor: Richard Clark

When Risk Invites Engagement: Geopolitical Counterbalancing in Sovereign Debt Markets

This thesis investigates why Western nations expand their financial presence in countries where Chinese lending has increased sovereign risk, defying traditional models of economic caution. I argue that Western creditors prioritize geopolitical counterbalancing over financial discipline when facing rival influence. I identify a sign reversal in Western behavior: While aid typically retreats from debt-distressed environments, it strategically surges when those countries are exposed to Chinese finance. This shift demonstrates how global competition has transformed sovereign debt into a primary instrument of geopolitical contestation.



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**Amy Dorgan**

Hometown: Park Ridge, Illinois

- Majors: Computer Science and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisors: Pam Wojcik and Darlene Hampton

Queering Reality: Animation as Alternative

This thesis argues that animation is a fundamentally queer medium, not only through LGBTQ+ representation but through its cultural position, production, and reception. Through a theoretical, historical, and cultural analysis, this project examines how queerness manifests in alternative techniques of animation; LGBTQ+ characters, creators, and consumers; and underground modes of production. It demonstrates how animation's flexibility makes it uniquely suited to challenge norms, not just enabling but encouraging queerness.



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**Frazier Dougherty**

Hometown: Yarmouth, Maine

- Major: Computer Science
- Minor: Anthropology
- Advisor: William Theisen

Inhuman Optimization: Exploring the Limits of Reward Modeling in Aligning Large Language Models

Reward modeling and reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) train large language models on human preference data with the goal of alignment, defined as the ability of AI systems to act in accordance with human values. Despite limitations imposed by system architecture, the complexity of value, and the tendency toward reward hacking, RLHF has proven effective in benchmark evaluations. However, these constraints lead reward models to be imperfect proxies, capturing and rewarding inhuman values that optimization then amplifies, producing downstream failures such as sycophancy, hallucinations, and delusion spiraling. Together, these limitations demonstrate that reward modeling is an insufficient solution to AI alignment.



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**Max Dow**

Hometown: Edina, Minnesota

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: Anne Garcia-Romero

Final Act: A Feature Film Screenplay

Final Act is a feature film screenplay about a naive, hopeful actress willing to do anything to make it big and an abusive director who attempts to manipulate her and her co-star into killing each other. The script explores the nature of the hierarchical film industry and the power structures that allow these relationships to persist. It questions whether or not industry players lower on the totem pole have the ability to fight against Hollywood's regime or if they must swim with the current in order to stay afloat.



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**Clare Duffy**

Hometown: Cold Spring, Minnesota

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Computing and Digital Technologies
- Advisor: Steven Landis

Decentralized Government Structure: Contributions to Ukrainian Military Resilience

How has Ukraine's decentralized government structure contributed to military success in the war with Russia since 2022? This thesis examines how decentralized government structures contribute to wartime success. Using process tracing and interviews with Ukrainian civilians, a war veteran, and a Ministry of Defence official, it identifies the mechanisms through which local autonomy and adaptive procurement strategies have improved military response. The Ukrainian case illustrates how distributed authority enables states to compete effectively against materially superior adversaries.



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**Catie Ellis**

Hometown: Boston, Massachusetts

- Majors: Economics and English
(Concentration in Creative Writing)
- Advisor: Andrew Ferdowsian

Matching in Stake-Based Labor Markets

This economic paper creates a model to help understand the market forces that exist that motivate firms and workers to match with each other.



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**Catie Ellis**

Hometown: Boston, Massachusetts

- Majors: Economics and English
(Concentration in Creative Writing)
- Advisor: Joyelle McSweeney

The Iliac Artery: A Novella

The iliac artery delivers blood to the lower parts of the human body. The tubular elastic collagen in which plum colored blood courses and surges into the lower extremities. The threefold layered tunica which runs from the bottom of the still beating heart to the reproductive organs. To the guilt-storing liver and the digestive tracts. To the full of empty intestines — paradoxical spaces. The rigid back and stomach muscles. The hips, thighs, toes. To the crescent shaped upper border of the ilium, the largest bone of the pelvis, the attachment point for various muscles and ligaments and is easily felt on the sides of the hips. These arteries deliver blood to the parts of the body further from the heart, nearly divorced, but yet still tied.



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**Saif Elmaleh**

Hometown: Belbeis, Sharqia, Egypt

- Majors: Political Science and Aerospace Engineering
- Advisor: Emilia Justyna Powell

Reality vs. Regulation: Assessing Stakeholder Priorities and the Gaps in International Space Law

While legal scholarship frequently identifies theoretical gaps in space treaties, particularly regarding the weaponization of dual-use technologies, there is a significant lack of empirical research on whether space stakeholders actually share these concerns. This thesis investigates the disconnect between academic legal theory and the practical priorities of major actors, including national space agencies and private corporations. By analyzing policy disclosures and industry positions, the research explores the feasibility of a third-party oversight framework to solve the information dilemma in orbit. It ultimately seeks to determine if those operating in space view current legal ambiguities as risks or strategic advantages.



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**Ashley Estelle**

Hometown: Birmingham, Alabama

- Major: History
- Minors: Africana Studies and Poverty Studies
- Advisor: Rebecca Tinio McKenna

Black Teacher Activism in Jim Crow Alabama

My thesis is on Black teacher activism and examines how the Alabama State Teachers Association (ASTA) transformed education into a tool for political resistance between 1901 and the late 1930s. In 1901, the Constitution aimed to eliminate Black people from politics entirely and diminish their educational opportunities. Despite the systemic disenfranchisement and deliberate underfunding of Black institutions under the Constitution, educators still found ways to support. Through ASTA, Black educators were able to organize collectively, secure critical resources through various networks, and embed cultural knowledge and Black history into their curriculum. In doing so, ASTA's educators transformed the classroom into a site of resistance.



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**Christian Evans**

Hometown: Arlington Heights,
Illinois

- Major: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics)
- Minor: Foundations of Business
- Advisor: Jasmine Xiao

Firm Determinants of Nonbank Credit

Private credit and nonbank lenders have rapidly expanded into corporate lending markets traditionally dominated by banks, especially after the Global Financial Crisis. While prior research focuses on supply-side factors, this project examines which firm characteristics drive borrowing from nonbank lenders and how these patterns shift during periods of financial stress. Using firm-level financial data merged with loan-level lending data from 2010-20, the analysis shows that highly leveraged firms are significantly more likely to borrow from nonbanks, consistent with regulatory constraints on banks. Firm size and liquidity also play important roles.



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**Janet Federici**

Hometown: Dallas, Pennsylvania

- Major: Japanese
- Minor: Linguistics
- Advisors: Hana Kang and Yoko Kawamura

Beyond the Classroom: Extracurricular Impact on L2 Japanese Willingness to Communicate

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a defining factor in second language acquisition, representing the likelihood of a learner to engage in conversation in a second language when given the opportunity. While classroom instruction provides a formal foundation, extracurricular environments offer unique sociolinguistic affordances that can mitigate anxiety and bolster learner confidence, which are key drivers of WTC. Through a combination of language exposure surveys, retrospective learning journey maps, and interviews in a multiple-case study design, this study tracks how specific extracurricular events impact WTC. It illuminates the WTC conditions needed to push students beyond the classroom to invest in authentic Japanese interaction.



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**Maxwell Feldmann**

Hometown: San Antonio, Texas

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Minors: Theology and Real Estate
- Advisor: Jeffrey Harden

Artificial Intelligence, Content Moderation, and the Structure of the Digital Public Sphere

This thesis examines how artificial intelligence shapes democratic discourse through both content exposure and user perception. Using an algorithmic audit and a survey experiment, it tests whether social media platforms deliver different political content across user identities and how individuals respond to content labels such as “AI-generated” and “fact-checked.” The findings show that while recommendation systems create modest differences in exposure, content labels have much stronger effects on trust, sharing behavior, and perceptions of fairness. These effects vary significantly by political identity, suggesting that AI systems influence not just what users see, but how they interpret and evaluate information.



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**Andrés Fernández Diep**

Hometown: Mexico City, Mexico

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Advisor: Scott Mainwaring

China's Quiet Rise and the Erosion of Democracy in Latin America

Across Latin America, democratic backsliding has risen as a particularly serious issue in recent history, with scholars primarily attributing it to a country's domestic context. Despite being highly informative, the influence of China's expanding presence on the region's democratic trajectories has been considerably understudied. Correspondingly, this thesis explores the extent and mechanisms through which China's growing engagement in Latin America has contributed to the erosion of democracy in the region from 2000 to 2023, focusing closely on the specific domestic contexts that may accentuate this association.



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**Faiza Filali**

Hometown: New Orleans, Louisiana

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: International Peace Studies
- Minors: Korean and Asian Studies
- Advisor: Steven Landis

The Bomb in the Back of Our Minds

My thesis examines how states construct rational security behavior under the threat of nuclear weapons. Challenging traditional deterrence theory, I argue that rationality is not inherent but politically produced through institutional, historical, and moral frameworks. Through comparative case studies of nuclear and nonnuclear states, including South Korea, the U.S., Israel, China, Russia, Japan, Germany, Australia, and Ireland, I analyze how different security contexts shape decision making. The project explains how societies normalize extreme risk and sustain stability despite the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, especially under conditions of persistent insecurity.



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**Nolan Fletes**

Hometown: Mokena, Illinois

- Major: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics)
- Minors: Data Science, Theology, and Real Estate
- Advisor: Eric Sims

How Should Monetary Policy Respond to High Frequency Measurement Error in Economic Data?

This paper addresses how monetary policy should adapt to data uncertainty by examining the effect of measurement error on Taylor Rule coefficients. I employ a static New Keynesian model to explore the impact of data revisions on the strength of the central bank's response to macroeconomic indicators. My central finding is that accounting for measurement error in a Taylor Rule-based interest rate regime yields closer policy rate movements to an optimal Taylor Rule than the Federal Reserve's historical interest rate regime. I also developed an exploratory data tool that allows the reader to modify model parameters beyond the cases examined, enabling the reader to internalize and challenge my findings.



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**Spencer Foote**

Hometown: Santa Monica, California

- Majors: History and Political Science
- Minor: European Studies
- Advisor: Joseph Parent

Courting Democracy

When can courts successfully stop elected leaders from weakening democracy? By comparing Hungary and Brazil, I examine why judges sometimes protect free elections, rights, and checks on executive power, and sometimes fail. I argue that courts are strongest not just because of legal authority, but because the public trusts them enough to make defying them politically costly.



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**Gabrielle Ford**

Hometown: Hanover, Indiana

- Majors: Economics and Spanish
- Minor: Data Science
- Advisor: Eva Dziadula

Does U.S. Immigration Enforcement Influence Latino Citizens to Move States?

In April 2010, Arizona received national news coverage due an immigration enforcement law, SB1070. The law gained national news coverage primarily due to one section that authorized police officers to check the citizenship status of individuals who they suspected of being undocumented immigrants during “any lawful contact.” My study examines the impact of SB1070 on Latino U.S. citizens’ propensity to migrate from the state. This paper contributes to existing literature that investigates the effect of immigration enforcement policy on legal Latino populations.



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**Brandon Foster**

Hometown: Evansville, Indiana

- Major: History
- Supplementary Major: A&L Pre-Health
- Advisor: Ijeoma Kola

Do No Harm: The Holocaust and Human Experimentation in America

My thesis studies the development of medical ethics and regulations on human experimentation in the U.S. in the wake of the Holocaust and its shortcomings. Several unethical medical experiments were conducted in America after the development of the Nuremberg Code, such as the Tuskegee Institute Syphilis Study. I hope to understand why our institutions allowed such studies to happen. From my research, I have learned that it was not due to malicious intent or negligence, but to ethical codes that fell short or lacked any means of enforcement.



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**Madison Fraizer**

Hometown: West Des Moines, Iowa

- Major: Psychology
- Minors: Business Economics and the Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Gerald Haeffel

Development and Validation of the Educator's Cognitive Styles Questionnaire

Teaching is stressful, and educators are going to experience challenges. The inferences and attributions that an educator generates during these times will influence their mental health and likelihood of quitting their job. This research aimed to develop and validate a measure of educator attributions to reliably assess educators' cognitive style for dealing with stressful job experiences and identify those who may be at risk for poor emotional health (e.g., burnout, depression, anxiety), and attrition. Three studies were conducted to determine common stressors, select the most psychometrically sound items, and validate the measure. Results yielded a 10-item measure with high internal consistency and convergent and discriminant validity.



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**Olivia Francis**

Hometown: New Orleans, Louisiana

- Major: International Economics
(Concentration in French)
- Minor: Philosophy
- Advisor: Kirk Doran

Crisis Type and Migrant Selection: Evidence from Lebanon

Lebanon experienced two major crises within five years — a refugee influx in 2015 and a financial collapse in 2019 — sending two different waves of migrants to the United States as a result. This paper shows that the mechanism of the crisis determines who leaves; the refugee shock displaced low-skilled workers and produced negatively selected emigrants, while the financial collapse destroyed professional wealth and produced positively selected emigrants. Using American Community Survey data and the self-selection framework, this project provides evidence that crisis type, not just severity, can predict the human capital composition of crisis-driven migration waves.



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**Avery Gahler**

Hometown: Saint Paul, Minnesota

- Major: English
- Minors: Business Economics and French
- Advisor: Susannah Monta

Motherhood, Conception, and Prenatal Life in Mary Sidney Herbert's Psalm 51, 71, and 139 Translations

This project examines how Mary Sidney Herbert develops a distinctly feminine and maternal theology in her early modern translations of the Psalms of David. Focusing on Psalms 51, 71, and 139, it highlights themes of motherhood, conception, and prenatal life — experiences uniquely understood by women. By situating Herbert's translations within 16th-century understandings of pregnancy and maternal identity, this project draws on early modern legal, medical, and social frameworks to illuminate her translational choices. In doing so, it argues that Herbert articulates a theology of motherhood shaped by embodied experience, producing an interpretation of the Psalms that reflects a specifically female perspective on the creation of life.



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**Kennedy Gallaher**

Hometown: Mount Sterling, Illinois

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Supplementary Major: A&L Pre-Health
- Minor: Italian
- Advisors: Denis Robichaud and Mark Roche

Have I Played the Part Well?

Have I Played the Part Well? is my historical novel, which tells the human story of Augustus, Mark Antony, Cleopatra, and Marcus Lepidus, spanning the dramatic years from Julius Caesar's death in 44 B.C. to Egypt's fall in 30 B.C. History remembers these people as figures, but the vulnerable men and woman beneath all the masks have been lost. Inspired by Augustus's real last words — "Have I played the part well?" — I tell the story of these people who walked across history's stage burdened by the masks they wore.



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**Mason Gallo**

Hometown: East Lyme, Connecticut

- Majors: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics) and Philosophy
- Supplementary Majors: Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics
- Advisor: Jeffrey Campbell

Monetary Policy Uncertainty and Macroeconomic Dynamics

A clear understanding of monetary policy uncertainty (MPU) and its effects is central to how the Federal Reserve designs and communicates policy, but existing measures are indirect or limited. I measure MPU using univariate and multivariate volatility models of the shadow federal funds rate. Using local projections, I show that increases in MPU are associated with temporary declines in consumption and inflation, consistent with a negative aggregate demand shock.



