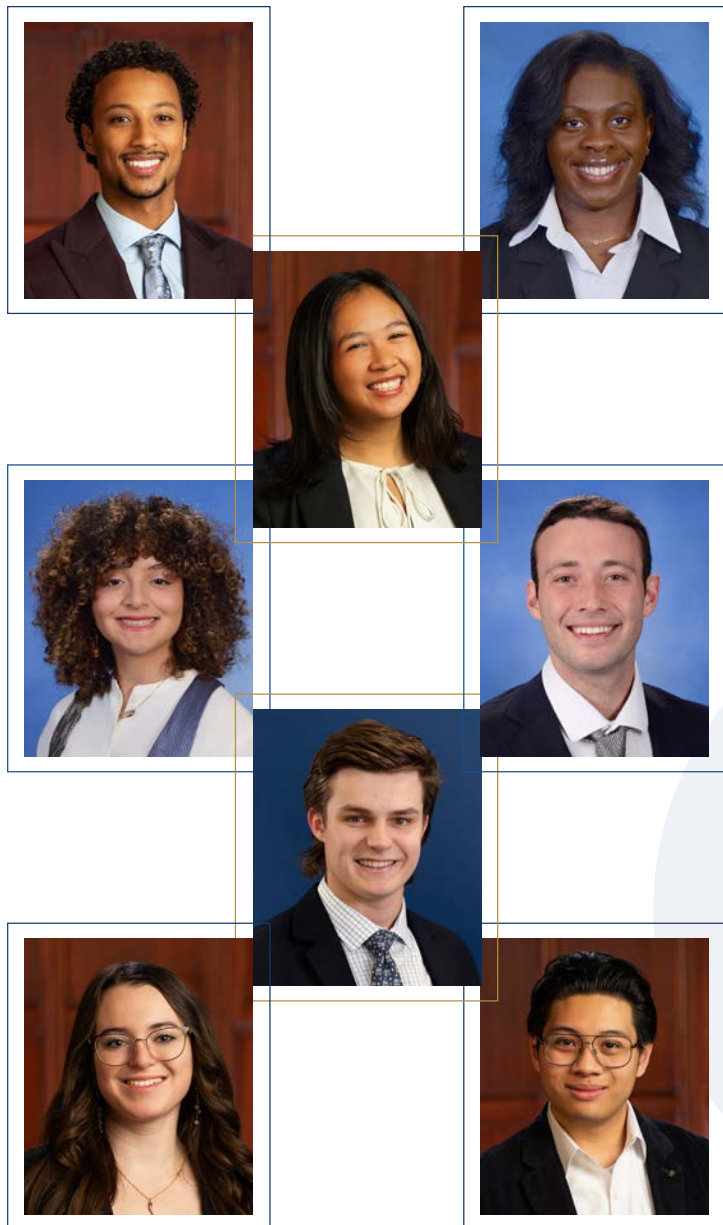




UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

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.

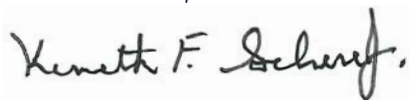
In their theses highlighted in this book, the Class of 2026 asked questions like "How does artificial intelligence shape democratic discourse?" and "Does raising pay keep teachers in the classroom?" Their wonderings ranged from "Can young actors successfully challenge Hollywood norms?" to "What is self-deception?"

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

**Sarah-Jane Carten**

Hometown: Derry, Ireland

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

Mousetrap: A *Severance* Speculative Screenplay

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

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



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**Carolyn Dell**

Hometown: Boerne, Texas

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

The Art of Stage Management

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



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**Amy Dorgan**

Hometown: Park Ridge, Illinois

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

Queering Reality: Animation as Alternative

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



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**Max Dow**

Hometown: Edina, Minnesota

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

Final Act: A Feature Film Screenplay

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



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**Thomas Helm**

Hometown: South Bend, Indiana

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

Revolutionary Nostalgia in 21st-Century Chinese Television

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



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**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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