



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

ARTS & LETTERS



2023

SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

Study everything. Do anything.SM



Hello, friends!

I am thrilled to present the 2023 College of Arts & Letters Senior Thesis book, highlighting the 226 students who devoted a significant portion of their final year at Notre Dame to producing an original work of research or creativity.

While reading these synopses, I've been delighted to see that a number of students were again able to travel — throughout the state and around the world — to inform original research and enrich their experience. I hope that you enjoy perusing these yearlong projects. They showcase the academic and innovative skills, as well as the wide-ranging talents and interests, of the Class of 2023.

For instance, students visited the Peace Walls in Ireland, translated a portion of the *Odyssey* into the Hawaiian language, staged a late-night comedy show, analyzed the function of the coxsackie-adenovirus receptor, tested the accuracy of predicting commodity spot prices, designed sustainable dental floss, examined political rhetoric, performed a recital that included *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps: III. Abîme des oiseaux*, and studied minimal surfaces within differential geometry.

As is the case every year, I'm grateful for the faculty members who have so generously shared their expertise and provided support to students undertaking this invaluable undergraduate academic experience.

While I will miss these seniors, individually and collectively, I am heartened that they'll continue to follow their dreams, contribute to scholarship, and serve their communities. Just as they've made the University of Notre Dame a better place, I'm confident they'll make the world a better place.

Sarah A. Mustillo

Sarah A. Mustillo

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

**Lucy Adams**

Hometown: Summit, New Jersey

- Majors: American Studies and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: Peter Cajka

Guilt, Innocence, and Shame: Exploring Four Decades of Representations of HIV/AIDS in TV Medical Dramas

My thesis examines various representations of HIV/AIDS in prime-time medical dramas over the past 35 years. I use a combination of analysis of the writing itself, frame-by-frame visual analysis, and the context in which these media were created and aired/streamed. My aim is to show how televisual representations of HIV/AIDS, specifically its associations with guilt and innocence, have changed since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. I ask what these representations indicate about American culture and what they suggest about representation in general.

I developed a deep and personal interest in the study of HIV/AIDS, memory, and representations after learning that a relative passed away from an AIDS-related illness. I wanted to explore how discussions of HIV/AIDS are frequently laced with ideas about guilt, innocence, and shame, and I wanted to combine this with the educational and transformational abilities of television. I went to the Power of Children exhibit at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis to learn more about Ryan White, a young white hemophiliac who contracted HIV/AIDS from a blood transfusion. He changed the perception of HIV/AIDS in the United States and, thus, was a valuable addition to my research and the context of all representations of HIV/AIDS.

Traveled to Indianapolis and received funding from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP).

**John Adkins**

Hometown: Williamsburg, Virginia

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Advisor: Terrance Brown

The Writing Packet: Late-Night Comedy Writing in the Pandemic

Through research, interviews, and my own comedy writing, I have seen firsthand how late-night comedy helped the general public process and understand events during a turbulent time for the world. My studies and comedy writing practice will culminate in a live-taping of my own late-night comedy show. I have always had a passion for late-night comedy and hoped to study how the genre helps us process the world around us and provides a new communal lens for understanding.

I'm incredibly grateful for the Glynn family and the opportunity to study a topic that means a great deal to me and will surely influence my career. I traveled to New York City to attend tapings of *The Daily Show* and *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, interview a producer at *Saturday Night Live*, and meet with other industry professionals.

Traveled to New York City and received funding from the Glynn Family Honors Program.

**Conrado Alcantara**

Hometown: Metro Manila, Philippines

- Majors: Economics and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Minor: Asian Studies
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Advisor: Manuel Alejandro Estefan Davila

Human Capital Losses from Enhanced Community Quarantine in the Philippines

My aim is to address the implementation of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) policy that was instituted by the Philippine government through human capital loss. My line of thinking stems from a policy proposal from the World Bank, which stressed the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD). Ultimately, I examine how the pandemic has affected ECDs and I quantify the loss of human capital, if any, through each extension of the ECQ. In Sarangani, Philippines, I conducted research and met with school administrations in Indigenous and urban regions.

I chose this topic due to my previous work with Indigenous people in the Philippines filming a documentary in the region. I hope my proposals shed light for the Department of Education to integrate new measures to improve learning outcomes and welfare gain in these communities, and I hope to foster relationships I've built.

Traveled to Sarangani, Philippines, and received funding from the Glynn Family Honors Program.

**Lucy Barron**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

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

What is True 'Self-Care'? : An Exploration of Mental Health Trends through Comedic Television Writing

This project features two episodes of an original half-hour television show which follows a depressed college woman struggling on the path to "self-care," with the help of her only friends, a number of sentient household objects. This show explores social media's depiction of "self care" for young people through the narrative of a young woman trying to overcome her own mental health issues.

Mental health is an issue that has always been important and personal to me, and I strongly believe in the power of humor as a coping mechanism. This project is the perfect union of the two ideas.