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**Libby Garnett**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Majors: English (Concentration in Creative Writing) and Philosophy
- Advisor: Cyraina Johnson-Roullier

***Timshel* and the Last of Human Freedoms: Choice, Suffering, and Meaning in Steinbeck and Frankl**

This project examines John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* alongside Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, arguing that both reject determinism in favor of an existentialist understanding that emphasizes free will, moral responsibility, and the meaning of suffering. Frankl's claim that humans always retain the freedom to choose their response is paralleled in Steinbeck's concept of *timshel*, or "thou mayest." Putting Steinbeck in conversation with Frankl demonstrates the impact both authors have beyond their home fields and shows how the lenses of literature and philosophy can together provide a clearer vision of human freedom and meaning-making.



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**Lupe Garvey**

Hometown: Silver Spring, Maryland

- Major: History
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Rebecca McKenna

Faith & Assimilation: Our Lady of Pompeii and the 'Italian Problem'

While the American Catholic Church initially viewed Italian immigration as an "Italian problem" of religious indifference and cultural mismatch, Father Antonio Demo transformed Our Lady of Pompeii into a strategic selective filter that mediated between traditional heritage and American integration. This project uses the correspondence of Father Demo (1900-24) to demonstrate how Our Lady of Pompeii became both a place of worship and a social safety net for urban adaptation by leveraging parochial networks, bilingual societies, and civic engagement.



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**Greg Gehring**

Hometown: Iron Ridge, Wisconsin

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Philosophy
- Advisor: Barbara Montero

Use It or Lose It: How Interior Resilience and Creative Resistance Combat AI-Induced Cognitive Malfunctioning

My research examines the moral limits of outsourcing judgment to artificial intelligence in contemporary decision-making systems. I argue that, despite increasing functional autonomy, AI lacks the moral agency required to bear responsibility. Drawing on political theory and philosophy of mind, I analyze how institutional reliance and cognitive deference on opaque, privately developed models reshapes accountability, displaces human judgment, and erodes critical capacities — deliberative, aesthetic, and moral — that remain essential to personal, public, and professional life. Ultimately, I conclude in defense of human responsibility as a condition of selfhood in a world increasingly contested by automated environments.



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**Greg Gehring**

Hometown: Iron Ridge, Wisconsin

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Philosophy
- Advisor: Barbara Montero

The Value of Creative Struggle and Cost of Convenience: What We Lose When We Capitulate to Artificial Intelligence

Following the Holocaust — the systematic, state-sponsored murder of around 11 million people by the Nazi regime — Hannah Arendt coined the banality of evil to describe how atrocity is perpetrated not through conscious malice, but through thoughtlessness: the unreflective execution of orders by those who abdicate moral judgment entirely. I find it is such thoughtlessness that artificial intelligence animates. When humans defer judgement to AI, moral responsibility is diffused through obscure networks, eliminating accountability altogether. AI cannot replicate genuine judgment, ethical reasoning, moral discernment, or creative resolve, rendering such capacities not merely desires, but obligatory features humankind must champion. Be a champion.



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**Sam Godinez**

Hometown: Tijuana, Baja California,
Mexico

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Constitutional Studies,
Hesburgh Program in Public
Service, and History
- Advisor: Eugene Gholz

Is the President Constrained?: Congressional Decision-Making on War Powers since 1945

Before World War II, the allocations of war powers were clear: Congress declared war, per article 1 section 8, and the president executed those orders as commander-in-chief. However, Congress has shifted its behavior by choosing to delegate and abdicate its authority to the executive branch. In this thesis, I analyze what explains congressional behavior since 1945 on war powers.

I analyze three theories — loss-responsibility-cost, political incentives, and changing character of war — across three case studies: Korea, Afghanistan, and Syria. I conclude that political incentives, driven by partisanship and political identity, provide the strongest explanation for congressional behavior in modern war-making decisions.



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**Kyla Goksoy**

Hometown: Istanbul, Turkey

- Major: Psychology
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Anre Venter

The Narrative Identity of Political Prisoners in Apartheid South Africa: Redemptive Narratives and Narrative Resilience

Narrative identity and resilience shape how survivors process trauma under oppressive systems. This project examines communicated narrative resilience in the stories of political prisoners on Robben Island in apartheid South Africa, where incarceration aimed to isolate and break resistance. Instead, resistance evolved from survival to beyond survival. Using a qualitative descriptive design, semistructured interviews were analyzed for four communication processes: crafting normalcy, affirming identity anchors, constructing alternative logics, and emotional focus. A linguistic inquiry approach assessed personal agency through emotional and cognitive word use, revealing how survivors reconstruct meaning and resilience through narrative.



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**Anne Griffin**

Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee

- Major: Arabic
- Supplementary Major: Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics
- Minor: Certificate in International Security Studies
- Advisor: Ian Johnson

Why U.S. Interventions Fail: An Examination of the 'Policeman-Soldier' in U.S. Force-Building Abroad

My thesis examines U.S. military nation-building efforts to understand why they frequently fail to produce durable, professional armed forces. Focusing on the critical transition from politically oriented constabulary forces responsible for internal security to nonpartisan national armies, I analyze three historical cases: the Philippines, Nicaragua, and South Korea. These cases represent a spectrum of outcomes from failure to success, allowing for a comparative assessment of the institutional practices and assumptions underlying U.S. force-building efforts. The project identifies conditions under which constabularies can successfully evolve into professional militaries and contributes to broader scholarship on civil-military relations.



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**Molly Griffith**

Hometown: Columbus, Ohio

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Advisor: William Evans

Despair & Displacement: The Effects of Mass Layoffs on Drug, Alcohol, and Suicide Mortality

More Americans have now lost their lives to the drug crisis of the last three decades than in all armed conflicts from the Spanish-American War in 1898 through the present day. Many scholars cite an unraveling of our nation's economic, social, and religious fabric as a contributor to this crisis. In this paper, I study the contribution of economic decline. I source data from the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act to analyze the effect of mass layoffs on "deaths of despair" — deaths due to drug overdose, alcohol, and suicide — and discuss the long-term social costs of labor market disruptions.



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Charlize Guerrero

Hometown: Elmwood Park, Illinois

- Majors: Spanish and Accountancy
- Advisor: Marisel Moreno

'Pa'l Perreo, la Salsa, la Bomba, la Plena': Ritmo y Resistencia en *Debí Tirar Más Fotos*

Bad Bunny's *Debí Tirar Más Fotos* (DTMF) is praised as his "most Puerto Rican album yet," featuring a unique blend of his signature reggaeton and Latin trap with traditional genres like salsa and plena. While his candid lyrics and public statements explicitly frame the album as a tribute to Puerto Rican identity and a defiance against colonial structures, this thesis argues that the genres themselves carry that resistance even further. By incorporating styles shaped by histories of community, migration, and resilience, Bad Bunny activates their cultural meanings in a contemporary setting. Through these sonic choices, DTMF moves beyond nostalgia, using genre as a vehicle for cultural celebration and political expression.



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Marcelo Guzman Aguirre

Hometown: Lima, Peru

- Majors: Economics and Spanish
- Minor: Data Science
- Advisor: Joshua Lund

¿Qué Diferencia Hace un Trato con el Diablo Si Ya Vivimos en el Infierno?: El Cuerpo Andino en la Urbe a través de 'La Ciudad y los Perros' de Mario Vargas Llosa

Little attention has been paid to the racial dynamics organizing life at the Colegio Militar Leoncio Prado in Mario Vargas Llosa's *La ciudad y los perros* (1963). Departing from the scholarly consensus that presents the institution as a microcosm of Peruvian reality, my project argues that the institution operates as a racialized microcosm of Lima — one in which its agents collude to marginalize and expel the Andean body. Placing Cava, "el Serrano," at the center, I conclude that no pact of loyalty or deal with the Jaguar could save him from the hell that constitutes his existence in the institution and the city it represents. Rather, such arrangements only seem to — or, in fact, can only — condemn him to a deeper circle than the one before.



**Kathryn Haertzen**

Hometown: St. Louis Park, Minnesota

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: History and Slavic & Eurasian Studies
- Advisor: Sebastian Rosato

For the Regime or for the State?: The Hierarchy of Survival in Authoritarian Regimes

Are authoritarian regimes more interested in regime or state survival? The primary case study for this paper will be Vladimir Putin's use of the public and historical memory of World War II in the Russian Federation. Putin has nationalized the past to secure the future of his regime. The Cult of the Great Victory of World War II is emblematic of Russia's narrative of historical victimhood and triumph. I argue that Putin does not do this out of a want to secure and preserve the Russian state; rather he does it in the name of personal preservation and protection.



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**Pierce Hand**

Hometown: Hobe Sound, Florida

- Majors: Spanish and Science
Preprofessional Studies
- Advisor: Thomas F. Anderson

Felices los Famélicos: Explorando la Bienaventuranza en los Macarios de B. Traven y Juan Rulfo

Macario is the name of a Mexican short story by Juan Rulfo first published in 1945, and also the name of a novella published five years later by the anonymous author B. Traven who lived in Mexico at the time. They both exhibit themes of hunger and suffering and are centered on main characters named Macario who tell similar narratives structurally. In this thesis, I explore possible connections between the two authors to argue that these similarities were not coincidences. I then focus on the theological meaning of the name Macario, blessed or happy, to reveal the supreme blessedness that each character enjoys despite their great suffering.



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**Drew Harrell**

Hometown: Evans, Georgia

- Majors: Philosophy & Theology
- Supplementary Major: A&L Pre-Health
- Advisor: Paul Kollman

African Theologies of Healing

This paper explores the ways in which African theology, shaped by the traditional African worldview, informs a holistic theology of healing relevant for the entire Christian faith. It outlines aspects of the traditional African worldview and traditional methods of healing. By connecting this to the Christian faith with the thoughts and writing of African theologians, we will discover how inculturation makes African theology unique and be able to contribute to a distinctive and insightful recognition of Jesus as a healer and a deeper understanding of healing in the Christian context.



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**Ty Harrington**

Hometown: Carmel, Indiana

- Majors: Philosophy & Theology and Program of Liberal Studies
- Advisor: Katie Bugyis

Rethinking God-World Relations in a Time of Environmental Crisis: An Interreligious Approach

Since the Enlightenment, Christian philosophical theologians have tended to emphasize God's detachment from the world. By thus desacralizing nature, this trend has enabled environmentally destructive behavior. In light of the climate crisis, contemporary Christian thinkers are reinterpreting the God-world relation so as to emphasize God's presence and recover a sacred view of nature. Drawing on my time living in India and studying Vedantic philosophy, I argue that Christian-Vedantic interreligious dialogue enables Christian scholars to rethink the God-world relation in new ways, providing the resources to emphasize anew God's presence in nature while still maintaining the traditional sense of God's transcendence.



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**Kathleen Healey**

Hometown: Raleigh, North Carolina

- Major: English
- Advisor: Francisco Robles

American Progress: The Structural and Thematic Influence of *The Pilgrim's Progress* on American Quest Narratives

My thesis explores how John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* functions as a structural precedent for the great American quest narratives *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Structural parallels exist most saliently in the episodic accounts of journey from bondage to freedom and the shared character archetype of the sacrificial companion. The structural delineations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Grapes of Wrath* from Bunyan's allegory allow Mark Twain and John Steinbeck to conflate the pursuit of freedom in America with Bunyan's conception of the Protestant pursuit of spiritual freedom through salvation: a deeply personal endeavor and matter of individual conscience.



**Olivia Heldring**

Hometown: Wayne, Pennsylvania

- Major: Computer Science
- Minor: Catholic Social Tradition
- Advisor: Margaret Pfeil

The Attention Crisis and the Loss of Encounter: A Catholic Anthropological Analysis of Digital Distraction

This thesis argues that the attention crisis is a theological crisis because it undermines the Catholic Church's anthropological vision of the human person. The attention crisis refers to the erosion of attention due to addictive smartphone and social media usage. These technologies threaten the Catholic posture of "encounter," or genuine presence to God and neighbor. By infesting mini-moments of the day, screens train brains to crave stimulation and destroy contemplative silence and prayer. Moreover, screens make the suffering of others ambient, fostering desensitization. I argue that screens are the origin of modern religious and interpersonal indifference, but I am hopeful that a disposition of silence and compassion can be reclaimed.



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**Thomas Helm**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Majors: Film, Television, and Theatre and Political Science
- Minor: Chinese
- Advisor: Tarryn Chun

Revolutionary Nostalgia in 21st-Century Chinese Television

Contemporary Chinese television dramas situate themselves within Chinese media and ideological traditions to transform revolutionary history into a system of ideological messaging that both reflects and advances Xi Jinping's political agenda. By repackaging past struggles and triumphs through resonant narrative archetypes and sophisticated modes of storytelling, the series creates a deliberate form of revolutionary memory that legitimizes party authority, promotes national unity, and conditions audiences to accept current state ambitions as part of the natural continuation of China's historical trajectory.



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**Ben Herbst**

Hometown: Irmo, South Carolina

- Majors: Computer Science and Psychology
- Advisor: Matthew Hauenstein

Toward Durable Peace Agreements: Provision Selection and Contextual Risk in Intrastate Conflict Resolution

Peace agreements are the most common way of terminating modern civil wars, yet nearly 40% collapse within five years. Prior research has examined individual agreement provisions in isolation, leaving unclear which provisions matter most relative to others. This project applies penalized survival analysis to 336 intrastate peace agreements signed between 1975 and 2021. Simultaneously evaluating 67 candidate predictors, the analysis identifies factors such as regional context, reaffirmation of prior agreements, national dialogue, and prior conflict outcome as key determinants of agreement durability. Policymakers can use these findings to design more durable peace agreements.



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**Stephanie Hernandez**

Hometown: Marrero, Louisiana

- Majors: History and Political Science
- Minor: Latino Studies
- Advisor: Emiliano Aguilar

The War that Followed Them: Salvadoran Migration to Washington, D.C.

My thesis examines Salvadoran migration to the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. I examine the causes of migration, immigration policy in the United States, and community formation in D.C. I argue that the United States has systematically excluded Salvadorans from sociopolitical inclusion, protection, and belonging. As a result, migrants themselves created grassroots organizations in Washington, D.C., and became movement builders for Salvadorans and immigration advocacy.



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**Nayla Hernández Ramírez**

Hometown: Denver, Colorado

- Major: Romance Languages and Literatures
- Advisor: Pedro Aguilera-Mellado

Cómo Hacer una Piñata: Un Caso de Estudio del Arte en el Antropoceno

A layer of matter — technology, minerals, daily objects — now covers the Earth in its entirety and will be evidence of the human presence for centuries to come. We have so changed the geological composition of the Earth that it is time to acknowledge that we are living in the Anthropocene, and that it is shaping our relationship to ourselves and others as much as it has modified earth systems. The evolution of the piñata's origin stories and making reflect the physical as well as ideological shifts that this new epoch has prompted, particularly in relation to materiality. Based on autobiographical experiences in my family's business, Piñatas La Estrella.



