



**JOHN PAUL
THE GREAT**
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY



2024

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Concert
December 6, 2024

The Comedy of Errors
March 7–9, 2025

Parents Weekend
May 2–4, 2025

jpcatholic.edu/events



Featured Illustrations

6, 13, 21, 25

To support our student and alumni artists, you can find their Instagram handles on each illustration.



Front Cover:

Carlo Acutis is a senior project from Bridget Baker '24. This 3d animated short highlights the life of Bl. Carlo Acutis, a young Italian with a love for programming, video games, and the Eucharist. He died at age 15 in 2006 from leukemia, and will soon be canonized a saint. Watch the project at jpcatholic.edu/showcase

Dear friends,

As we wrap up 2024, I reflect on the many ways the Lord has blessed our JPCatholic community. This year has simultaneously been one of thanksgiving and preparation.

In August we graduated our 16th student cohort. These 80+ new alumni grew considerably in their personal relationships with Jesus and achieved exceptional mastery of their chosen professional crafts. They represent great hope to our world as they now begin to **impact culture for Christ**. Our new freshman class arrived on campus in late September, full of energy; I am impressed by their eagerness to learn and their enthusiasm for JPCatholic's mission. They include our first Digital Music program students.

Our ambitious Feature Film Program, launched in 2021 to produce feature films on a regular cycle, successfully distributed *O, Brawling Love!* on streaming for anyone to watch. We feel blessed for the enthusiastic reception to this student and alumni project, which validates JPCatholic's hands-on approach to education, alongside our focus on engaging with culture. The program built further momentum this year with our second project, *No Reception*, which premiered during our outstanding Graduation Week showcase. We are now preparing to go into production on an exciting comedy, *Pickle for Pickleball*, next summer.

For many years, JPCatholic has been eager to add Fashion Design to our program offerings. In 2025, under the leadership of Prof. Elena Chirkova, it is finally launching, along with a minor in Costume Design. Elena joined our faculty earlier this year and her courses have been very well received by our students.

As you may know, our campus is entering a new phase of growth, and the construction on our new Creative Arts Academic Complex is now in full swing. It is incredible to see the new buildings take shape. This complex will greatly enhance our students' experience and expand our capacity to produce content across the entertainment spectrum.

With our **Across the Finish Line campaign**, we seek to raise \$750,000 to finish the building interiors, furnish it, and install state-of-the-art technology for our students. Since launching this final fundraising push in August, we have already reached 55%! I ask you to prayerfully consider supporting our students and our mission with a gift, joining me and Lidy who have given \$25,000.

Our students, faculty, staff, trustees, and benefactors make JPCatholic an incredibly special community. I am pleased to count you among our friends and supporters, and I thank you for being part of our important mission. Please keep all of us in your prayers, as you will be in ours. May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

Sincerely,



Derry Connolly, PhD
Founding President



Fashion Design Program Announced for Fall 2025

One of JPCatholic's biggest announcements this year was the addition of a Fashion Design emphasis within our BFA in Visual Arts, along with a new minor in Costume Design. The Fashion Design emphasis will be available for students entering JPCatholic in Fall 2025, and courses are already being offered for the Costume Design minor.

The Fashion Design emphasis will provide an in-depth examination of fashion analysis coupled with practical design work. Under the guidance of experienced professionals, students will develop their creative talent with courses in digital design, fabric, sewing, fashion drawing, color theory, production, retail and wholesale, and more. Students can expect the curriculum to constantly evolve to adapt to the ever-changing marketplace dynamics and technology advances.

"Within Catholic higher education, JPCatholic is well established as the leader in the creative arts, and we are excited to grow fashion and costume design within our dynamic community of creators," said Joe Connolly, Chief Academic Officer. "Our campus culture allows fashion design students the freedom to experiment and nurture their creativity. Our vibrant theater culture and our commercially distributed feature films will provide a very natural and collaborative environment for costume designers in particular to implement their craft."

The program will be spearheaded by Prof. Elena Chirkova, who started teaching at JPCatholic earlier this year with courses on Fashion Analysis and Sewing. Chirkova has over 25 years

of experience in the fashion, modeling, and TV industries, with substantial time spent working with models in Eastern Europe and with well-known European designers. She became a professional model at age 14, which led to work as a runway, print, TV, and commercial model. These experiences, combined with her Master's in Education and Bachelor's in Fashion, led to the foundation of Dance in Style in 1998, a design company specializing in ballroom dancewear. In 2007, the company successfully relocated from Russia to the U.S. and expanded to skate wear and gymnastics outfits. Chirkova's creations have appeared in Season 5 of *Dancing with the Stars*.

