

KINGFISHER INSTITUTE FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS AND PROFESSIONS

Annual Report

2025-2026





Cover Photos

Top left: Fr. David Paternostro, SJ, PhD, assistant professor of philosophy, holds the microphone while speaking on a panel with Trish Ross, PhD, assistant professor of modern languages and literatures, Ted Burk, PhD, professor of biology, and Gintaras Duda, PhD, professor and chair of physics. The panel at the Kiewit Luminarium explained many aspects of the infamous "Scopes Monkey Trial," which turned 100 in 2025. See page 6. *Photo by Z Long, courtesy of the photographer and the Kiewit Luminarium*

Top right: Students chat with Eric Avery, MD, our fall 2025 Kingfisher Visiting Fellow, in the Lied Art Gallery during his art exhibition, Art as Medicine/Medicine as Art. *Photo by and courtesy of Rachel Mindrup*

Bottom: A group of students and university and community leaders gather at the Omaha awards luncheon for the Envisioning Population Health Student Photo Contest and student research awards. *Photo by and courtesy of Cathy Tibbels, Institute for Population Health.*

Back row from left: Ginny Czechut, MSPR, Charles Drew Health Center Inc. development director; Bridget Keegan, PhD, dean, College of Arts and Sciences, acting director, Kingfisher Institute for the Liberal Arts & Professions; Scott Shipman, MD, executive director, Institute for Population Health; Amir Jafari, MD student; Mardell Wilson, EdD, RDN, Creighton University provost; Ashley Fricks-Gleason, PhD, director, Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship; Khenda Mustafa, director of community engagement, Center for Refugee and Immigrant Advancement; Rosa Ortiz, legal center director, International Council for Refugees and Immigrants.

Front row from left: Kennedy Haase, MD student; Alexa Koza, PA program student; Alison Dang, College of Arts & Sciences student

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Welcome Letter

From Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Acting Director of the Kingfisher Institute, Bridget Keegan, PhD

Last year, the Kingfisher Institute saw many accomplishments advancing its core mission, as well as some significant transitions. Founding director, Dr. Tracy Leavelle, accepted a new role in the School of Medicine in Phoenix, and I had the pleasure of stepping in to work with Charise Alexander Adams to begin discerning the next phase of the Institute's work.

Back in 2017, I had the honor to work with Dr. Leavelle and others to design and launch the Institute as part of Creighton's Lighting the Way strategic plan. I could not be prouder of how the Institute has truly transformed Creighton and made innovative new opportunities available for faculty, staff, students and our communities.

Looking toward the year ahead, we prepare to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Creighton's founding and the launch of a new University strategic plan. In honor of the occasion, the Institute will be aligning our core themes with the 150th and sponsoring programming that commemorates Creighton's past, present and, notably, its future. To help guide this new work, we will be inviting applications seeking two faculty members to serve in shared leadership roles as we chart the Institute's course for the years ahead.

We will be strengthening Kingfisher's partnerships with the university's other Institutes of Excellence, including the recently announced Institute for Adaptive Intelligence and the Institute for Population Health. As part of this collaboration, the three Institutes and the Center for Faculty Excellence and Creighton's Office of Sustainability Programs will host Dr. Bryan Alexander, a professor at Georgetown and a nationally recognized "academic futurist." He will join us for a week in February as a visiting fellow to engage the community in conversations about the future of higher education and the future of Creighton. The year ahead promises exciting new developments for Kingfisher and our mission!



Bridget M. Keegan

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Visiting Fellows Program

Kingfisher Visiting Fellows are carefully selected to bring expertise and ideas that complement areas at Creighton University. Their visits focus on intentional engagement with targeted audience groups.

Eric Avery: Art as Medicine/Medicine as Art

About 200 students engaged with Eric Avery, MD, during his visiting fellowship the week of Sept. 21, 2025. Dr. Avery is retired from practicing as a psychiatrist, but he makes little distinction between his work as an printmaker and as a care provider. Dr. Avery's work, he says, explores the liminal space between art and medicine.

Timing the visit with an exhibition of his work in the Lied Art Gallery, Sept. 5-Oct. 5, it included artworks from his experiences in a Somali refugee camp; AIDS and HIV wards and action clinics; as well as from Dr. Avery's life now on the Texas-Mexico border. He met with classes in the gallery space to encourage students to observe and talk through what they saw.