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**Alexis Hill**

Hometown: Orlando, Florida

- Major: Sociology
- Supplementary Major: Gender Studies
- Advisor: Mim Thomas

Conspiracy Laundering: How Misinformation Shapes Public Understanding and Justifies Harmful Policies toward Marginalized Groups

This project examines how conspiracy theories are laundered into mainstream discourse, transforming fringe misinformation into seemingly credible narratives that shape public understanding. It explores how media, political rhetoric, and digital platforms contribute to this process, particularly in ways that target marginalized communities. By analyzing contemporary examples, the project highlights how misinformation not only distorts reality but also legitimizes harmful policies and social attitudes. Ultimately, it seeks to uncover the mechanisms behind conspiracy laundering and its real-world consequences for equity, justice, and democratic discourse.



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**Liliana Hobday**

Hometown: Saint Paul, Minnesota

- Major: Sociology
- Minors: Education, Schooling, and Society and the Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Mark Berends

Public Records Requests in Indiana's Public School Systems: Transparency or Burden?

This project investigates the rise in public records requests submitted to K-12 school systems, a trend evident in Indiana, as well as across the country. Using semistructured interviews with school board members, district administrators, records clerks, legal professionals, and current and former public access counselors, the study explores what factors explain changes in request volume between 2018 and 2025, who is submitting requests, what information they seek, and how school corporations experience their impacts.



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**Dylan Hockx**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Majors: English and Political Science
- Minor: Chinese
- Advisor: Barry McCrea

'A Love More Mysterious than This': Unveiling the Hidden Novel in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*

E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* is a love story. It follows Lucy Honeychurch's navigation of typical class distinctions and parental disapproval while deciding which of two men to marry. Forster's novel, however, is about more than this marriage plot.

My thesis aims to display, by analyzing the peripheral details in *Room*, the beauty — and criticism — that Forster places in the shadows of his text.

Room contains glimpses of another novel hidden within its text — one chiefly concerned with perception, repression, and the importance of the grey areas lying between the extremes of binary tensions. *Room's* smallest details become figures for the novel itself, providing veiled insights into a story concerned with "the [things] one never [talks] about."



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**Carson Hruskoci**

Hometown: Fishers, Indiana

- Majors: Spanish and Finance
- Advisor: Pedro Aguilera-Mellado

La Paradoja de la Transición Verde: La Dependencia de las Tecnologías Sostenibles de la Extracción de Cobre y Litio

As the world develops more sustainable innovations, a central paradox emerges: Technologies designed to reduce carbon emissions rely on environmentally destructive processes. Focusing on copper and lithium extraction in Chile, my thesis analyzes how these materials are produced with significant environmental and social costs. This research highlights how Chile's role as a primary resource supplier is embedded within the global supply chain, where China's dominance in refining stems from their willingness to absorb environmental damage. Ultimately, I find that clean tech does not completely eliminate environmental harm, but shifts it geographically to upstream suppliers, where the damage is less visible to the world.



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**Jue Huang**

Hometown: Shanghai, China

- Majors: English and Philosophy
- Minor: French
- Advisor: Mike Zhao

A Pale View of Memories: A Philosophical Account of Self-Deceptive Narrative

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novels — say, *A Pale View of Hills* — we often find the first-person narrators evading or even distorting their memories when recollecting the past. In real life, people can also believe in made-up stories of themselves or the people around them, a phenomenon that Primo Levi notices among both Nazis and Holocaust survivors. Self-deceptive narratives abound, but it seems rather unclear what we mean when we say that someone is “lying to herself.”

My thesis, therefore, tries to analyze the concept and answer the following questions: What is self-deception? What is narrative? And — at their intersection — what is self-deceptive narrative, and what does it mean for the self-deceiver and other people?



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**Thomas Huberty**

Hometown: Redmond, Washington

- Majors: Economics, Philosophy, and Theology
- Advisor: Margaret Pfeil

St. Francis of Assisi's Care for Creation: Francis' Lasting Influence on Modern Ecological Theology

This thesis will analyze St. Francis' life and writings to understand his view of creation before diving into how the modern Church has taken up his witness in responding to the contemporary environmental crises. I contend that St. Francis' example, asceticism, and teachings lend themselves to a theological view of hospitality that entails a noninstrumentalist, interconnected view of all creation. This view, which is best defined as integral ecology, has been emphasized by the Church and modern theologians, especially Pope Francis, not as a departure from Church doctrine, but as the logical extension of Christian teachings on creation.



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**Grace Huguley**

Hometown: Waldo, Florida

- Majors: Psychology and Sociology
- Advisor: Rory McVeigh

Contextualizing the Self: How Religion and Political Climate Shape Identity Development Among First-Generation College Students

My thesis examines the question: Does being a first-generation college student cause variation in sense of self-development, and does this relationship differ depending on the current political climate and the religious affiliation of an institution? Although substantial research has analyzed the differences between first-generation and continuing-generation students, no research has taken into account how the current political climate and the religious affiliation of an institution can enter into the process of self-development. My project examined this question qualitatively through 25 interviews with Notre Dame students, both first-generation and continuing-generation.



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**Madeline Huie**

Hometown: Orland Park, Illinois

- Majors: Classics (Concentration in Latin) and Theology
- Minor: Music
- Advisor: Rev. Mark L. Poorman, C.S.C.

'Neither Do I Condemn You': A Merciful and Compassionate Approach in Pastoral Ministry toward Nontraditional Families

This thesis explores the history of the Church's treatment toward single mothers and other individuals in nontraditional families. Based on personal experiences and research of Church documents and case studies, I argue that while official Catholic guidelines for ministry toward those who do not necessarily adhere to the moral guidance she puts forth are clear, merciful, and compassionate, widespread variance in the implementation of these guidelines throughout history has driven vulnerable individuals away from the Church family. I conclude with an outline of further advancements in ministry that could be made to benefit nontraditional families as the Church moves forward with a mission of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion.



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**Ava Hyde**

Hometown: Oradell, New Jersey

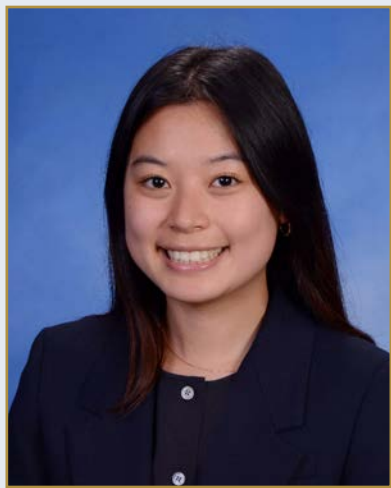
- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Japanese
- Advisors: Geoffrey Layman and McKenzie Bennett

Race Baiters and Clout Chasers: The Racial Rhetoric of Right-Wing Influencers on X

This thesis examines how right-wing influencers on X deploy racial rhetoric and how their strategies drive user engagement over time. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines quantitative analysis of tweet features — such as effect, framing, and explicitness — with qualitative close readings of exemplar posts across key political periods from 2020 to 2025. Findings show that emotionally charged, fear-based, and explicitly racial content generates higher engagement and has become more overt over time. The study argues that platform incentives and political context jointly encourage increasingly explicit racial discourse, raising concerns about democratic norms and the amplification of divisive narratives online.



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**Anna Jang**

Hometown: Holbrook, New York

- Majors: Art History and Finance
- Advisor: Tatiana Reinoza

Disruptive Silence: The Asian American Feminine Body in Contemporary Performance Art

This project examines how contemporary artists mobilize silence, rupture, and embodiment to resist racialized and gendered expectations. Patty Chang's ritualized performance reframes mourning as an embodied, subversive response to the patriarchal gaze, transforming the Asian feminine body into a site of resistance and reimagination. It also analyzes Ayoung Kim's glitch aesthetics, where fragmented identities and digital multiplicity destabilize fixed notions of race, gender, and labor. Together, these chapters argue that disruption enables the Asian American feminine body to reclaim agency and articulate new diasporic subjectivities.



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**Andrew Jitendran**

Hometown: Burbank, California

- Major: Sociology
- Supplementary Major: Education, Schooling, and Society
- Advisor: Mark Berends

Schooling, Family, and Peer Factors Motivating Students to Become ACE Teachers: Pursuing a Higher Purpose

Following a higher purpose involves dedicating one's life to serving others and improving oneself. Alliance for Catholic Teaching Education graduates chose a master's program that provides ample opportunities for service to others through teaching and self-improvement through community formation, rigorous academics, and moral development. By interviewing ACE graduates from cohorts 27 and 29, we will see how their experiences in school, with their families, and with their peers motivated them to choose a graduate program and a lifestyle centered on service and self-improvement, and thus higher purpose. We will also gain insight into ways that schools can encourage their students to live lives centered on higher purpose.



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**Ella Johnson**

Hometown: Madison, Wisconsin

- Majors: Spanish and Science
Preprofessional Studies
- Minor: Science and
Patient Advocacy
- Advisor: Vanesa Miseres

No More Babies: A Gendered Analysis of Eugenic Sterilization in California and Puerto Rico in the 20th Century

Throughout the 1920s to the 1970s, more than 30 U.S. states and territories enacted laws enabling the forced sterilization of over 60,000 individuals. These programs disproportionately targeted marginalized populations, with women, particularly women of color, bearing the brunt of these interventions. This project examines two interconnected sterilization campaigns affecting Latina women in Puerto Rico and California. Inspired by the documentary *No Más Bebés* and drawing on a multidisciplinary framework, this paper analyzes eugenic ideology, institutional power, and lived experience. It argues that these abuses were not isolated, but part of a broader system of reproductive control that has effects on U.S. health care today.



**Emily Joseph**

Hometown: Minnetonka, Minnesota

- Major: Neuroscience and Behavior
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Advisor: Ryan Carpenter

Perceptions and Experiences of Alcohol Use in Patients in Buprenorphine Treatment for Opioid Use

Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), such as buprenorphine, are highly effective at reducing overdose risk. However, one-third of patients receiving MOUD drink alcohol, which is associated with a greater risk of leaving treatment. Alcohol and opioids have similar pharmacological effects, but little is known about what patients receiving MOUD experience when they drink. In this study, we examined patients' self-reported experiences of alcohol use during opioid treatment, their understanding of its neurological implications, and providers' current knowledge on the risks of alcohol use and the need for patient education.



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**Sandy Kang**

Hometown: Fullerton, California

- Majors: Psychology and Sociology
- Minor: Korean
- Advisor: Jordyn Wilcox

Beyond Culture: How Context Shapes East Asian and Western Stress Coping

Stress is universal, yet coping varies by stressor type and cultural context. This study examined coping among 224 emerging adults across internal, external, and environmental stressors and Western, East Asian, and bicultural groups. Factor analysis identified two coping types from the Brief COPE: socially oriented and problem focused. Stressor type significantly shaped coping, with environmental stressors linked to more social coping and internal stressors to less problem-focused coping. Culture was not a significant predictor, though interviews revealed differences in internalization, family modeling, and generational shifts, highlighting the role of context and perceived controllability.



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**Emi Kartsonas**

Hometown: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

- Major: Neuroscience and Behavior
- Minors: Business Economics and Gender Studies
- Advisor: Dan Graff

Take the Glory, Give Everything: Female Popular Music Artists and the Patriarchal Bargains of Reinvention and Authenticity

This project explores the ways that female popular music artists encounter gendered demands of reinvention and authenticity as patriarchal bargains necessary to sustain their careers. Through consistent redefinition and the assumption of curated public personas, female artists conform to normative expectations in exchange for fame, visibility, and longevity in the music industry. The argument expands the application of existing frameworks that depict the prescribed career trajectory of women in the music industry. These frameworks are applied to the careers of contemporary female artists, using Taylor Swift as a primary case study, to illustrate how women adopt, negotiate, and resist patriarchal expectations of performance and perfection.



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Eric Derr, page 43



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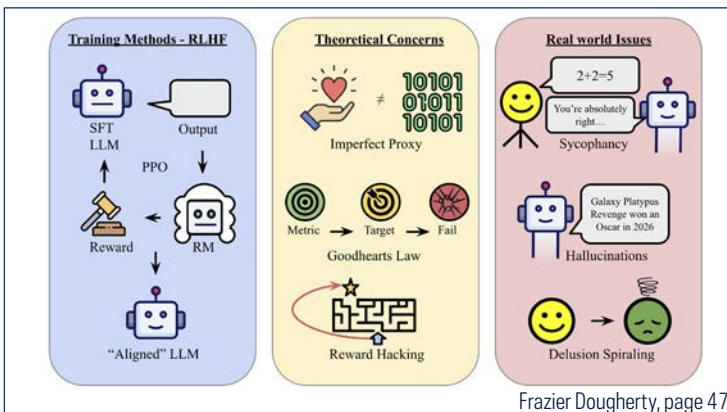
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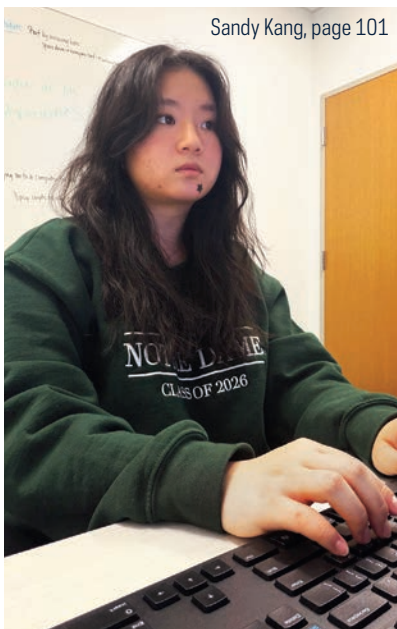


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Sarah-Jane Carten, page 29



Tia Mittle, page 139



Monica Schleg, page 175



John Majsak, page 122



Tess Barrett, page 13



Alondra Meza Camarillo, page 134

**Connor Kaufmann**

Hometown: El Paso, Texas

- Major: History
- Minors: Theology and Civil & Human Rights
- Advisor: Emiliano Aguilar

Migrant Communities from Zyklon B to Chlorpyrifos: An Analysis of How Chemicals Contribute to the Making of the 'Other'

This research explores the longstanding and deadly intersection of health, immigration, and racialized violence at the U.S.-Mexico border, focusing on policies that have historically dehumanized immigrant populations. Drawing on government reports, public discourse, personal accounts, and archival research, this research examines the U.S. government's use of toxic chemical disinfectants against immigrants in the early 20th century followed by the use of similar chemicals against immigrant farm workers in agricultural settings to the present day. This research highlights the continuity of health-based immigration policies in the U.S. and their deadly implications for immigrant communities, offering critical examination of how racialization has been institutionalized through medical practices aimed at controlling "the other."



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**Mary Elizabeth Kees**

Hometown: Jackson, Mississippi

- Majors: Classics and History
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Christopher Baron

Aeneas in Italy: From Myth to History

Roman myths that name the Trojan hero Aeneas as Rome's founder circulated the Mediterranean for centuries prior to the composition of Vergil's well-known *Aeneid*. This historical project uses archaeological and literary evidence to reconstruct the sociopolitical role of myths and cults to Aeneas in Roman civilization from the fourth century BCE to the first. It reveals that the myth served as a diplomatic link within Rome's sphere of influence because he was distant from yet familiar to most Mediterranean powers during this period. The project additionally offers a historiographical analysis of the myth's role in important historical works of the first century by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.