Solomon Duane

Hometown: Chesapeake, Virginia

- Major: Architecture
- Minor: Musical Theatre
- Glynn Family Honors Program and Suzanne and Walter Scott Scholars Program
- Advisor: Matt Hawkins

Dawn's Early Light: A New Musical

Dawn's Early Light was workshopped and produced by the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre as a part of its New Works Program. The original musical follows the true story of the Zucchiattis, an Italian-American family struggling with generational conflict during World War II.

I began creating this musical in March 2020, and was inspired to tell a story reflective of another time in American history when a young generation was faced with overcoming a worldwide tragedy on a global scale.

**Quinlan Earley**

Hometown: Wheaton, Illinois

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: Terrance Brown

The Importance of Intersectionality in Television and *The W*

This project researched the importance of representation and intersectionality in television characters. The project was accompanied by an original pilot screenplay called *The W* about women who play in the Women's National Basketball Association.

I chose this topic because of how important representation in media has been proven to be. I want to create entertainment that makes people feel validated in their identities, even if the environment they are surrounded by is insistent on telling them it's not. For me, that starts with this screenplay.

**Grace Gasper**

Hometown: Playa Del Rey,
Los Angeles, California

- Majors: Theology and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisors: Tarryn Chun and Carys Kresny

A Little Princess

My thesis project is a children's stage adaptation of *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The play seeks to give space for the grief, pain, and other big emotions that children feel just as much as adults. It also explores what happens when kindness knows no social norm and imagination knows no age limit.

The book *A Little Princess* spoke to me as an undiagnosed neurodivergent child. My play re-examines the main character, Sara, through a neurodivergent lens. My hope in creating this piece is to show Sara's differences not as obstacles to overcome, but as beautiful, integral parts of who she is. This play demonstrates a boundless kindness that I wish our world were more familiar with. Sara ignores the social norms of class in her attempts to care for others, unintentionally upsetting the social order. I hope this play reminds us all that we all have the power to disrupt the status quo in favor of kindness and love, and everyday we can choose to do so.

**Kelly Harris**

Hometown: Fort Lauderdale, Florida

- Major: Political Science
- Minors: Musical Theatre and Digital Marketing
- Glynn Family Honors Program and Kennedy Scholars Program
- Advisor: David Campbell

Freedom of Speech in the Digital Age: An Exploration of the Impact of Social Media on the First Amendment

Social media has created a paradigm shift in the legal field. My project aims to fill a gap in constitutional studies by analyzing the effects of this new digital medium. To gain greater insight into the role that social media has played in shaping free speech, I conducted a national survey. Respondents played the role of Supreme Court justice, opining on the outcome of scenarios that address classical exceptions to free speech.

Through gauging public opinion on social media's impact on free speech, I aim to provide a reference for when constitutional questions come to a head in the digital realm.

Received funding via a Kennedy Scholars Fellowship.



Nora Hayes

Hometown: Avon, New York

- Majors: Film, Television, and Theatre and History
- Kennedy Scholars Program
- Advisors: Pamela Wojcik and Terrance Brown

The Life and Career of Marilyn Monroe

My project is a screenplay exploring the life and career of Marilyn Monroe. I am specifically interested in the ways in which she fought for control in a male-dominated industry and grappled with double standards regarding female sexuality versus male sexuality.

Well-known films about Monroe (*Blonde* and *My Week with Marilyn*) paint her as a victim of her circumstances and focus largely on traumas she endured throughout her life. I want to bring a new depth to these representations of Monroe by calling attention to her self-advocacy within the industry.

**Caroline Lavender**

Hometown: Arlington Heights, Illinois

- Majors: Neuroscience and Behavior and Philosophy
- Minor: Musical Theatre
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Advisor: Christopher Patzke

The Elucidation of the Cell Biological Function of the Coxsackie-Adenovirus Receptor

My project focuses on determining the exact function of the coxsackie-adenovirus receptor (CAR), with special focus on whether this protein is overexpressed in Down syndrome and if it contributes at all to DS pathology. We have created knockout lines that demonstrate a characteristically abnormal morphology in HeLa cells, and colocalization functional assays identify certain proteins that tend to bind to CAR. We are working on creating a knockout line in iPS cells in order to create human neurons that are CAR-deficient.

I have focused my undergraduate research on CAR, which was the protein on which my thesis advisor worked as a postdoc. I am particularly interested in Alzheimer's disease; individuals with Down syndrome are severely predisposed to getting Alzheimer's later in life. I am interested in whether this protein could be responsible for this or other phenotypes of Down syndrome.

Received funding from a College of Science Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship and the Glynn Family Honors Program.

**Elizabeth Maroshick**

Hometown: Depew, New York

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre
- Minor: Musical Theatre
- Advisor: Mary Kearney

Costume Design Adaptation in Disney Princess Narratives

My thesis involves researching the role of adaptation in Disney costume design as classic narratives move from animated film, to live-action film, to Broadway musical formats. The final project will consist of a video essay that visually tracks my research process, as well as a series of four original and modernized costume renderings for classic Disney princesses.