In Dr. Avery's words:

"My Creighton visit was outstanding for me. Conversations in my exhibit with students helped me find a new way of practicing art as medicine with students. Tracy Leavelle and I called the method "Bedside Art Rounds."

Besides growing the intelligent eye by looking at art, I was able to teach bedside rounding behavior with small groups of potential healthcare students. Each group had "interviewed" their piece of art and selected the student who would present it when the large group made rounds.

Then as the "attending physician," I was able to reinforce what they had seen and interpreted. On clinical ward rounds, a student might never say they didn't like their patient [or] how bad or upset they might have made them feel. This was a fun way to learn medicine by looking at art."

100%

of students **strongly agreed** or **some-what agreed** that ***After interacting with Dr. Avery, I have a better understanding of the role of art in health/healthcare.***



"This was a great experience and I loved every second of it."
- Undergraduate student

79%

of students **strongly agreed** that ***Dr. Avery demonstrated how the arts and humanities can help us understand major issues in our society.***



Visiting Fellows Program

Eric Avery: Art, Stories, and Lived Experiences

Thanks to the support of the **Nebraska Arts Council**, Dr. Avery spent time off-campus as well.

In partnership with the **Nebraska AIDS Project** (NAP), we presented a community panel: "Art, Stories, and Lived Experiences of HIV/AIDS" at Benson Theatre on Sept. 24, 2025. Dr. Avery and community members affected by HIV/AIDS shared how storytelling and visual art intersect to affirm identity and reduce the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and mental health.

Audience members were invited to start the event by creating artworks of their own. NAP provided art supplies and puzzle piece mini-canvases, and each work was added to their community art display.

Thank you to our partners:



NEBRASKA
CULTURAL
ENDOWMENT
Endless
ARTS & HUMANITIES

Lied Art Gallery

Richard L. Deming, MD'80, Endowed Chair
in Medical Humanities



From left: TJ King (panelist), Tommy Calloway (moderator; NAP outreach manager), Tracy Leavelle, PhD (founding director, Kingfisher Institute), Eric Avery, and Tyree Royal (panelist), holding a print of Avery's "Healing Before Art." Photo courtesy of Tommy Calloway



Curriculum Innovation

We promote curriculum innovation by awarding grants to faculty who revise or create a course to incorporate our areas of emphasis.

2025-26 Curriculum Grant Recipients

- **Aimee Hein, PhD**, assistant professor of theology, for THL 270 Theological Ethics: Applying Moral Principles
- **Waseq Rahman, PhD**, assistant professor of journalism, for a new core curriculum course that will have students analyze the cultural and psychological influences of entertainment and gaming
- **Andrea Thinnes, OTD**, OTR/L, PMH-C, FNAP, and **Marion Russell, OTD**, MOTR/L, SCFES, associate professors of occupational therapy, for OTD 317 Occupational Therapy in Mental Health and OTD 355 Physical Rehabilitation I
- **Veronica Sule, BDS**, MMHCA, MSc, and **Alvin Samuels, DDS**, assistant professors of dentistry, for GDS 112 Dental Materials and Operative Dentistry Laboratory, and GDO 330, Operative Dentistry Clinic
- **Kristina Medero, PhD**, assistant professor of communication studies, for COM 450: Communicating Health Narratives

2024-25 Curriculum Grantee Outcomes

30 pharmacy students completed PHA 469 Lab, with **Kim Begley, PharmD**, professor of pharmacy practice, who used the curriculum grant to integrate Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) longitudinally in the lab course. Dr. Begley has started a research project to measure the effectiveness of the new activities.

60 undergraduate students (two full sections) took HAP/PLS 334 Public Policy and Healthcare, updated by **Christian Janousek, JD, PhD**, assistant professor of political science, who integrated readings on humane health and sustainable development.

46 first-year OT students took OTD 342: Clinical Human Anatomy, updated with an "anatomical humanism" module by **Shawn Magrum, PhD**, assistant professor of exercise science. Dr. Magrum will continue to teach the course with this module.

12 undergraduate students took PHL 433: Philosophy and Ethics of AI, a new course created by **Jacob Rump, PhD**, associate professor of philosophy.

57 undergraduate students took ENG 220: Queer Literature & Cinema, a new course in the core curriculum created by **Tyler Talbott, PhD**, assistant professor of English.

"Studying cadaver donation, compassion research, and patient narratives helped me appreciate the importance of honoring each person's dignity. This knowledge will impact my future interactions by encouraging me to be more intentional in how I listen, communicate, and advocate for my patients."