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**Jack Kelleher**

Hometown: Richmond, Virginia

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Business Economics and International Security Studies
- Advisor: Dan Lindley

Finances or State Failure?: Testing State Characteristics that Permit Terrorist Group Emergence and Survival

What state characteristics permit terrorist group emergence and survival? I examine two of the leading counterterrorism theories — state failure and presence of illicit economies — to determine which is more important in explaining terrorist group emergence and survival. I test my hypotheses against three case studies: al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin in Mali. I argue that the presence of illicit economies is more important to group emergence and particularly survival, often serving as a mechanism by which to mitigate stronger state authority.



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**Sarah Kerber**

Hometown: Dallas, Texas

- Majors: Economics and English
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: Roy Scranton

The Real Unreal: Figurative Language and the Reader's Reality in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and *Neverwhere*

Whether by construction or coincidence, fantastic worlds draw our attention back to reality. Placing the unreal alongside the real can illuminate the vast differences between possible worlds — or reveal surprising similarities. The fantastic also has the potential to disrupt our conception of reality entirely, exposing its alarming fluidity by separating language from its usual meaning, which effect this project explores in the context of two fantasy novels by Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere* and *American Gods*. Gaiman's unique manipulation of metaphor, both as wordplay and self-reflexive metafiction, demonstrates to readers just how ambiguous the boundary is between creating fiction and representing reality.



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**Tess Kesler**

Hometown: Berkeley Heights,
New Jersey

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Jazmin Sierra

Cooperation for Power and Profit: A Case Study of Italian Participation in PESCO

While the Russian invasion of Ukraine has made strengthening the European defense industrial base a priority, the market is highly fragmented, and procurement cooperation remains limited. Through a mixed-methods approach, this thesis examines Italian participation in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to understand why and how states engage in cooperative defense procurement projects at the European level. Rather than viewing PESCO as a tool for EU integration, the research argues that Italy's high but preferential engagement is driven by a strategic response to the relative power environment, filtered through protecting the interests of its national defense industry.



**Kate Kirwan**

Hometown: Harrisonburg, Virginia

- Major: Anthropology
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Minor: History
- Advisor: Eric Haanstad

Woven Witness: Chilean *Arpilleras* Then and Now

This thesis compares Chilean *arpilleras* in Santiago during their dictatorship era (1973-90) to their contemporary forms. It situates *arpilleras* within their shifting cultural and historical contexts by analyzing both their production in workshops and their public presentation in museums and protests in Santiago. Drawing on semistructured interviews and participant observation, the study examines how and why Chilean women employ *arpilleras* today as instruments of social change. The findings demonstrate that, as in 1973, *arpilleras* function as a medium of political resistance and a site of solidarity and sociality for women, while differing in scale, application, and impact in the present day.



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**Jacqueline Klein**

Hometown: Vienna, Virginia

- Majors: English and International Economics (Concentration in French)
- Advisor: Francisco Robles

‘The Angel in the House’ and the ‘Madwoman in the Attic’: Female Madness and the Deconstruction of Feminine Identity in *Rebecca* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

In response to the romance fiction trope in which marriage typically marks a happy ending, this thesis instead focuses on Gothic novels that begin with a power-imbalanced marriage. Discussing *Rebecca*, I explain how class anxiety, patriarchal control, and the entrapment of the feminine psyche are all fundamentally spatial due to the intrinsic relationship between Maxim de Winter and his estate, Manderley. I then introduce *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s postcolonial perspective, providing evidence that marriage itself is a form of colonization that fractures female identity. Both novels end with the burning of the English husband's estate, signifying an architectural cleansing that is required to dismantle these oppressive societal structures.



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**Vivie Koo**

Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

- Majors: Africana Studies and Marketing
- Minor: Real Estate
- Advisor: Maria McKenna

The Common Good in Practice: Notre Dame, South Bend, and the Evolving Landscape of a Shared Future

The University of Notre Dame's expanding footprint in South Bend, through real estate acquisition and infrastructure investment, reflects the complex dynamics of an anchor institution relationship that has produced measurable growth while raising questions about equity, cultural displacement, and who determines what gets built and for whom.

By analyzing the strategic visions of Notre Dame and the City of South Bend, I examine how the built environment and community engagement have reshaped their relationship over the past two decades and what those shifts have meant for the community.

Rooted in my undergraduate experience studying marketing, Africana studies, and real estate, this piece bridges business and humanitarian perspectives to examine the stakes.



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Ryan Lally

Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri

- Major: Classics (Concentration in Latin)
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Luca Grillo

Tantum Christianitas Potuit Suadere Bonorum: Prudentius' *Liber Peristephanon* as Response to Lucretius

In *De Rerum Natura*, the poet Lucretius employs poetic skill to make his ideas more palatable to a Roman audience. His condemnation of religion would prove incompatible with the blossoming of Christianity in the Latin-speaking world, but his artistry would ensure him a place of renown, even among dissenters. The early Christian poet Prudentius, for example, makes use of the style and narrative structures established by Lucretius. Yet instead of advancing the earlier poet's ideology, he refutes it. Using the very rhetorical tools with which Lucretius derides religion, Prudentius, in his *Liber Peristephanon*, defends his Christian faith. In doing so, he systematically rejects the ideas of the very poet to whom he looks for inspiration.



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**Meghan Lang**

Hometown: Manhattan Beach,
California

- Majors: Art History and Economics
- Minor: Computing and Digital Technologies
- Advisor: Davin Raiha

When the Market Tips Off: NIL and the Shifting Competitive Balance of Women's Collegiate Basketball

This project examines how the introduction of name, image, and likeness (NIL) rights has reshaped recruiting and competitive balance in women's college basketball. Using data on top recruits from 2017-25, it analyzes whether NIL has redistributed talent across programs or further concentrated elite players at already dominant schools. By treating NIL as a natural experiment, the study explores how financial incentives, visibility, and institutional resources influence athlete decision-making. Ultimately, it asks whether the shift to a market-driven system has increased opportunity — or reinforced inequality — in women's collegiate athletics.



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**Kat Lauinger**

Hometown: Seattle, Washington

- Majors: Anthropology
(Concentration in Biomedical
Anthropology) and Science
Preprofessional Studies
- Advisor: Vania Smith-Oka

Uncertainty as Lived Experience: Navigating Communication, Trust, and Identity in Cancer Care

My thesis explores the lived experiences of cancer patients, including how patient-physician communication dynamics, decision-making processes, and the inherent uncertainties of cancer are navigated. By collecting survey responses and conducting semistructured interviews with both physicians and patients, my project aims to understand how uncertainty is managed, treatment options are framed, and comfort is maintained on both sides of the clinical encounter. Ultimately, my thesis highlights nuanced perspectives that contribute to a fuller anthropological understanding of how patients and providers experience uncertainty amid the complexities of oncology care.



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**Jun Wei Lee**

Hometown: Singapore

- Majors: History and Philosophy
- Minors: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics
- Advisor: Robert Sullivan

Fantasies of Order: Indian Indentured Labor in British Malaya (1867-1910)

From 1867 to 1910, 120,000 Indian migrants traveled to British Malaya — present-day Singapore and Malaysia — as indentured laborers to work on the colony's agricultural plantations. I explore how the Indian and Straits Settlements governments constructed a legal regime to regulate this migrant labor system. I make three arguments. First, indenture law evolved mainly to satisfy the labor demands of economic elites. Second, imperial administrators altered ideas of race, freedom, and the imperial mission to justify indenture policy. Third, although imperial actors mobilized indenture law to promote diverse visions of legal order, migrants often found ways to thwart attempts at legal control.

**Emma Leedy**

Hometown: Kendallville, Indiana

- Majors: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics) and Greek and Roman Civilization
- Advisors: David Phillips and Victoria Barone

The Local Economic Impact of Private Prisons: Evidence from Local Employment and Wage Data

Private prisons remain a contested policy issue, yet evidence on their local economic impact is limited. I examine whether the opening of a new private prison affects county-level employment and average weekly wages using the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages and a novel dataset of 49 facilities opened between 1993 and 2006. Employing an event study difference-in-differences model and propensity-score-matched controls, I estimate the dynamic effects of private prison openings on local labor markets. I find modest, persistent increases in employment but no statistically significant effects on wages or employment per capita, which suggests that private prison openings yield limited improvements in local labor market outcomes.



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**Cindy Liu**

Hometown: Beijing, China

- Major: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics)
- Supplementary Majors: Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics and Japanese
- Minor: Actuarial Science
- Advisors: Jeroen Dalderop and Jooyoung Cha

How Does Driving Behavior & Road Environment Influence Risk for Commercial Vehicle Fleets in Beijing

Usage-based insurance (UBI) is a vehicle insurance pricing model that uses telematics data to evaluate driving behavior and environmental risk. While UBI has been widely studied for private vehicles, limited research has focused on vehicle fleets. This study develops a framework for predicting insurance claims using telematics data from fleet vehicles. It extends existing UBI models by incorporating new variables that capture fleet-level characteristics. Various machine learning models are applied to assess predictive performance. The findings suggest that fleet-based UBI models are consistent with private vehicle models, while accounting for group heterogeneity can further improve model effectiveness.



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**Maddie Long**

Hometown: Wheaton, Illinois

- Majors: History and Sociology
- Minor: Civil and Human Rights
- Advisor: Abigail Ocobock

American-Chinese Adoption: The Role of Decision Making in Family Building and the Construction of Transnational Family Identities

What does it mean to be an American-Chinese adoptive family in the United States? That is, in the process of family building, how do American adoptive parents make choices and decisions that necessitate the construction, or lack thereof, of an American-Chinese family identity? This paper investigates the relationship between American adoptive parents and decision making in Chinese adoption, and the extent to which intentional or unintentional decisions made by adoptive parents contribute to a heightened sense of transnational family identity.



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**John Majsak**

Hometown: New City, New York

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: A. James McAdams III

Extremist Energy: The AfD's Nuclear Energy Policy and How It Reveals their Conflict over Democratic Governance

After winning the second-largest vote share in Germany's 2025 national election, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is concerning experts and other political parties over what their rising popularity could mean for German democracy. Investigating the AfD's pro-nuclear power stance in the traditionally antinuclear Germany reveals whether the AfD can work within Germany's democratic framework. Interviews and evidence reveal a bifurcation of the party into an extremist wing, which erodes democracy, and a substance-based wing, which can work within democracy. This paper argues that the AfD will present itself as the substance-based wing, but gradually revert to the extremist wing, thus eroding democracy.



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**Tommy Marino**

Hometown: Delaware, Ohio

- Major: Classics
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Erynn Kim

'So, They Killed Cassandra First': Choral Complicity in Aeschylus' Agamemnon and Taylor Swift's 'Cassandra'

Despite the 2,500-year difference between the Greek tragedian Aeschylus' Agamemnon and Taylor Swift's song "Cassandra," the two artists nevertheless engage in thoughtful dialogue with one another. By reading the original ancient Greek tragedy alongside the modern song, I argue that Swift's work invites a reinterpretation of Aeschylus' Argive Chorus as complicit participants in Cassandra's fate through the lens of modern-day cancel culture and religious hypocrisy. With her own colloquialisms and contemporary additions to the myth, Swift successfully preserves the voice of Aeschylus' Cassandra while simultaneously extending a voice to the silenced victims of sexual assault in the modern era.

**Maeve Mastri**

Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

- Major: Neuroscience and Behavior
- Minor: Anthropology
- Advisor: Kristin Valentino

The Moderating Role of Emotion Regulation in the Relationship between Early Life Adversity and Child Inflammation

Prior research has demonstrated a strong link between exposure to early life adversity and later psychological and physiological health problems. Specifically, experiences of childhood maltreatment and poverty generate significant stress on the developing child and have been shown to pose risks for both impairment in emotion regulation skills and the formation of a pro-inflammatory phenotype. Through utilization of data from a randomized clinical trial that examines the efficacy of the reminiscing and emotion training intervention in promoting positive child emotional development, this study aims to assess whether adaptive child emotion regulation behaviors may buffer the effects of early life adversity on elevated child inflammation.



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**Bjorn Mauritsen**

Hometown: Artesia, New Mexico

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Business Economics
- Advisor: Gabrielle Grow

Handcuffs or Handshakes?: Comparing the Effectiveness of Resolution Mechanisms for Corporate Crime and Misconduct

Over the past several decades, deferred prosecution agreements (DPAs) and nonprosecution agreements (NPAs) have emerged as popular alternatives to traditional plea bargains as resolution mechanisms in cases of corporate crime. The appropriateness and effectiveness of these pretrial agreements is highly controversial. This project empirically compares the effectiveness of DPAs and NPAs in preventing criminal recidivism and future civil or regulatory misconduct through a novel analysis of publicly traded companies and their U.S. subsidiaries.



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**Thomas Mazzurana**

Hometown: Austin, Texas

- Majors: Theology and Business Analytics
- Advisor: Kimberly Belcher

***For Eden*: Integrated Musicianship as a Theological Approach to Understanding Sacramentality in Song**

This thesis examines the musician's vocation to create sacramental song in the framework of collaborative Catholic praise-and-worship album *For Eden*. An original creative endeavor undertaken in communion, *For Eden* infuses powerful contemporary Christian music with rich theological truths, explicitly bringing to life the sacraments — the seven core vantage points of divine grace — to a younger Catholic audience. Co-author Sofia Benigno and I present an overview of musicianship as vocational, incarnational, and sacramental; define the inherent sacramentality of music as a whole; and analyze how the lyricism and musical composition of each of our seven songs capture the theological essence of each sacrament.



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**Kelly McGlinn**

Hometown: Malvern, Pennsylvania

- Major: Neuroscience and Behavior
- Minors: Collaborative Innovation and Italian
- Advisor: Seham Kafafi

The Relationship between Depression and Anxiety Internalizing Symptoms and Emotional Memory Encoding through the Lens of Pupillometry

This research aims to understand how physiological arousal during encoding contributes to emotional memory and whether this relationship is influenced by internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Using an emotional memory trade-off task combined with pupillometry, participants viewed negative and neutral scenes and later completed a recognition memory task assessing both specific and gist memory. Analyses examined how pupil responses varied across time and conditions and whether they predicted memory performance, in moderation with depression, anxiety, and shared negative affect. This project provides insight into how arousal and individual differences jointly shape emotional memory encoding processes.



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**Madeleine McGovern**

Hometown: Downers Grove, Illinois

- Majors: English and Political Science
- Minor: Gender Studies
- Advisors: Essaka Joshua and Barbara Green

Bells, Whispers, and Silk: ASMR, Sensory Loops, and Feminist Care in George Egerton's Short Fiction

This thesis reads the late 19th-century short fiction of George Egerton through the framework of autonomous sensory meridian response, tracing how her work constructs a looping, immersive aesthetic grounded in sound and touch. Across her New Woman fictions, Egerton returns to and layers quiet sound, ambient rhythm, and tactile attention, cultivating states of calm, intimacy, and heightened perception for both characters and readers. These sensory loops do not merely describe experience, but produce it, offering embodied forms of care through which women regulate emotion and endure constraint. In doing so, Egerton anticipates a widely recognizable sensory mode, illuminating how attention itself can become a site of care and survival.