In September, I traveled to see dozens of Disney live-action film costumes at the Heroes & Villains: The Art of the Disney Costume exhibit at the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation in Dearborn, Michigan. Seeing the garments firsthand and taking photographs of the pieces provided incredibly valuable primary sources for my project. I also spoke with the renowned costume designer Ann Hould-Ward, as well as Disney scholar Susan Ohmer. As a film major with a passion for musical theatre and costume design, this project was the intersection of all of my interests. It allowed me to hone my video editing skills while also exploring multifaceted angles of Disney media.

Traveled to Dearborn, Michigan.



Mark Mehochko

Hometown: Morris, Illinois

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Minor: Musical Theatre
- Kennedy Scholars Program
- Advisor: Gretchen Reydamts-Schils

Artificial Intelligence and Kantian Ethics

This project examines the question of whether artificial intelligence (AI) can be moral according to a Kantian framework, and what the ramifications of a moral AI would be.

I am fascinated by science fiction, especially the work of Isaac Asimov. I wanted to do a project that reflected that interest in a practical way.

**Daniela (Dani) Obringer**

Hometown: San Jose, California

- Majors: Business Analytics and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: Christine Becker

Sports Betting & Television: How the Betting Industry is Changing How Viewers Engage with Sports

Research has found that people who bet on sports are more likely to watch and be engaged in sports broadcasts. As states continue to legalize sports betting, the betting industry continues to grow and establish its connections to sporting events. This project delves into the dynamics between traditional television networks and how they are engaging with sports betting companies, and how sports betting companies are creating their own media platforms to compete with traditional channels.

The rise of sports betting has allowed my interests in sports, data, and media to interact in unique ways. Exploring the connections between the three allowed me to have a deeper appreciation of the television and sports industries and how data can empower each respective industry.

**Aidan O'Malley**

Hometown: Wheaton, Illinois

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre
- Minors: Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy, and Digital Marketing
- Advisor: Ted Barron

'Bro, You Just Filmed Cringe!': Cringe Cinema and So-Bad-It's-Good in the Internet Age

My thesis explores the rise of cringe culture in online ecosystems and applies the spirit of internet irony to movies: "So bad, they're good." Drawing from scholarship on camp, trash, and historical badfilm, I advance a 21st-century canon of "cringe cinema," divided into films that encourage our compassion or provoke our contempt. Finally, I interrogate the infrastructure of cringe communities, debating if they're mere schadenfreude or a challenge to politics — and taste itself.

The go-to pastime of my friends from high school was to scroll through the bowels of Netflix in search of a "funny-bad" film (there was not much else to do). Admittedly, I still enjoy this. But why? My thesis is a form of self-reflection, combining my interests in film and internet culture to chart a new history of so-bad-it's-good and analyze my fascination with cringe.

**William (Will) Ventura-Chavez**

Hometown: New London, Connecticut

- Majors: Design (Concentration in Visual Communication Design) and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Advisor: Neeta Verma

CG Pathway: Find Your Way

Unlike many other fields, the computer graphics (CG) industry presents a large peril for newcomers — clarity. Most education is hidden behind a gigantic paywall and navigation of its composition is tedious at best. By using and analyzing a database of recruiting information, conducting interviews with professionals, and teaching myself a whole slew of software, I created a web application that allows students to figure out how to fulfill all their needs occupationally and educationally.

I've witnessed others' aspirations for careers in animation, visual effects, and video games die. Whether it be stubbornness or pride, I've refused to let my dream go. But having now seen the flaws in the system, I've decided to not just overcome them but to pave a path for others to succeed too. This has been one of the most rewarding and scary experiences of my life. For this project, I've had to teach myself Python, C, Unity, Cinema 4D, AutoDesk Maya, and Substance Painter, to name just a few. I hope no student has to feel as alone as I did in this process (or at least a little less so).

Received funding from the William and Connie Greif Art Award.

**Ryan Vigilante**

Hometown: Potomac, Maryland

- Majors: Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics and Film, Television, and Theatre
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Advisor: Clayton Cole

How Machine Consciousness in Film Impacts Narrative

In this paper, I dive into a plethora of films featuring robots and artificial intelligence and discuss how machine consciousness impacts each of their narratives. I also identify patterns across films to see if certain levels of machine consciousness often inspire specific types of stories. For instance, I discovered that the highest levels of machine consciousness occur either in children's films such as *Robots* or extremely mature films like *Ex Machina*, but not often in between.

I wanted to do a film analysis that spanned multiple films, but I wasn't sure which topic would be right for me until I took Professor Clayton Cole's class on robots in film and I knew that, especially as an ACMS and FTT major, this topic fit me perfectly.

**Zhanqi (Jackie) Zhang**

Hometown: Beijing, China

- Majors: Film, Television, and Theatre and Philosophy
- Advisor: Anne García-Romero

In Search of My Homeland: A Play

My thesis is a full-length staged play, in which a British-Chinese high school student gets stranded in Beijing due to COVID-19. There, he embarks on a winding yet mysterious journey of self-exploration. Last spring, I directed the stage reading of my play.

I hope to show my confusion and thinking about Chinese and Western cultures during the epidemic as a Chinese student. I also want to use this play to portray the group portraits of contemporary youth, so there will be more works featuring young people in society.