-Occupational therapy student in Dr. Magrum's updated course



Partnerships and Engagement

We continue our commitment to offer uniquely valuable opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to engage with one another, the wider community, and interdisciplinary perspectives.

The 100th Anniversary of the Scopes Trial

Kripke Center for Religion and Society director **Sabrina Danielsén, PhD**, and **Trish Ross, PhD**, assistant professor of Modern Languages & Literatures, co-facilitated a fall 2025 faculty/staff book club on *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and American's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*, by Edward J. Larson. The Kripke Center and Kingfisher Institute co-sponsored the book club.

Thanks to Dr. Ross, we partnered with the **Kiewit Luminarium** on a "Night Lights" evening event. A faculty panel included **Dr. Ross, Fr. David Paternostro, PhD**, assistant professor of philosophy, **Ted Burk, PhD**, professor of biology, and **Gintaras Duda, PhD**, professor and chair of physics. They shared insights on how the 1925 trial of a school-teacher charged with violating a Tennessee state statute against teaching evolution shaped the nation.

Attendees also engaged with prototypes of an upcoming religion and science exhibit that Dr. Ross and Dr. Duda have helped to develop.



Photo by Z Long courtesy of the photographer and the Kiewit Luminarium

Fulbright Scholar Michelle Eady



In partnership with the **Center for Faculty Excellence** (CFE), in October we co-hosted **Dr. Michelle Eady**, professor in the School of Education at the University of Wollongong, Australia, while she was in the U.S. as a Fulbright scholar at Columbus State University. Dr. Eady's work focuses on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).

With this "mini visiting fellowship" Dr. Eady held workshops, met with CFE faculty associates, and gave presentations, including "Trust in Higher Education: Relationships, Readiness, and the Role of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning."

Thank you to **Peggy Rupprecht, PhD**, associate professor of public relations and CFE senior faculty associate, for help coordinating Dr. Eady's visit.

Above photo of Dr. Eady courtesy of Dr. Rupprecht



**Center for
Faculty Excellence**

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Partnerships and Engagement

Envisioning Population Health Student Photo Contest

Creighton's **Institute for Population Health** (IPH) created the Envisioning Population Health Student Photo Contest in 2023, and we have partnered with them for the two most recent years of this successful initiative.

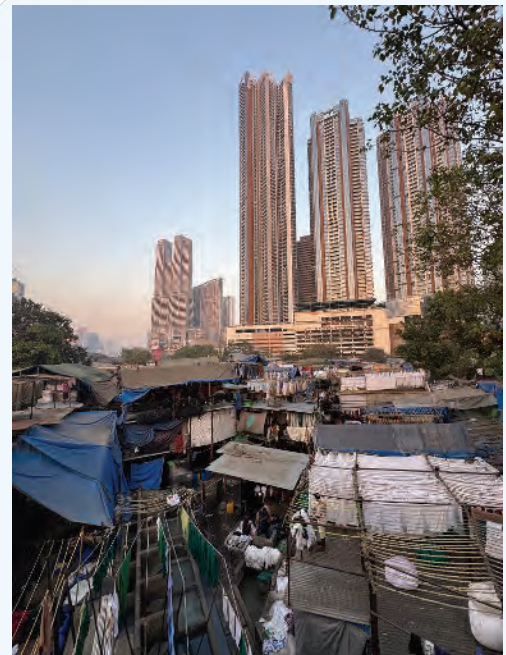
The Kingfisher Institute matched the cash awards that the student winners received from IPH with contributions to Omaha and Phoenix nonprofits selected by the first-prize winners. Students chose Charles Drew Health Center (Omaha), Omaha Center for Refugee & Immigrant Services Inc., and Circle the City (Phoenix).

The 2026 first-place winners were:

- Lived Environments: **Nikita Ramaswamy**, sophomore, political science student (Omaha); **Benjamin Theurer**, MD student (Phoenix)
- Migration: **Lauren Dentinger**, MD student (Omaha); **Christina Heid**, MD/MPH student (Phoenix)
- Food insecurity: **Engelius Agudo Hernandez**, PharmD student (Omaha); **Raymond Romero**, PharmD student (Distance pathway).



Left: "ICE Melts in Phoenix" by Christina Heid



Right: Shared City, Unequal Space" by Nikita Ramaswamy



Partnerships and Engagement

MLK Book Club

The Martin Luther King Jr. book club, a collaboration with the MLK Celebration Week committee, returned for fall 2025. To observe the 100th birthday of Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little in Omaha in 1925) we read ***The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.*** by Peniel Joseph.