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**Jimmy McHugh**

Hometown: Verona, New Jersey

- Major: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics)
- Supplementary Major: Statistics
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisors: Daniel Hungerman and Giuseppe Vinci

(Fun)draising: Reputable Donor and Large Donation Effects on Nonprofit Fundraising

I investigate the effect of receiving a university grant on a nonprofit's reported fundraising in the year following the grant. I research whether university grants lead to positive crowding-in or negative crowding-out spillover effects on a nonprofit's total fundraising capacity the year after they receive a grant. Through the Philanthropy Lab's program of grant giving across the country, I gather and analyze data from four major universities: the University of Notre Dame, Baylor University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Texas. While I investigate the effect of simply receiving a grant, I also research the effect of the size of the grant and the status of the donating university as public or private.



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**Connor McKenna**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Major: American Studies
- Minor: Digital Marketing
- Advisor: Korey Garibaldi

The Double Dependency: Philanthropy and Federal Policy in the History of American Higher Education Funding

This thesis examines the historical and evolving role of philanthropy in American higher education amid shifting government support. Tracing philanthropy from colonial religious giving to industrial foundations and federal policies, from the Morrill Acts to the GI Bill and National Defense Education Act, it argues that federal and philanthropic aid have long functioned in double dependency. Using archival research at Xavier University of Louisiana, it shows how institutions navigate a competitive funding landscape and how foundation records and institutional experiences shape debates over equity, resource allocation, and social mission.



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**Claire McKenna**

Hometown: Savannah, Georgia

- Majors: English and Gender Studies
- Advisor: Yasmin Solomonescu

From Theory to Fiction and Back Again: Interactions between Pedagogical Theory and Novel Form in the Work of Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Maria Edgeworth

Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Maria Edgeworth each published pedagogical theory proposing specific educational ideals for young women, but they did not stop there. In their respective works, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, and *Belinda*, they each attempted to communicate their theoretical ideas through the medium of the novel. This thesis analyzes how each author combined the two and what impacts this had on the content of their theory and/or the form of these books. Through this process, I aim to explore the tension that results from actualizing theory through depictions of their characters' lived experiences.



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**Coby McKeown**

Hometown: Logan, Utah

- Major: English (Concentration in Creative Writing)
- Supplementary Major: Peace Studies
- Advisor: Azareen Van Der Vliet Oloomi

The Battle of Cresap: An Investigation

This creative writing project chronicles a series of labor strikes in a fictional 1930s Michigan town. It is narrated in epistolary form, with elements of social realism, mystery fiction, magical realism, and Afro-surrealism. Following a Haitian-American reporter from New York investigating an enigmatic factory, alongside a young Polish-American worker's involvement in the factory's unrecognized labor union, the project explores the volatility of class and racial tensions in Depression-era America. As the labor dispute continues to escalate, the small town quickly unravels economic and political networks of national and global scale.



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**Jonathan Mendez**

Hometown: Key Biscayne, Florida

- Majors: Psychology and Spanish
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Tatiana Botero

The Role of Masculinity and Paternal Figures in Emotional Security in Hispanic Families

This project examines how the presence of paternal figures shapes the dynamics of and relationships in Hispanic families. After reviewing the literature on the psychological, cultural, and gender theories of masculinity, I was curious to understand how paternal presence related to family members' reported levels of interpersonal conflict and emotional security. I used data from the Happy Families/Familias Felices Projects within the Family Studies Lab to determine the relationship between paternal presence and constructive and destructive patterns of behavior.



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**Alondra Meza Camarillo**

Hometown: Gustine, California

- Majors: Arabic and Political Science
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Steven Landis

Water as Currency and Cultural Ties to Land: Why Water-Saving Technologies are Undesirable to Some, Despite a Deteriorating Climate in Southern Morocco

In response to the recent drought, the Moroccan government has implemented national subsidy programs to alleviate the costs of new irrigation technologies meant to increase the volume and revenue of crops while wasting less water. While in the country, I conducted an independent study project on the connection between small-scale farmers' accessibility to such subsidies and alternative adaptation methods to understand how to support the autonomy of farmers and reduce the necessity of their movement. My fieldwork included in-depth interviews of produce merchants, professors, and agrarian cooperatives in the Souss-Massa region of Morocco.



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**Jonathan Mikovits**

Hometown: Spring Arbor, Michigan

- Major: Economics
- Minors: Data Science, Korean, and Sustainability
- Advisor: Daniel Miller

Conservation Funding, Corruption, and Deforestation in the Global South

International conservation finance is a cornerstone of the global strategy to combat deforestation, yet its effectiveness varies widely across recipient countries. This study investigates whether political corruption undermines how effectively conservation funding reduces forest loss across Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Using two complementary empirical approaches and data spanning over 90 countries from 2002 to 2023, the study finds no statistically significant evidence that corruption moderates the effectiveness of conservation finance at the national level, suggesting that the relationship between governance and conservation outcomes is more complex than existing theory predicts and that more granular data is needed to do so.



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**Jane Miller**

Hometown: Arlington, Virginia

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Minor: Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy
- Advisor: Joseph Rosenberg

Pilgrimage: A Peripatetic Wandering

My thesis explores walking pilgrimage through literature, philosophy, and lived experience. Drawing on authors such as Aristotle, Geoffrey Chaucer, Robert Macfarlane, and Faust, as well as my own journey along the Camino de Santiago, I examine pilgrimage as both a physical and intellectual practice. The project considers how walking shapes thought, how shared hardship fosters meaningful connections, and how pilgrimage offers a framework for understanding transformation, embodiment, and the search for meaning.



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**Maeve Miller**

Hometown: Tampa, Florida

- Major: Sociology
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Minor: Accountancy
- Advisor: Erin McDonnell

Interpreting Workplace Perks: Two Different Logics of Work Identity, Corporate Benevolence, and Work-Life Balance

My thesis examines how young potential employees perceive perquisites, or perks, in the workplace and the consequences on perceived work-life balance. In this interview study, participants were presented with two fictional job positions, one with perks — on-site gym, free dinner after hours, etc. — and one without. Participants then answered questions about rigor and work-life balance in these roles. By introducing a sociological perspective to this topic, I found that participants were aware of corporate signaling through perks; however, their interpretations of corporate benevolence and motivation varied with their definitions of work-life balance, creating two groups: enchanted acceptors and disenchanting skeptics.



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**Kait Milleret**

Hometown: Ironton, Missouri

- Majors: English (Concentration in Creative Writing) and Japanese
- Advisor: Joyelle McSweeney

In Spring It Is the Dawn

Drawing inspiration from Japanese folklore and classical literature such as *The Tale of Genji*, this project is a series of selections from a larger novel about a shapeshifting fox who infiltrates the Heian court. Acting as an intermediary between spirits and humans, the protagonist navigates feelings of love and jealousy against a backdrop of superstition, engaging with humans at the risk of being exposed as an interloper. By examining Japanese aesthetics and class tension through a fantastical lens, this project aims to immerse readers in the melancholic society of ancient Japan during its cultural zenith.



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**Tia Mittle**

Hometown: Mumbai, Maharashtra,
India

- Majors: Political Science and
Global Affairs
- Minor: International Development
Studies
- Advisor: Susan Ostermann

Explaining the Indian Paradox: How Quotas, Combined with Social Norms, Produce Divergent Outcomes for Women's Political Ambition

India has implemented gender quotas to increase women's political representation, yet this has produced a paradox: high participation in patriarchal regions and low participation in less patriarchal ones. This thesis uses a comparative qualitative study of villages in Uttar Pradesh and Kerala to examine how social norms shape women's political ambition. Drawing on over 30 interviews, it finds common constraints but divergent outcomes across regions implementing the same institutional reform. In Uttar Pradesh, proxy leadership enables descriptive representation while limiting ambition. In Kerala, strong networks and expectations of independence enable gradual substantive representation.



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**Mireya Monterroso**

Hometown: Fort Wayne, Indiana

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Latino Studies
- Advisor: Luis Fraga

Immigration Exceptionalism and the Roberts Court: Did the Supreme Court Practice Immigration Exceptionalism in 2025?

Immigration exceptionalism is a practice that departs from public law, in which immigration is treated as a constitutionally unique domain where standard rules of judicial review and constitutional scrutiny are suspended or weakened. Immigration exceptionalism occurs under the assumption that the plenary power doctrine grants the federal government the unchecked power to make immigration decisions. The origin of immigration exceptionalism and the plenary power doctrine are debated, and this study adopts the view that their forms as practiced today were developed in the Roberts Court. This study examines the immigration cases decided by the Supreme Court in 2025, to determine if the Roberts Court practiced immigration exceptionalism in 2025.



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**Daniel Mooney**

Hometown: Red Bank, New Jersey

- Majors: International Economics (Concentration in German) and Global Affairs
- Advisor: Matthias Hoelzlein

Pathways to Integration: Exploring the Impact of the German Integration Act on Migrant Education and Labor Market Outcomes

Understanding how the spatial allocation of refugees affects their economic and social integration into foreign settings remains a central question in migration economics. In accordance with the 2016 Integration Act, asylum seekers in Germany are distributed across regions through administrative rules that limit initial location choice, creating conditions well-suited for the causal analysis of local context effects on integration outcomes. This paper employs a quasi-experimental design that exploits county-level variation in the concentration of asylum seekers resulting from Germany's mandatory placement system, along with cross-state variation in the strength of compliance with the German Integration Act's place of residence provisions.



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**Michael Mora**

Hometown: Budd Lake, New Jersey

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Minor: Foundations of Business
- Advisor: Katie Bugyis

From the *Pensées* to Puddleglum: C.S. Lewis's Pascalian Resolution to the Crisis of Faith

In this thesis, I provide a careful analysis of C.S. Lewis's profound intellectual indebtedness to Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*. In particular, I assess Lewis's great reliance upon Pascal in resolving the "crisis of faith" — the seeming impossibility for faith to survive in a world rife with inescapable doubt and endless diversion. Tracing Pascal's influence from Lewis' nonfiction apologetics and into the very heart of Lewis's fiction, I focus particularly on Lewis' Pascalian resolution to the crisis of faith in *The Silver Chair*, one of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In our own day, the West is in another crisis of faith. In today's religious climate, Lewis' timeless solution is perhaps timelier now than ever before.



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**Aryana Moreau**

Hometown: Brooklyn, New York

- Major: Africana Studies
- Minor: Gender Studies
- Advisor: Maria McKenna

Beyond the Outlier: Reimagining Educational Success For Black Students From Underresourced Backgrounds through Oral Histories

This project examines how Black college students from underresourced backgrounds navigate and gain access to a predominantly white institution, using oral histories from four University of Notre Dame students. Their narratives illuminate the structural, familial, and cultural forces that shape their educational trajectories, revealing both the barriers they encounter and the forms of capital they mobilize to succeed. By challenging dominant narratives of exceptionalism and the “talented tenth,” this study asks what conditions — beyond individual perseverance — enable equitable outcomes. Ultimately, it explores alternative frameworks for educational achievement rooted in Black communities rather than elite institutional validation.



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**Charlie Morris**

Hometown: Rye, New York

- Major: American Studies
- Minor: Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy
- Advisor: Peter Cajka

Thin Ice: The U.S.-Canada Allyship and International Politics of Hockey

This project delves into the relationship between hockey and international politics through four case studies. The centerpiece of the project focuses on the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off hockey tournament, in which the trade war increased the stakes of the championship game between the United States and Canada. Prior to 2025, politics and hockey clashed twice amid the Cold War, during the 1980 Miracle on Ice and 1972 Summit Series, and Canada and the U.S. met again at the 2026 Olympics. Ultimately, the goal of the project is to prove that hockey's violent nature and international competitiveness breed politically charged games unlike any other sport.



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**Ryan Murphy**

Hometown: Concord, New Hampshire

- Major: American Studies
- Minor: Sport, Media, and Culture
- Advisor: Annie Gilbert Coleman

Small Area Games: The Professionalization of American Youth Ice Hockey

This thesis investigates the growth and influence of professionalization and commercialization in American youth ice hockey from 1945 to 2000. The professionalization of youth sport — characterized by an emphasis on winning and talent identification, specialization in one sport, and year-round training — has become a growing concern among scholars and the public alike. Using archival material from four different collections, this thesis shows how incremental change by well-meaning adults made the game more expensive, more specialized, and less accessible by the end of the century. This history provides important context for grappling with issues of access in today's \$40 billion youth sports industry.



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**Aidan Murray**

Hometown: Glen Ellyn, Illinois

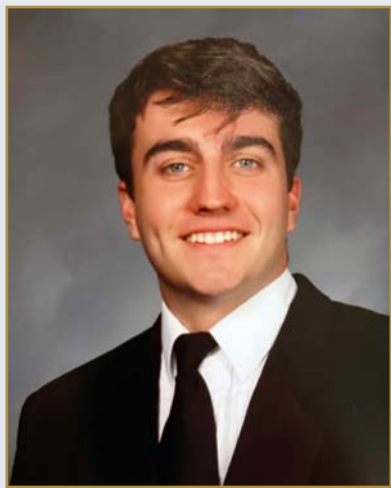
- Majors: Music (Concentration in Performance: Organ) and Aerospace Engineering
- Advisor: Mary Catherine Levri

Senior Organ Recital

This degree recital featured a program consisting of the "Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546" and "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV 659" of J.S. Bach, as well as "Livre de Noël, Op. 2," "I. Noël, sur les jeux d'anches sans tremblant," "X. Noël, grand jeu et duo," and "XII. Noël Suisse, grand jeu et duo" of Louis Claude Daquin. It concluded with Louis Vierne's "Symphonie No. 1 Op. 14," "III. Pastorale," "IV. Allegro vivace," and "VI. Final." This recital was performed on the Wayne and Diana Murdy Family Organ at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart.



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**Patrick Murray**

Hometown: Little Silver, New Jersey

- Major: Economics
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Dan Graff

From Teamsters to Teachers: An Explanation of the Divergence in Private and Public Sector Union Density in the Late 20th-Century United States

Since the middle of the 1970s, public sector unions have succeeded in a labor market that has seen most other trade unions falter. In order to explain why one sector saw an increase in organizing while most other sectors experienced stark decline, this thesis examines how changing macroeconomic conditions, firm structures, and technological advancements contributed to a decline in private sector density while public sector unions remained insulated. This thesis also examines how changes to the legal regimes at the state and federal level explain the relative success of public sector unions. The contours of the explanation provide a full picture of the essential factors needed for a durable presence of unions in the labor market.



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**Edward Nagler**

Hometown: Norwalk, Connecticut

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Business Economics
- Advisor: Sebastian Rosato

From Dependent to Defiant: A Structural Theory of Client Proliferation

Why do clients of great powers proliferate? I make two assumptions: Anarchy creates strong incentives for states to acquire nuclear weapons, and great powers universally oppose their spread. These assumptions generate a fundamental tension: Clients desire independent arsenals, yet patrons work tirelessly to prevent that outcome. I argue that the winner of this contest depends on a client's security environment, defined by its relative military capabilities and geography. Clients in benign environments can defy great power opposition and proliferate. Clients in malign environments cannot and remain nonnuclear. I test this theory across six U.S. Cold War clients: the United Kingdom, France, Israel, West Germany, Japan, and South Korea.



