



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

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

**Corrinne Carlson**

Hometown: Huntington Beach,
California

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Minors: Constitutional Studies,
Medieval Studies, and Theology
- Advisor: Jason Baxter

Breathing Narnian Air: C.S. Lewis' Medieval Cosmology for a Modern World

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis describes modern children entering into a medieval world. My thesis explores his use of literature to provide a model for what it is like for the modern reader to experientially encounter the medieval worldview through his story, and what he may learn about God, himself, and his place in the world through this experience.

I have always loved Lewis, and wanted to incorporate the academic interests I began exploring in my minors, as well. This thesis allowed me to compare the medieval worldview with modern democracy and touch upon the theological implications of the two models while drawing upon Lewis' writing.

**Alexander Cattaneo**

Hometown: Winthrop, Massachusetts

- Majors: Medieval Studies and History
- Advisor: Christopher Abram

The Conversion of Iceland and the Norse Pagan and Christian Ethos in the Íslendingasögur

My thesis is about the conversion of Iceland as presented within the Icelandic sagas, in particular the portrayal of paganism, pagan ethical and religious beliefs, and magic, in contrast with post-conversion Christianity. I also am looking at the difference in the portrayal of pagans before the time of conversion, and those who cling to pagan religion or practices after the country converts. I am examining the way in which the Christian scribes of these sagas portray the old way of life. Sometimes they admire it, and sometimes they condemn it, while ultimately still affirming both their pride in the Icelandic cultural history and the importance of the Christian worldview.

I chose this topic because I was interested in the Norse conversion from paganism to Christianity, in particular the medieval Christian view of their pre-Christian ancestors, and because it allowed me to engage with religious and ethical ideas, alongside literary analysis.

**Brenden Quirk**

Hometown: Louisville, Kentucky

- Majors: Medieval Studies and Theology
- Minor: Latin
- Advisor: Christopher Abram

Coping with Loss in Old English and Old Norse Poetry

I am investigating the way in which Christianization has impacted the application of the gnomic wisdom poetry in the Anglo-Saxon and Norse elegiac poetic traditions. I am focusing on the Old English poem "The Wanderer" and the Old Norse poem "Sonatorrek." These poems are emblematic of the broader genre, and follow a similar pattern of loss, grief, and acceptance through the use of the gnomic poetry.

I chose this topic because it allows me to work directly with the languages of Old English and Old Norse, as well as explore another area of interest to me, namely the interaction between Christianity and paganism in the early Middle Ages.

**Elizabeth VanKammen**

Hometown: Kenosha, Wisconsin

- Major: Philosophy
- Minors: Medieval Studies;
Science, Technology, and Values;
and Theology
- Advisor: Michael Rea

Talk About Self: How a Metaphysical Conception of Selves Allows Us to Take Everyday Speech Seriously

There seems to be a disconnect between the casual ways in which we refer to ourselves every day and the current metaphysical theories of the self. If we take these references seriously, however, they pose very real problems for the current theories of self available in philosophy.

I became intrigued by the question “Who am I?” after taking the Self and Identity philosophy course during my sophomore year. When this question did not go away long after completing the course, it seemed to be worth exploring further.