Faculty, staff, and student book club members in Omaha visited Malcolm X's birth site and heard from leaders at the **Malcolm X Memorial Foundation**. We also coordinated with Danielle Okezie to offer a Phoenix-based book club.

Dr. Franklin Thompson (below), longtime community leader and educator, led the group discussions.



The Humanities and AI

Responding to faculty requests, the Institute hosted lunch discussions on *"What can the humanities tell us about ourselves and our society in the age of AI?"* Each discussion highlighted AI-related scholarly work by faculty members. The October session featured **Nicole Reibe, PhD**, assistant professor of theology, and the November session highlighted **Jacob Rump, PhD**, associate professor of philosophy.

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Center for Interprofessional Practice, Education and Research

Expression Across Professions

As part of our ongoing partnership with Creighton's Center for Interprofessional Practice, Education and Research, 34 health professions students, including Phoenix, Regis, and distance students, participated in a series of virtual sessions designed to promote collaboration and communication through creative expression and reflection. This activity is one on a menu from which students must complete three interprofessional activities to graduate.

Trey Moody, PhD, associate professor of English, and **Ingrid Berg, DO**, palliative care physician with CHI Health, led a session on poetry. **Rachel Mindrup, MFA**, associate professor of fine and performing arts and Richard L. Deming '80 Endowed Chair in Medical Humanities, and **Sarah Ball, PhD**, RNC-OB, C-EFM, CHSE, associate professor of nursing, facilitated a session on drawing comics. **Brooke Kowalke, PhD**, assistant professor of English, and **Erica Begler, MD**, palliative care physician with CHI Health, held a session on reading memoirs and other narratives. **Colette O'Meara-McKinney, EdD**, assistant dean for student affairs in the School of Dentistry, led an Ignatian reflection at the conclusion of the series.

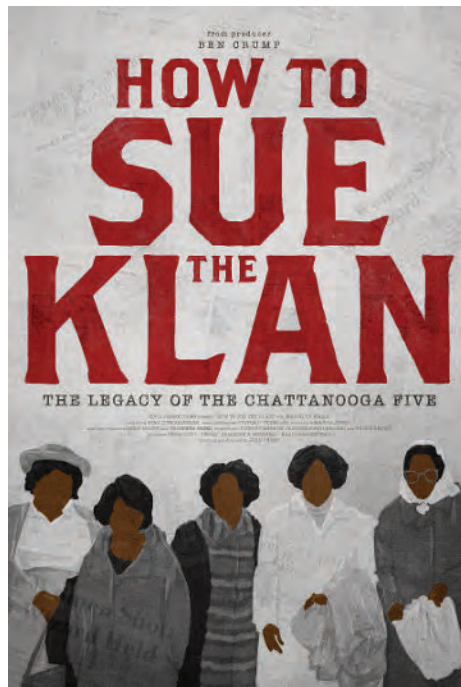
"This experience allowed me to take a step back from my studies and reminded me of my 'why'."

-Physician assistant program student



Partnerships and Engagement

Documentary Screening and Q&A with Civil Rights Lawyer



In partnership with the **School of Law, the Institute for Population Health, and CHI Health**, we hosted a virtual event to show the award-winning documentary ***How to Sue the Klan***. The powerful film tells the story of five women in Chattanooga, Tennessee, who, after surviving an attack, successfully sued the Ku Klux Klan in civil court, creating an important precedent.

Randolph McLaughlin, the attorney at the center of the case, who is featured in the film, joined for Q&A. **Yvonnnda Summers, JD**, associate dean for student affairs in the law school, moderated the discussion.

In addition, through **University Libraries**, the Kingfisher Institute purchased rights for the Creighton community to access the film for educational purposes. A group in the **Schlegel Center for Service and Justice** watched the film before a service and justice trip to Chattanooga.

Other Co-Sponsorships

With Phi Beta Kappa Society and the College of Arts and Sciences: **An Evening with Fred Lawrence**, PBK CEO and Secretary, April 2026

With Phi Beta Kappa Society and the College of Arts and Sciences: **Kathy Lawrence, PhD: Envisioning the "Tender Spirit": Henry James and the Origin of Disability Studies**, April 2026

With the English Department and the Institute for Population Health: Community and Creighton at Highlander: **Community Poetry and Pizza Party**, April 2026

About **80 faculty members** directly participated in our programs

About **400 students** participated in our programs and courses

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Research and Scholarly Activity

Mini-Seminar Projects: 2025-2026: Two faculty-led interdisciplinary teams met throughout the academic year to develop their projects while several other faculty received smaller awards to work on individual projects (below). The three teams of the 2024-2025 cohort presented the results of their work, some of which is featured on the next page, to the Creighton community in September 2025.