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**Jackie Nguyen**

Hometown: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

- Majors: Economics and Theology
- Advisor: Melissa Moschella

The Moral Use of Natural Family Planning

While the Catholic Church consistently condemns contraception, it is less clear under what circumstances abstaining from marital intercourse to avoid conception — commonly practiced as natural family planning (NFP) — is morally permissible. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI writes that for “serious” or “grave” reasons, the use of NFP may be not only licit but prudent. But what qualifies as such a reason? Can the Church clearly delineate the boundary between moral and immoral use of NFP, or does this judgment necessarily depend on prudential discernment? What factors ought to guide couples as they make this decision?



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**Avery Njau**

Hometown: Bloomington, Indiana

- Major: History
- Supplementary Major: A&L Pre-Health
- Advisor: Ijeoma Kola

Sanitation, Victorianism, and Yellow Peril: The Shaping of Bubonic Plague in Sydney, 1900

The third wave of global bubonic plague hit Sydney, Australia, in January, 1900. Despite extremely low infection and death rates, the arrival of the disease prompted robust institutional and public reactions. Destructive cleansing operations and housing demolitions, forced quarantine, discrimination against poor and immigrant populations, and the enactment of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 resulted from intense public demand for government intervention. This project argues that decades of poor municipal sanitation, Victorian morality codes, and the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments crafted Sydney's social fabric at the turn of the century and acted as the most influential factors in plague management.



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**Brendan Nolte**

Hometown: Atlanta, Georgia

- Majors: Economics and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: George Sikharulidze

Bodily Fluids

Bodily Fluids is a minor motion picture following Alejandro (Eamon Nussbaum) and Pirouetta (Brigid O'Driscoll), a young couple in dire straits. One day while using the bathroom, Alejandro, a follower of online influencers the likes of Andrew Tate and Nick Fuentes, stumbles across a video of a big bald man on Instagram announcing the Second Coming of Christ to the nearby town of New Carlisle, Indiana. This complicates things, and the lovebirds go on a journey of faith, love, red wine, and what it means to be a man. A romantic dark comedy, the film explores insecurity in America and how what we put in our bodies affects what comes out of them.



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**Lara Novaes Victor**

Hometown: Taubate, São Paulo
Brazil

- Majors: Chinese and Economics
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Michel Hockx

The Sage and the State: Confucianism as a Source of Legitimacy in the Hu Jintao Era

This thesis examines the revival of Confucianism in post-Mao China, focusing on the Hu Jintao era, and argues that it reflects not merely a return to tradition but a deliberate strategy by the Chinese Communist Party to address ideological and social challenges. By analyzing political speeches, cultural events, and academic discourse, the study shows how Confucian values were leveraged to reinforce moral governance, social harmony, and regime legitimacy. The work situates this revival within both historical Confucian thought and contemporary statecraft, highlighting the interplay between tradition and modern political objectives.



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**Abby O'Connor**

Hometown: Whitehouse, Ohio

- Majors: Anthropology and Art History
- Advisor: Elyse Speaks

From the Basque Country to the Earth: Ecology, Politics, and Place in Site-Specific Basque Sculpture

Basque sculptors Eduardo Chillida and Cristina Iglesias utilize site-specificity and abstraction to engage with regional identity, politics, and the natural world. This thesis investigates how their works in San Sebastián — Chillida's *Peine del viento* (1976) and Iglesias's *Hondalea* (2021) — prompt political and ecological reflection. By analyzing Chillida's use of local materials and abstraction to assert cultural memory and Iglesias's employment of bodily movement to foster environmental stewardship, I explore how these artists engage with local and universal concerns. I demonstrate how site-specific sculpture can transform a viewer's relationship with the land toward a collective responsibility for the Earth.



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**Grace O'Neill**

Hometown: Owosso, Michigan

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: Richard Garnett

Humanity in Government Construction: How Philosophy of the Self Shapes the State

In this project, I explore how political philosophers' conceptions of human nature shape their development of the ideal state, concluding that the latter inevitably relies on the former. I examine various political philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, John Locke, and Karl Marx, observing the relationship between each of their ideas of what it means to be human and their respective notions of the best form of government. The philosophers I have chosen are discussed as individual case studies and are also compared and contrasted with one another.



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**Yara Obeidi**

Hometown: Guelph, Ontario, Canada

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Supplementary Major: Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics
- Advisor: Joseph Rosenberg

***Lolita*: An Allegory of Reading**

When Vladimir Nabokov submitted his draft of *Lolita* to his publisher, he was told that its publication would entail prison for them both. Though the novel, eventually published in 1955, is no longer controversial within literary circles, it continues to excite debate surrounding the morality of fiction. Central to that debate is no longer simply whether we should read *Lolita*, but how to read it, especially when both good and bad readings are possible. To explore these questions, I examine Nabokovian models of reading to analyze three layers of artifice within the novel and argue that the novel functions as an allegory of reading.



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**Kephass Olsson**

Hometown: Lander, Wyoming

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Advisor: Matthew Rickard

John Hales and the Beginning of Socinian Method in England

My thesis argues that John Hales is the seminal figure in the history of English Socinianism, and that Hales came to read Socinus' works in a methodological — especially hermeneutical — not merely political or dogmatic key. Using archival research, I show that Hales introduced Socinianism into the English bloodstream some 15 years earlier than often supposed, arguing that he purchased his large collection of Socinian texts primarily while attending the Synod of Dort. Furthermore, my thesis aims to add a new perspective to the intellectual history of hermeneutics by suggesting that radical sects have been mistreated in purely political or dogmatic taxonomies of radical English religion.



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**Angela Olvera**

Hometown: McAllen, Texas

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Latino Studies
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: Luis Fraga

The Politics of Precedent: Stare Decisis, Political Ideology, and the Supreme Court's Tumultuous Policymaking Role

This investigation examines Supreme Court cases from the Earl Warren Court (1953-69) and the modern-day John Roberts Court (2005-25). In studying both courts, this side-by-side comparison seeks to provide empirical and traceable evidence in the Court's tenuous relationship with national policymaking. By analyzing the rationale across these comparable constitutional issues, we can evaluate how political motivations, partisan affiliations, and the ruling regime influence the Court. These findings contribute to broader debates surrounding the evolving dynamics of judicial activism or restraint, and how these approaches are becoming increasingly influenced by the justices' own ideologies.



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**Elizabeth Orchen-Baker**

Hometown: Wethersfield, Connecticut

- Major: Anthropology
- Supplementary Major: A&L Pre-Health
- Minor: Poverty Studies
- Advisor: Cara Ocobock

Autonomic Flexibility Across the Lifespan: Polyvagal Theory, Stress Regulation, and the Ventral Vagal Complex

How does autonomic nervous system flexibility, as understood through Polyvagal Theory, mediate stress regulation and resilience across the lifespan, and what biological and environmental factors influence access to the ventral vagal complex?



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**Naz Palines**

Hometown: Gardena, California

- Majors: Classics and Philosophy & Theology
- Advisor: Michael Baxter

Settling the Divorce between Throne and Altar: The Scholastic Roots of 'Dignitatis Humanae'

This thesis analyzes "Dignitatis Humanae," Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom, to understand its defense of the universal human right to religious liberty. After parsing out the grammar of the declaration, this thesis then traces its theological genealogy through the Catholic political tradition, specifically through the writings of John Courtney Murray and Thomas Aquinas.



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**Charlie Pehl**

Hometown: Seattle, Washington

- Majors: Economics and History
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Sarah Shortall

Catholics, Cinema, and Culture Wars: The Church and Postwar Italian Cinema 1945-65

My thesis investigates the relationship between the Catholic Church and Italian cinema in the two decades following World War II. I analyze films, Catholic film periodicals, and papal encyclicals to capture the Church's efforts to respond to the films of Italian directors ambivalent to the faith during two decades of profound social and political change.



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**Matthew Potter**

Hometown: Hoboken, New Jersey

- Majors: Accounting and Finance
- Supplementary Major: Italian
- Minors: Constitutional Studies and Real Estate
- Advisor: Kathleen Boyle

Mangia che ti fa bene: Food as a Means of Social Mobility in the Italian American Community

From Italians' mass arrival in the 1880s until today, food has been at the center of the Italian immigrant experience. It was not only a means for sustenance but a cultural marker in the New World, and it represented an opportunity for social mobility. Many authors and filmmakers use the central role of food in Italian American society to tell a story of the people's place within the fabric of American history. Through a selection of films and literary works, this paper examines how food represents an opportunity for socioeconomic mobility for the Italian American community.



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**David Rae**

Hometown: Yorktown Heights,
New York

- Majors: Philosophy & Theology
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: Rev. Matthew Hovde,
C.S.C.

***Imitatio Christi* in Blessed Basil Moreau's Vision for the Congregation of Holy Cross**

To Blessed Basil Moreau, the imitation of Christ was not a general aspiration, but rather the foundation for the spiritual life for the new Holy Cross priests, brothers, and sisters. Importantly, this imitation was only possible through a union with Christ, specifically through an intimate, effective, and glorious union wherein one becomes another Christ. In his writings, Moreau leads his readers through a journey of self-knowledge and knowledge of Jesus that culminates in the one who hopes to be Jesus's disciple handing over their heart to Him, the glorious crucified Model.



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**Tommy Rafacz**

Hometown: Schaumburg, Illinois

- Major: Political Science
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Susan Rosato

Decapitation as Policy: The Effectiveness of the United States' Use of Assassination Against Foreign State-Linked Actors

There has been much literature on whether the targeted killings of terrorists by the United States is beneficial for American foreign policy goals but comparatively little research on the benefits and drawbacks of the assassinations of state-linked opponents. I examine a range of case studies in which the United States sponsored the assassination of a foreign political or military leader in order to examine whether certain circumstances or target backgrounds correlate with a positive or negative outcome of the assassination for the United States.



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**Kate Rafford**

Hometown: Tempe, Arizona

- Majors: American Studies and Economics
- Minor: Hesburgh Program in Public Service
- Advisor: Kathleen Sprows Cummings

Magic in the Sound of Her Name: Remembering the Female Faculty at Notre Dame 1970-81

While the University of Notre Dame's history has often highlighted important male figures, the women instrumental to its formation and evolution have been ignored. This thesis profiles the advocacy, scholarship, and legal battles of the first female faculty that sought to make Notre Dame a home for women. Through studying primary sources from Notre Dame at the time of coeducation and discovering the archives of four important women, I found that Notre Dame initially failed to make the changes necessary for faculty women's inclusion. Still today, despite decades of promises about accelerating hiring and retention of women, Notre Dame lags behind its academic peers, thus missing out on the academic diversity that more women would provide.



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**Reid Ragsdale**

Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee

- Major: Spanish
- Supplementary Major: A&L Pre-Health
- Advisor: Vanesa Miseres

St. Francis of Assisi's Care for Creation: Francis' Lasting Influence on Modern Ecological Theology

This thesis explores the relationship between the representations of the theme of motherhood in Federico García Lorca's *Yerma* and Pedro Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre*. This work aims at examining these two works through a sociohistorical lens that utilizes the historical bookending of the Spanish Civil War and the aesthetic influence of camp across the two works. These works are also analyzed through a close literary analysis in order to further understand the representation of motherhood in these works and the complications it offers in order to better comprehend the attitudes toward gender roles in 20th-century Spain.



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**Diego Ramos**

Hometown: Houston, Texas

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Advisor: Ricardo Ramirez

Crisis: AIDS, the Politics of Emergency Policy, and Strategic Activism

The AIDS crisis began in 1981, and the lives of civilians were immediately threatened en masse. The crisis ravaged the lives of those with AIDs largely due to varying response levels from the federal government. This project seeks to uncover why the federal government responded, or did not respond, throughout the 1980s and '90s, and the effect of strategic activism in pushing for a government policy response. The government's response will be evaluated under a paradigm of emergency politics, and the cultural stigma against LGBTQ+ people will be a focal point of analysis. This era in U.S. politics was plagued by crisis, so government stakeholders' responsiveness to activism can uncover further how the government handles dire civilian stakes.



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**Alejandra Ricardo**

Hometown: Santo Domingo,
Dominican Republic

- Majors: Political Science and Theology
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: Daniel Philpott

Conscience v. Compliance: A Judicial Settlement Between Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty

In the wake of Obergefell, conflicts in the commercial sphere have emerged as religious business owners refuse to provide services for same-sex weddings on account of their deeply held beliefs that recognize marriage as a union exclusively between a man and a woman. This paper addresses the constitutional tensions between same-sex marriage and religious liberty by proposing a jurisprudential framework to evaluate claims of religious exercise in the context of public accommodation law. Ultimately, this thesis explores the Supreme Court's religious liberty jurisprudence and aims to offer a legal defense for the rights of religious business owners to operate their business in a manner consistent with the doctrines of their faith.



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**Miriam Rice**

Hometown: Toms River, New Jersey

- Majors: Music (Concentration in Performance: Piano) and Program of Liberal Studies
- Advisor: Matthew Gummess

Just Another Brick in the Stonewall: Simone de Beauvoir through the Prism of the Closet, Disclosure, and Queer Experience

My thesis engages the work of French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, specifically her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. I apply the ethical framework outlined in this book to the situation of a queer person coming out of the closet, arguing that self-disclosure, especially of one's sexuality, is both necessary enough to require the freedom to do it, and transitory enough to be treated as a stepping stone, not a point of arrival.



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**Bridgette Rodgers**

Hometown: Santa Monica, California

- Majors: Political Science and Theology
- Advisor: Joshua McManaway

An Education in Death: The Marian Mission of a Catholic University

This thesis examines the Marian posture at the heart of a Catholic university's mission, proposing it as a model for undergraduate formation. To adopt a Marian stance is to learn to receive, bear, and bring Christ to the world through one's unique vocation. Central to this vocation is the universal call to self-denial: to die to oneself in pursuit of deeper communion with Christ. Within the distinctive environment of a Catholic university, students encounter the *Logos* in a privileged way, nourishing a rich interior life. This cultivated interiority becomes essential, sustaining them long after they leave the university's sacramental abundance.



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**Anna Rohrer**

Hometown: Firth, Nebraska

- Major: History
- Minors: Chinese and International Security Studies
- Advisor: Ian Johnson

Showdown on the Final Frontier: Competition in the Development of International Outer Space Law

International outer space law was created in the United Nations during the Cold War, a period of great power competition between the United States and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This competition motivated international space law's creation, while international cooperation, such as international treaties, served to further facilitate this competition. This thesis analyzes law reviews, international treaties, and United States executive branch documents from the Cold War era to identify outer space events and international treaties that influenced the formation of international outer space law in order to trace the development of legal thought on outer space law and place legal debates in their historical context.



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**Nicholas Rotondi**

Hometown: Troy, New York

- Majors: Philosophy and Spanish
- Minors: Middle Eastern and North African Studies and Theology
- Advisor: Keith Schaefer

La Escuela de la Sociabilidad: La Soledad en la Obra de Miguel de Unamuno

My project examines the paradox of solitude and sociability in the work of Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936). For Unamuno, solitude and sociability are inseparable. The social person is also solitary, and the solitary is also social. True society is formed of solitaires, and true solitude is composed of dialogue with oneself. Through a close reading of select novels and essays by Unamuno, with particular attention to his essay "Soledad" (1913), I explore the dialectic between solitude and the social and ultimately argue that the tension between the two provides an alternative to a modern, technified mode of being that views the world and others as an unending set of problems to be solved.



