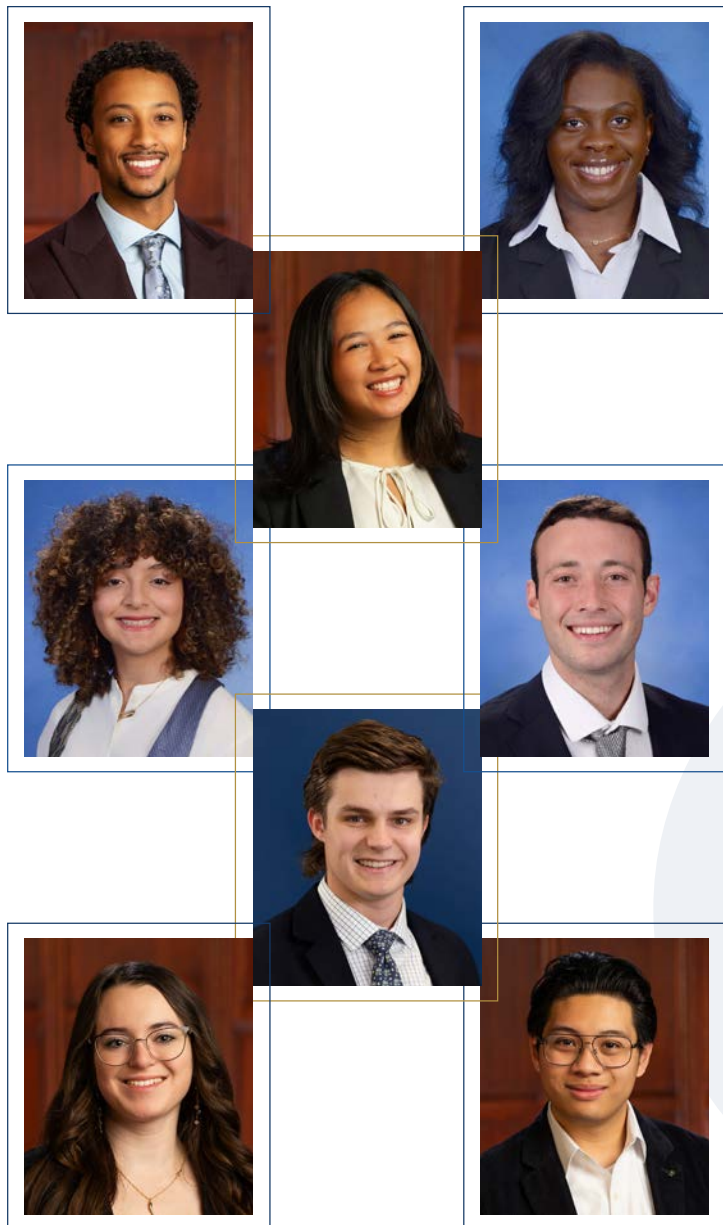




UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

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.

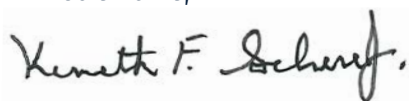
In their theses highlighted in this book, the Class of 2026 asked questions like "How does artificial intelligence shape democratic discourse?" and "Does raising pay keep teachers in the classroom?" Their wonderings ranged from "Can young actors successfully challenge Hollywood norms?" to "What is self-deception?"

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". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kenneth Scheve

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



2026

SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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.



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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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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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.



**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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**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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**Daniel Mooney**

Hometown: Red Bank, New Jersey

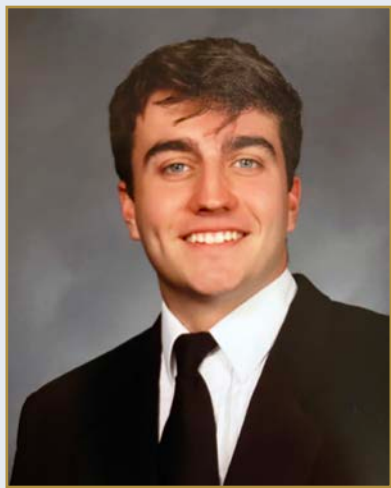
- Majors: International Economics (Concentration in German) and Global Affairs
- Advisor: Matthias Hoelzlein

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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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**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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