Creighton Computing4Good App Development Lab

This project aims to construct an interdisciplinary service-learning framework for sustainable student-led software development projects, improving their usefulness, trustworthiness, and endurance over time.

Co-PIs: Catherine Baker, PhD, Associate Professor, Computer Science

Kevin Lombard, PhD, Assistant Professor, Computer Science

Steven Fernandes, PhD, Associate Professor, Computer Science

Waseq Rahman, PhD, Assistant Professor, Journalism

Sherri Weitzl-Harms, PhD, Associate Professor, Computer Science

Student researchers: Erika Germinario, BS'26; Jerome Bustarga, BS'26; Torin O'Connor, BS'28

Public Discussion Practice: Cultivating Trust in Institutions

The goal of this project is to gain an comprehensive understanding of trust-building efforts between representatives of Creighton University and North Omaha community members and ascertain how to continue these efforts in a way that demonstrates a long-term investment in relationships in the community.

Co-PI's: Anne Ozar, PhD, Associate Professor and Associate Chair, Philosophy

Jay Leichter, PhD, Associate Professor, Communication Studies, and Director, Sustainability Studies

Individual Projects

Laura Roost, PhD, Resident Assistant Professor, Political Science and International Relations

Dr. Roost is working on a book-length project on transitional justice in healing from genocide and the feasibility of economic development as a form of transitional justice.

Brooke Kowalke, PhD, Assistant Professor of English

Dr. Kowalke's project looks at the work of non-speaking autistic poets and the risks of adhering to, or disrupting, the historical presumption that "non-speaking" means "non-verbal" or even "non-thinking."

Candance Bloomquist, PhD, associate professor in the interdisciplinary EdD program, and **Peggy**

Rupprecht, PhD, associate professor of public relations, received seed funds to develop future projects.

"The Kingfisher Institute is a vital champion for faculty scholarship."

-Andrea Thinnes, OTD, 2024-2025 Research & Scholarship Fellow



Research and Scholarly Activity

Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships



The Institute partnered with Creighton's **Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship** to offer two Kingfisher summer undergraduate research fellowships (SURFs). The recipients are:

Fredrick Mindrup (left), a rising sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences, is working with **Emily Stokes, MFA**, assistant professor of fine and performing arts, on his project, **"The 'Artist's Proof': A Conversation on the State of Women's Healthcare."**

Tiffanie Chang, a rising senior in the College of Nursing, is working with **Falah Rashoka, PhD, RN, MS, MPH**, assistant professor of nursing, on a project called **"Expansion of a Culturally Tailored Health Education and Wellness Project for the Korean Community in Nebraska."**

"Being selected for this SURF grant has been a blessing that I am deeply grateful for. Thank you for laureling me with this incredible opportunity."

-Fredrick Mindrup

Research and Scholarship Fellows Outcomes

Andrea Thinnies, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA, FNAP, PMH-C, associate professor of occupational therapy, and **Diva Wilson, MD**, assistant professor and physician of family medicine, presented: **"From Pregnancy to Postpartum: A Holistic Team Approach between Medicine and Occupational Therapy to Impact Maternal Well-Being"** at the 39th Annual Postpartum Support International Conference in June 2026.

They presented on their pilot project that integrated OT, medical, and social support for postpartum women in small cohorts at the CHI Health Creighton University Medical Center - University Campus.

Creighton students **Danielle Ameijeiras Mena OTD'27**, **Nick Nondorf, BS'26**, and **Emma Dubisz, OTD'26**, mentored by **Sarbinaz Bekmuratova, PhD**, and **Yongyue Qi, PhD**, associate professors of occupational therapy, and **Rochelle Dalla (UNL)**, presented **"What are the perceived risks and exposure to recruitment tactics for human trafficking among American young adults?"** at Creighton's Research Week in April 2026.

The students led efforts to share the human trafficking survey with young adults on social media, creating creative posts and spreading general awareness of human trafficking.