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**Olivia Ruffalo**

Hometown: Glen Ellyn, Illinois

- Majors: Italian and Accountancy
- Advisor: Kathleen Boyle

Made in Italy: A Study of the Political and Cultural Significance of Italian National Branding and Fascism's Impact on the Italian Fashion Industry

Made in Italy is one of the most powerful national brands in the world, and this thesis aims to discover what *makes* Made in Italy. Italian national branding holds deep political and cultural significance dating back to the nation's decades under fascist control (1922-45). In this thesis, I focus on well-known Italian brands Gucci, Ferragamo, Schiaparelli, and Prada, analyzing how key aspects of fascist ideology, such as cultural autarky, imperialistic expansion, standardization in daily dress, and hypermasculinity, are evident in their signature pieces. Historically, two brands aligned with fascist uniformity, while the latter two often subverted and satirized this ideology.



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Quinn Sanderson

Hometown: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- Major: Sociology
- Minors: Collaborative Innovation and Philosophy, Politics, and Economics
- Advisor: Erin McDonnell

Signaling Semantics: How Labels Shift Political Support for American Foreign Aid in the Wake of USAID's Closure

In July 2025, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) officially shut down and ceased operations, a process that began in February of the same year. Mainstream media coverage of the policy shift led to a spike in media headlines, Google searches, and overall attention toward USAID. Using data gathered with two nationally representative public opinion surveys, this study asks whether the Trump administration's closure of USAID, and subsequent media coverage, durably attached partisan connotations to the agency's name. Results from this study suggest that high-publicity partisan actions can load polarizing connotations onto previously neutral labels, a policy-relevant insight.



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**Carley Sapp**

Hometown: Columbia, Missouri

- Major: Anthropology
- Minors: Linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
- Advisor: Susan Sheridan

Teaching in Trauma Analysis: Improved Pedagogical Approaches in Cranial Trauma

Within the fields of bioarchaeology and paleopathology, there has been an ongoing call for increased rigor and standardization. Through the utilization of osteological remains of individuals from the Early Bronze Age II-III site of Bab adh-Dhra', this senior thesis project hopes to improve and standardize the pedagogy surrounding the differential diagnosis of cranial depression fractures. Current resources are variable and inexplicit through their use of exaggerated images and inconsistent lexicon to explain the diagnosis for this cranial trauma. This project utilizes three student test groups to analyze the effectiveness of currently available resources against a newly created pedagogy.



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**Monica Schleg**

Hometown: Grayslake, Illinois

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Advisor: Aníbal Pérez-Liñán

Protection Without Promise: Gender and the Limits of Asylum and Migration Law in South America

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has triggered the largest displacement in South American history. Nearly 8 million Venezuelans are homeless and desperately seeking shelter in neighboring South American states. Venezuelan women and gender minorities often face unique risks, ones that often cause barriers to protection. This project examines the legal frameworks of Chile, Brazil, and Colombia, seeking to determine to what extent their asylum and migration laws comply with international human rights standards for gender-based protection. Using a comparative legal analysis, this study scores laws and decrees to assess and compare how gender-specific risks and recognized and addressed within formal legal systems.



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**Noel Shabu**

Hometown: Lancaster, Pennsylvania

- Major: Anthropology
- Supplementary Major: Biochemistry
- Advisor: Lee Gettler

Associations between Adult Peer Rankings of Child Health and Indicators of Child Well-Being Among BaYaka Foragers and Bandongo Fisher-Farmers in the Congo Basin

This study examines how culturally embedded peer-ranking methods reflect child health in small-scale subsistence societies. While anthropometric measures are used to assess child well-being, they may overlook local understandings of health. Drawing on research from BaYaka foragers and Bandongo fisher-farmers in the Congo Basin, this project explores whether fathers' peer evaluations align with anthropometric indicators of health. Given differences in social structure, this study situates peer-ranking within broader cultural and ecological contexts. By integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, it highlights how local norms, caregiving systems, and resource distribution shape child outcomes and the validity of peer-ranking methods.



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**Kathryn Sherman**

Hometown: Hopkins, Minnesota

- Majors: Chinese and Aerospace Engineering
- Advisor: Michel Hockx

The Workforce behind the Rockets: A Comparative Study of Work Culture in the U.S. and Chinese Space Industries

This thesis examines how work culture shapes technological development in the United States and China's space industries. While both countries pursue similar goals in rocket technology and human spaceflight, their engineering outcomes are driven by fundamentally different cultural and organizational systems. China's space sector reflects centralized planning and collective, high-intensity work norms, while the U.S. system emphasizes commercial competition and internally motivated startup culture. By comparing these environments, the thesis argues that differences in work culture, not just technical capability, play a critical role in determining development speed, engineering practices, and the future trajectory of human spaceflight.



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**Kiki Shim**

Hometown: Haddonfield, New Jersey

- Majors: Economics and Global Affairs
- Advisor: Kasey Buckles

Household Composition and Parental Time Investment: Evidence from Biological, Step, and Adoptive Parents

Children from nonbiological families fare worse than children in biological families, but it is unclear why this correlation exists. This paper explores one potential explanation: parental time investment. Using data from the American Time Use Survey, I analyze daily time diaries for biological, step, and adoptive parents to identify differences in overall child care time between family types. The results indicate that both stepparents and adoptive parents do less childcare than biological parents. Overall, the findings add to the divided literature on child care time and provide some insight into a potential contributor to the outcome divide between children in different families.



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**Peyton Shrader**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

- Majors: Anthropology and Global Affairs
- Advisor: Maurizio Albahari

From Protection to Product: The Transformation of the Evil Eye in Contemporary Athens

The Greek evil eye's presence in global tourism markets has become increasingly apparent. How can the evil eye exist simultaneously as a meaningful Greek cultural symbol while also being a commercialized product within souvenir shops? Is globalization and commodification of the evil eye compromising the evil eye's authenticity within Greek culture? Through semistructured interviews with souvenir shop workers in Athens, Greece, I examine how the evil eye is transformed across these contexts. Ultimately, this study reveals that rather than diminishing its cultural meaning, globalization transforms the evil eye into a multidimensional symbol that operates simultaneously as a spiritual protection, cultural identity, and commercial commodity.



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**Gabriela Sierocka**

Hometown: Toru, Poland

- Major: Computer Science
- Minors: Business Economics and Italian
- Advisor: Theodore Cachey Jr.

Visions of Judgment: Reimagining Dante's *Inferno* in 19th- and 20th-Century Art

This thesis examines how four major artists — William Blake, Gustave Doré, Alberto Martini, and Salvador Dalí — reimagined Dante's *Inferno* across the 19th and 20th centuries. Through comparative iconographic analysis and historical contextualization, it traces how each artist transformed Dante's moral architecture into a reflection of their own era's anxieties. Focusing on three pivotal cantos — the lustful, the suicides, and Lucifer — the project argues that visual reinterpretations of the *Inferno* reveal the gradual transformation of Hell from a theological construct into a psychological and metaphysical space.



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**Hannah Alice Simon**

Hometown: Kochi, Keralam, India

- Majors: English and Psychology
- Minor: Theology
- Advisors: Barbara Green and Elizabeth Capdevielle

Crossing the Threshold of the Green World into Porous Spaces of Encounter: Redefined Domesticity and the Ungendered Home in Girls' College Fiction of the Progressive Era

The genre of girls' college fiction emerged in the late 19th century to normalize the relatively new, all-female space of women's colleges. Yet scholars have tended to minimize this genre's contributions to feminist discourse, characterizing the freedom and rebellion portrayed in these novels, particularly those that trace the post-college years, as irrelevant aberrations. My thesis explores the post-college trajectory in the Molly Brown series to show how college shapes the college girl protagonist into a woman who makes porous the boundaries between the private and public domains, dismantles gendered spaces within her home, and sustains a female community of reciprocity that empowers women.



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**Kali Spalding**

Hometown: Makawao, Maui, Hawai'i

- Majors: Anthropology and English
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Ashlee Bird

‘Ōkolehao

Set during the plantation era in Hawai'i, *‘Ōkolehao* is a novella that explores family, identity, and love in the islands at the turn of the century. Toni, the eldest daughter of first-generation Portuguese immigrants — and brewers of potent 'ōkolehao — must grapple with the effects of their illicit enterprises on the family she is desperately working to keep together, acknowledging the 'ōkolehao as their financial lifeblood, but also the thing that threatens to tear them all apart.



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**Allison Srp**

Hometown: Austin, Minnesota

- Majors: English and Theology
- Minor: Italian
- Advisor: Susannah Monta

'I Feare No More': Forgiveness, Confession, and Liturgy in John Donne's Poetry and Sermons

I am using John Donne's writing, specifically "Good Friday, 1613. Rising Westward," "A Hymn to God the Father," and a sermon on Psalm 32:5, to explore how forgiveness and confession were thought about in early modern England. The English Reformation changed much of how those topics were discussed, and these works provide a window into the emotional consequences of the transition away from sacramental confession and the ways in which liturgy fits into those changes. I traveled to London in July 2025 to consult works from this era in the British Library, which was supported by a grant from the Nanovic Institute for European Studies and a Sorin Fellows Program grant from the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture.



**Anna Izabella Stachniak**

Hometown: London, United Kingdom

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Business Economics and Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: David Campbell

MACA: Make Accountability Consistent Again!

This project examines why comparable episodes of presidential overreach produced starkly different accountability outcomes in the cases of Richard Nixon and Donald Trump. Executive accountability is explored through the dual lenses of congressional response and public opinion, each situated within an era of intensified partisanship. Drawing on historical analysis and an original survey experiment, the study traces how citizens judge presidential misconduct. The findings reveal a striking tension: While wrongdoing is widely recognised, the impulse to punish it fractures along partisan lines, suggesting that democratic accountability endures, albeit in a conditional and increasingly politicised form.



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**Keira Stenson**

Hometown: El Segundo, California

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Advisor: Thomas Stapleford

‘The Central Truth of Existence’: Lily Bart’s Search for Purpose and Fulfillment in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*

Edith Wharton’s 1905 novel *The House of Mirth* presents a poignant picture of its heroine, Lily Bart, as her attempts at an advantageous marriage dissolve into crises of agency, relationship, and self-fulfillment. Though sometimes interpreted as a classic challenge to the patriarchal structures that confined women to marriage and ornamentality, the novel’s complicated dynamics of power, desire, and self-knowledge frustrate such a simple reading and prompt valuable reflection on the true source of feminine — or even human — fulfillment. This project considers how Lily attempts to resist the aloof detachment society advocates, and how her failure to find satisfaction might challenge women’s attempts to find realization through self-reliance.



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**Claire Stinson**

Hometown: Chagrin Falls, Ohio

- Major: Economics
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Minor: Poverty Studies
- Advisor: Evan Mast

Availability of the American Dream: The Effect of Access to FHA Mortgages on Low-Income Homeownership

Owning a home is a key financial asset and a symbol of the American Dream for many families. Mortgages are an essential mechanism for accessing this dream, but this pathway is too often closed to low-income, credit-constrained households. In this paper, I study a litigation shock that decreased access to Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans, a mortgage program specifically designed for riskier borrowers. I replicate and extend an existing framework, showing a significant decrease in both the size and magnitude of FHA loans originated in counties with greater exposure to this shock.



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**Richard Sutliff**

Hometown: Davis Junction, Illinois

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Hesburgh Program in Public Service and International Security Studies
- Advisor: Daniel Lindley

Minimizing Constraints, Opening Doors: The Destabilizing Nature of Drone Warfare

This thesis examines how unmanned aerial systems (UASs) reshape constraints on the use of military force in contemporary conflict. Using an expected-utility framework, I argue that drones lower both domestic political and military feasibility constraints by reducing soldier and civilian casualties and providing cheaper, more adaptable strike capabilities. Through quantitative analysis of historical and economic trends, alongside case studies of counterterrorism strategies in the Obama administration and drone warfare in the Russia-Ukraine War, I find that UASs both expand the range of actors able to employ force and increase situations in which limited military action appears worthwhile.



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**Richard Taylor**

Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri

- Majors: Theology and Physics
- Minor: Mathematics
- Advisor: Trent Pomplun

The School in the Heart of Jesus: The Doctrine, Spirituality, and Epistemology of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

In 2024, Pope Francis promulgated his last encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, on the devotion to the Sacred Heart. In June 2026, United States bishops will consecrate the U.S. to the Sacred Heart in celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary. This thesis advances one way of understanding this resurging early-modern Catholic devotion: as a spiritual school. The spirituality of the devotion to the Sacred Heart encourages an intimate contact and an exchange of love with the Person of Christ. This spiritual contact makes the devotion to the Sacred Heart an excellent school for the conversion of non-Christians and Christians alike.



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**Jack Theobald**

Hometown: Milton, Massachusetts

- Major: Political Science
- Advisor: Steven Landis

From Words to War: How Leadership Rhetoric Shapes Conflict Onset

This thesis examines how political rhetoric, specifically inflammatory rhetoric, shapes the likelihood of conflict onset in militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). To do so, this study introduces and develops an original measure of inflammatory rhetoric using a two-dimensional framework — tone (aggressive vs. passive) and precision (specific vs. vague). Using content analysis of U.S. presidential statements in the 90-day period preceding dyadic MIDs, I construct a novel dataset and use binary logit models to evaluate the relationship between rhetoric and conflict onset. The results confirm my hypothesis that higher levels of inflammatory rhetoric are associated with an increased likelihood of conflict onset.



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**Matthew Thorn**

Hometown: Manasquan, New Jersey

- Majors: Economics and Political Science
- Minors: Italian and Sport, Media, and Culture
- Advisor: Susan Rosato

Shall It Be a Jubilee: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Italy-Holy See Relationship

Set within a city that hosts multiple sovereign entities, the Roman Jubilee provides an insight into how Italy, the Holy See, and local actors balance authority. This paper examines the extent to which the pilgrimage fosters cooperation and discord between these parties. In the process, it examines two variables for predicting the impact of Jubilee-related issues on the parties' relationship: salience within the Italian public and historical settlement. Arguing that salient Jubilee issues that have been settled in past agreements are most likely to foster cooperation, this paper hopes to clarify each actor's role in the pilgrimage and Rome at large.



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**Dorothy Tomko**

Hometown: Havertown, Pennsylvania

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Minor: History
- Advisor: Matthew Rickard

Stitched Poetics in the Sidney Psalter

The Sidney Psalter was the work of two authors: Philip Sidney, who began it, and his sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, who completed it. I focus here on Mary's paraphrases. My goal in this project was to examine Mary's consistent use of needlework and fabric as guiding metaphors, asking why she might choose textiles as metaphor even when such language is not supported by her source materials.

Ultimately, I argue that her use of the social, cultural, and theological implications of textile objects in the psalter and in her introductory materials proposes the psalms, and her paraphrase specifically, as a new kind of intangible priestly vestment for 16th-century English Protestants. I also completed an accompanying embroidery piece.



