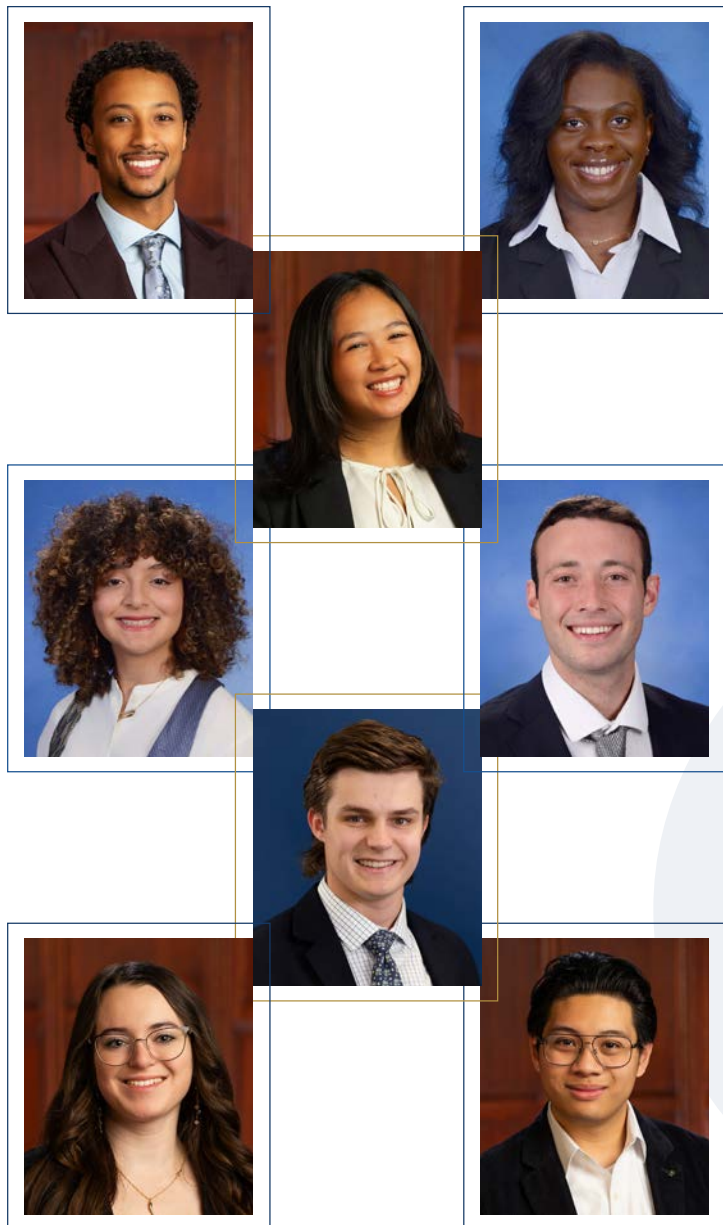




UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

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.

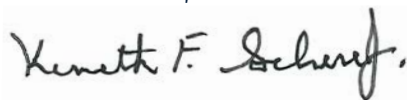
In their theses highlighted in this book, the Class of 2026 asked questions like "How does artificial intelligence shape democratic discourse?" and "Does raising pay keep teachers in the classroom?" Their wonderings ranged from "Can young actors successfully challenge Hollywood norms?" to "What is self-deception?"

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

**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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**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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**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.