Brooke Kowalke, PhD, assistant professor of English, presented **"Dancing with the Forms: Linguistic Risk in Non-Speaking Autistic Poets' Works"** at the annual meeting of the Society for Science, Literature, and the Arts in August 2025.



Leadership Highlights

Advocating for Federal Funding for the Humanities



Program manager Charise Alexander Adams participated in the National Humanities Alliance Annual Meeting and Humanities Advocacy Day in March 2026 in Washington, DC.

For Humanities Advocacy Day, advocates met with lawmakers and staffers to testify to the value of the humanities, in particular urging robust funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities and related agencies as established by Congress decades ago.

Here in the office of Congressman Mike Flood, she was joined by, from left, Flood's staffer Maggie Andersen, Andy Jewell of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, and Katherine Klosek of the Association of Research Libraries.

Creighton University is a proud member of the National Humanities Alliance.

Ms. Alexander Adams represented Creighton University at the **Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes annual meeting** in Banff, Alberta, Canada, June 2026

Ms. Alexander Adams attended **Tri-Faith Initiative's Race, Religion, and Social Justice conference** with Creighton colleagues in Omaha, June 2026

Ms. Alexander Adams received a “**Spirit of Laudato Si**” **sustainability award** from Creighton University for efforts to advance a culture of care for our common home, in April 2026



At the Tri-Faith Initiative with Creighton faculty and staff Laura Roost, PhD, resident assistant professor of political science & international relations, Annabelle Abisset, MPA, program manager for global and community-engaged learning, and Aimee Hein, PhD, assistant professor of theology.



The Kingfisher Institute and Creighton's Liberal Arts and Professional Formation at 150

A New Framework for Incubating Innovation and Integrating Liberal Arts and Professional Formation

In honor of Creighton's 2028 sesquicentennial, the Kingfisher Institute will convene faculty, students, scholars, artists, and practitioners to celebrate our past, interrogate our present, and boldly envision the future of Creighton's unique expression of the Jesuit, Catholic mission in education. The Institute will amplify Creighton as a national leader in interdisciplinary and interprofessional innovation rooted in Ignatian values.



Goal 1: Celebrate, Interpret, and Commemorate Creighton's Founding

Develop signature programming drawing on Creighton's unique history connecting liberal arts and professional education in the Jesuit tradition.



Goal 2: Advance Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Present Moment

Position Creighton as a regional and national convener of public conversations about integrating liberal arts and professional formation.



Goal 3: Incubate Innovation for the Future of Jesuit Higher Education

Elevate the Kingfisher Institute as a resource for the next generation of Jesuit, Catholic pedagogy and research uniting liberal arts and professional formation.



Goal 4: Build Institutional Identity and National Reputation

Ensure the Institute's work is visible, documented, and connected to partners across higher education and our local communities.

Celebrate our past

Interrogate our present

Boldly envision the future



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for the Liberal Arts and Professions

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2025–2026 Advisory Council

We thank our advisory council members for their valuable time and support.

Candace Bloomquist, PhD: Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary EdD in Leadership Program

***Lizzy Curran, MS:** Director of Alumni: Heider College of Business, School of Law, and Graduate School

Joy Doll, OT, OTD: Program Director, Health Informatics Program

Gintaras Duda, PhD: Professor and Chair of Physics

***Fr. Kevin FitzGerald, SJ, PhD, PhD:** Chair of Medical Humanities

***Ayushi Kaul:** MD student, class of 2026; Creighton alumna, BS'20

Christine Keith, DDS: Assistant Professor, General Dentistry

***Rachel Mindrup, MFA:** Associate Professor of Fine and Performing Arts, Richard L. Deming MD'80 Endowed Chair in Medical Humanities

Margo Minnich, DNP: Associate Professor, College of Nursing

***Patrick Murray, PhD:** Professor of Philosophy, John C. Kenefick Faculty Chair in the Humanities

Kirk Peck, PT, PhD, CSCS, CCRT, CERP: Associate Professor of Physical Therapy

***Nicole Piemonte, PhD:** Associate Dean, School of Medicine (Phoenix)

Sarah Singletary Walker, PhD: Professor of Management

**Special thanks to the starred members who are cycling off at the end of the 2025-2026 academic year, the conclusion of their terms.*



KINGFISHER INSTITUTE

for the Liberal Arts and Professions

Mission:

Transcendent Perspectives for Transcendent Problems

Vision:

Humanities for the 21st Century: Head, Heart, and Hands