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**Sophia Torcelino**

Hometown: Mangilao, Guam

- Majors: English and Psychology
- Advisor: Liam Kruger

Language as Liberation: Negotiating Postcolonial Identities in *Americanah* and *Devil on the Cross*

This essay examines how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* challenge simplistic views of identity in postcolonial contexts. Applying the manifestos of Adichie's "single story" and Thiong'o's linguistic decolonization, Ifemelu and Wariinga negotiate their identities of race, gender, and belonging. Through motifs such as language and labor, both texts reveal how colonial histories shape self-perception. Ultimately, the essay argues that each protagonist resists assimilation and reductionism by maintaining self-defined identities within and beyond oppressive social structures.



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**Nicolas Tsypin**

Hometown: Tallahassee, Florida

- Major: Economics
- Minors: Constitutional Studies and Data Science
- Advisor: Christopher Mills

Betting Against the Future?: Online Sports Gambling and the Socioeconomic Trajectories of Young Men

Since 2018, many states have legalized sports gambling, which, combined with digital technology, has led to a rapid introduction of low-friction betting into U.S. households. Young men, who are already economically vulnerable, are the largest demographic for betting apps. This paper utilizes nationwide survey data, along with the staggered adoption of sports gambling laws, to examine indicators of long and short-term stability among young men.



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**Colly Urdan**

Hometown: San Francisco, California

- Majors: History and Political Science
- Minors: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics
- Advisor: Joshua Specht

Land Grants and the Liberal Arts: The Battle for Higher Education in 19th-Century America

When Puritan settlers arrived in Massachusetts Bay 400 years ago, among the first things they did was establish a college. Ever since, Americans have been receiving a higher education in various formats. This project examines the Morrill Act of 1862, which established land-grant colleges and universities. The debate surrounding the Act — whether to emphasize classical or practical education — has animated arguments about the nature of education for millennia. The Morrill Act should be viewed as one short chapter in this larger debate and as a turning point in the history of American education.



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**Electra Vaitsas**

Hometown: Atlanta, Georgia

- Majors: Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics) and International Economics (Concentration in French)
- Advisor: Mary Flannery

How Fintech Repriced Trust in France

Following the 2012 European Sovereign Debt Crisis, France's banks faced tighter regulation, declining profitability, and weakened trust, enabling financial technology, or fintech, to enter the market, reshaping consumer expectations and competition. While fintech's global expansion is well studied, its impact on France remains less understood. Using a France-specific bank-year dataset and fixed-effect OLS and IV models across bank groups, this analysis finds that early fintech growth compresses margins and erodes market share for less adaptive incumbents, while digitally advanced banks recover profitability, suggesting a hybrid equilibrium in which fintech complements traditional banking and reshapes how trust is produced and priced.



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**Mark Valenzuela**

Hometown: Pasadena, California

- Majors: History and Spanish
- Advisor: Jaime Pensado

No Crimes, Only Criminals: Science and Determinism in Mexican Criminology, 1867-1901

My thesis explores how the Mexican justice system fundamentally changed its view of criminality at the end of the 19th century. Though the law initially treated crime as a voluntary moral choice to do wrong, this perspective was soon replaced by a deterministic approach that viewed criminal behavior as an inevitable result of a person's biology or social environment. The effect was to create a national criminal pathology that defined the Mexican people as a violent people and the Mexican nation as a violent nation, a stigma that continues to affect the present.



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**Izabella Vasquez**

Hometown: Tulare, California

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Latino Studies
- Minor: Civil and Human Rights
- Advisor: Emilia Justyna Powell

Legal Traditions and Human Rights: A Comparative Analysis of Civil, Common, and Islamic Law

This research examines how civil, common, and Islamic legal traditions influence the enforcement of human rights. While international law is often perceived as universal, legal traditions often shape enforcement capacity, leading to different human rights outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research compares three states between 2020 and 2025. Quantitative analysis is based on data from V-Dem, Freedom House, and the Human Rights Data Index, while qualitative data examines major human rights violations reported by Human Rights Watch. The analysis indicates that civil law states perform the strongest, common law states perform moderately, and Islamic law states perform the weakest overall.



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**Joshua Velasquez**

Hometown: Edinburg, Texas

- Major: Theology
- Advisor: Ann Astell

Dunstan Thompson: A True Conversion?

The life, work, and legacy of Dunstan Thompson, an American-born Catholic and gay poet active in the years surrounding World War II, have been heavily debated in literary circles, even as familiarity with his name waned in the 1950s. Because of his obscurity and apparent disappearance from the public stage, critics have, until recently, have gathered around two poles of interpretation, each of which exalts his gay or Catholic experience to the denigration of the other. This project examines the controversy surrounding Thompson's interpretation from the theological, conversion-centric perspective of Bernard Lonergan to support a more unified theory and to present his story to theological audiences.



**Sam Viner**

Hometown: Lake Village, Indiana

- Major: American Studies
- Minors: Theology and European Studies
- Advisor: Annie Coleman

Planting a Seed of Hope: *Laudato Si'*'s Relationship with Catholic and Native Communities in Chicago

Laudato Si' marked a huge transformation in Catholic views about the environment, especially regarding climate change. I use two frameworks to investigate *Laudato Si'*: Native traditional ecological knowledge and the Catholic theological tradition. I argue that Chicago's Native community supports a holistic model of community health that resembles integral ecology, yet Indigenous knowledge, not *Laudato Si'*, is the primary driver of environmental action. By analyzing Chicago Catholics' responses to *Laudato Si'* in the Archdiocese's *Laudato Si'* Action Platform and parishes, this thesis argues the Archdiocese advertises *Laudato Si'* ministries as extensive and robust publicly, but parish engagement shows a gap between rhetoric and practice.



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**Aidan Walsh**

Hometown: Clarendon Hills, Illinois

- Major: Psychology
- Minor: Science, Technology, and Values
- Advisor: Kristin Valentino

Impulsivity, Childhood Maltreatment, and Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents: The Role of Emotional Security

I sought to examine emotional security as a protective factor against suicide in highly vulnerable adolescent populations. Collecting a sample of nearly 200 participants as part of the REACH Project and Development & Psychopathology Lab, I assessed childhood maltreatment, impulsivity, and suicidal ideation severity. These risk factors were analyzed alongside emotional security, a construct that encompasses feelings of safety, family stability, and vulnerability. Our findings suggest that emotional security moderately buffers against suicidal ideation severity in adolescents.



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**Arjun Wasan**

Hometown: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

- Major: Philosophy
- Minor: German
- Advisor: John Betz

The Death of God: Nietzsche's Critique and 20th-Century Responses in the Thought of Heidegger and Jünger

Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher well known for his statement that "God is dead." This thesis examines how Nietzsche's associated critique of religion was received among German philosophical thinkers in the 20th century, focusing on the work of Martin Heidegger and Ernst Jünger, who both grappled with Nietzsche's thought for decades, often in dialogue with each other. This discourse is analyzed in light of developments in public religiosity, and salient points are again brought to bear in critiquing contemporary discussions of secularism and of religious revival movements.



**Colson Wells**

Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

- Majors: Computer Science and English (Concentration in Creative Writing)
- Advisor: Dionne Irving Bremyer

Choking on My Lungs

This novella contends with the sensations and forces of anxiety, how it manifests in the body, and its ability to overpower us. Following Felix Caldwell, a college student partaking in an honors exchange semester, the project explores feeling out of place, socially helpless, and chronically unsure. Pulled into the shadows of a mysterious university legend, Felix's anxieties take physical form, both internally and externally, bringing him in direct conflict with himself and his fear of what the world thinks of him.



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**Sara Wheeler**

Hometown: Needham, Massachusetts

- Majors: Economics and Theology
- Advisor: Marianne Cusato

Dereliction of Duty: The Irish Housing Crisis

Ireland presents a profound contradiction: It has one of the highest GDP per capita globally yet has failed dramatically to provide adequate affordable housing amid a decadelong crisis expected to persist for another 15 years. At the core of the housing crisis is a severe shortage of multifamily and single-family units, consistently lagging behind population growth and net migration. Moreover, tens of thousands of properties remain vacant or derelict, undermining communities and social cohesion, as well as being an affront to those seeking homes in a supply-constrained market. This thesis, structured as a policy report, outlines the crisis' historical and present context, evaluates current policies, and proposes reforms.



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**Eva Williams**

Hometown: Falls Church, Virginia

- Major: American Studies
- Minor: Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy
- Advisor: Peter Cajka

Remnants of War: An Exploration of Visual Rhetoric in Vietnam War Museums

The Vietnam War remains a historical period of political and cultural controversy across academic scholarship, public education, and, for the focus of this project, museums. Through close analyses of visual rhetoric — specifically photographs, plaques, and objects — this thesis analyzes how the common themes of reconciliation and recognition are seen across Vietnam War museums, while also working to focus on visitor engagement and align with contemporary museal trends. This research looks at three case studies: the National Vietnam War Museum in Weatherford, Texas; the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; and the Vietnamese Heritage Museum in Santa Ana, California.



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**Christopher Winter**

Hometown: Oxford, Mississippi

- Major: Classics (Concentration in Latin)
- Minor: Medieval Studies
- Advisor: Hildegund Müller

St. Augustine of Hippo, the Latin Classics, and the Remnant of the Pagan Nobility: A Philological, Historical, and Literary Analysis of St. Augustine's Letter 138

The City of God is one of St. Augustine of Hippo's most influential works, arguing at great length and in painstaking detail against a Roman pagan view of history and in favor of a Christian view. Connected with *The City of God* is Augustine's Letter 138 to Marcellinus, which serves as a precursor to *The City of God* and touches on similar themes. By undertaking a close philological and historical study of this letter, I have sought to show how Augustine uses classical pagan texts and rhetorical techniques to make the remnant of the pagan nobility in his day more amenable to his arguments for Christianity and to show that the works of the pagan authors themselves provide support for Christian claims.



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**Gabi Woodward**

Hometown: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- Major: English
- Supplementary Major: Peace Studies
- Advisor: Laura Knoppers

Sympathy with the Other: Reimagining Elizabeth in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*

Elizabeth Lavenza appears in *Frankenstein* as a character marked by gentleness and moral insight, yet the novel restricts how her compassion can operate. Her sympathy is repeatedly described but ultimately blocked by Victor's secrecy. Guillermo del Toro's 2025 adaptation reimagines this dynamic by expanding Elizabeth's access to information and placing her within the story's central conflicts. In the film, her sympathy becomes fully realized, allowing her to intervene and leave a lasting impact beyond her death. Rather than contradicting Shelley's portrayal, del Toro's interpretation draws out the possibilities the novel suppresses, suggesting that Elizabeth's sympathy offers a response to the narrative's central conflict.



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**George Enshu Xu**

Hometown: Alpharetta, Georgia

- Major: Economics
- Supplementary Major:
A&L Pre-Health
- Advisor: Christopher Cronin

Public Mental Health Care and Provider Diagnosing Behavior: Evidence from the Affordable Care Act and CCBHC Demonstration

Mental health problems impose a significant burden on the health care system and the lives of patients, disproportionately affecting low-income populations. Increasing access to public mental health care presents a promising means to address this problem. I use difference-in-differences and event-study models to examine the effects of Medicaid expansion under the 2014 Affordable Care Act and the 2017 CCBHC demonstration on severe mental health outcomes. I find no evidence for changes in mental health care received, suicidality, or inpatient readmission rates; however, I do find changes in some diagnostic practices indicative of providers responding to new financial incentives.



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**Taemin Yoon**

Hometown: San Francisco, California

- Majors: Economics and Finance
- Advisor: Davin Raiha

Do MLB Pitchers Make Optimal Decisions?: Examining Strategic Decisions in Baseball — A Game Theoretic Approach

My project aims to examine strategic decision making of MLB players, evaluating the optimality of their decisions and exploring what factors play a role in shaping their decisions. In addition, I examine correlations across strategic decisions, particularly the sequences of pitch types delivered by pitchers within an at bat.

My results indicate that players may be behaving suboptimally or making decisions subject to loss aversion. By contrast, the best pitchers in baseball follow strategies that are predicted to be optimal by game theory.

I love baseball. It is a beautiful game and America's favorite pastime.

"How can you not be romantic about baseball?" – *Moneyball*



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**Maxine Zamora**

Hometown: Manila, Philippines

- Major: Psychology
- Supplementary Major: Greek and Roman Civilization
- Minor: Theology
- Advisor: Nicole McNeil

Importance of Teacher-Student Relationship: A Correlational Study

Much of the current research focuses on how the expectations of educators and/or the strength of teacher-student relationships affect the academic outcomes of their students, but lacks the perspective of how these educators view these values. My thesis investigates how tutors prioritize key principles such as setting high expectations and building strong relationships, and the extent to which those priorities correspond to their reported practices. Additionally, this study also seeks to investigate how these chosen principles are associated with reading growth, but those analyses are secondary and exploratory.



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**Sonia Zhang**

Hometown: Shanghai, China

- Majors: Economics and Global Affairs
- Minor: Data Science
- Advisor: Taryn Dinkelman

The Effect of Foreign Aid Project Presence on Local Labor Market Outcomes: Empirical Evidence from Nigeria

This paper examines the impact of education and health foreign aid projects on local labor force participation and occupational outcomes in Nigeria from 2008 to 2019. Using a geospatial matching approach, I combine project-level data with household survey data and estimate effects using a two-way fixed-effects framework. The results show limited statistically significant effects of aid on overall labor market outcomes, except for a positive association between education project spending and labor force participation. Subgroup analyses reveal heterogeneous impacts across urban populations, highly educated individuals, and single women, highlighting the importance of targeting foreign aid policies to specific populations.



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**Rain Zhang**

Hometown: Shanghai, China

- Major: Medieval Studies
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Advisors: Liang Cai and Daniel Hobbins

Barbarian Rulers and Imperial Revival: Ethnicity and Rulership under Charlemagne and Tang Taizong

This project compares the rulership of Charlemagne and Tang Taizong to examine how postimperial regimes reconfigured ethnic identity and imperial legitimacy. It argues that while both rulers inherited traditions that marked them as ethnic others, they developed distinct strategies for governing multiethnic empires. Taizong articulated a universal sovereignty grounded in the concept of *tianxia*, subordinating ethnic distinctions within a unified order. Charlemagne, by contrast, maintained a Frankish ethnic foundation while layering Roman imperial and Christian authority onto it. Through analysis of titulature, court structure, and political rhetoric, the project demonstrates the flexibility of ethnic discourse in shaping imperial power.



**Zach Zieleniewski**

Hometown: Fort Thomas, Kentucky

- Major: Economics
- Minors: Marketing and Sheedy Family Honors Program
- Advisor: Jonathan Tebes

Lending a Hand or Losing a Home?: Evaluating the Causal Impact of Payday Loans on Eviction Filings

This study investigates whether access to payday loans — short-term, high-cost credit typically used by financially vulnerable households — acts as a financial safety valve or a debt trap that drives housing instability. Using a regression-discontinuity design based on a major lender's automated credit score threshold, I analyze over 1 million loan applications matched to public eviction records. My findings indicate that for applicants near the eligibility cutoff, payday loan approval does not lead to a statistically significant change in the likelihood of a subsequent eviction filing. These results suggest that while payday loans pose high financial costs, they may not be a primary driver of immediate housing crises for marginal borrowers.



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