“Our vibrant theater culture and our commercially distributed feature films will provide a very natural and collaborative environment for costume designers in particular to implement their craft.”

"I am thrilled to be setting out with JPCatholic in the launch of this new program," said Chirkova. "Fashion and costume design are such beautiful crafts; they serve as a unique expression of the human person, and play an important part in telling a cohesive story. The environment here is prime for the ad-

dition of these programs, and I cannot wait to help JPCatholic students grow as designers and build a successful career."

The emphasis will seek to form innovative fashion design professionals with a deep understanding of the breadth of fashion markets as well as the ability to blend their creativity with evolving technology innovation. It will prepare graduates for meaningful careers in fashion, such as digital design, product development, retail management, merchandising, personal styling, and costume design for film, theater, and other entertainers.





Meet Elena Chirkova
Professor of Fashion

Prof. Chirkova shares about her journey into fashion, and what students can expect out of JPCatholic's newest program.

Scan to watch video



Meet Grace Edwards '24
Student Spotlight

Grace shares about her passion for fashion and costuming, and how she developed her talents through JPCatholic's theatre and film productions.

Scan to watch video





Heidi Ranschaert '24

The Lamppost

Watercolor, gouache & ink

📷 @heidi_ranschaert

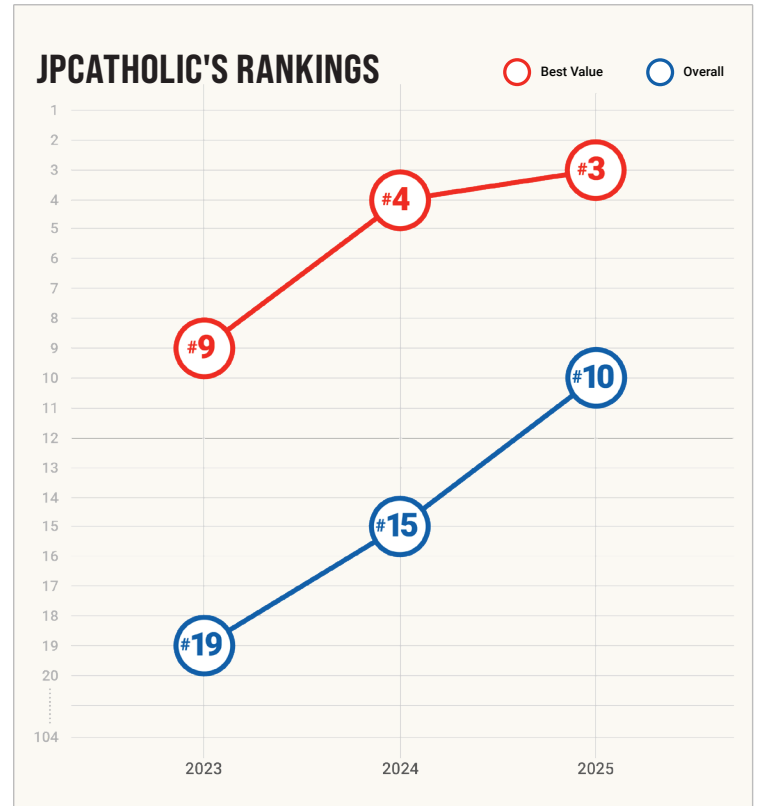
U.S. News Ranks JPCatholic Among Top Western Colleges

Of the 104 schools in the region, JPCatholic is ranked #10 overall, along with #3 in Best Value

U.S. News & World Report, one of the go-to sources for national college rankings, placed John Paul the Great Catholic University at #10 in its list of Best Regional Colleges West for 2025. Among the 104 schools of the Regional Colleges West category, JPCatholic ranks #10 overall (tie) and #3 in Best Value.

This marks the second consecutive year that JPCatholic's ranking has risen in both categories.

"These consistently high rankings are a great testimony to the hard work and dedication of our faculty and staff in providing an outstanding student experience," said president Dr. Derry Connolly. "It serves as an independent and external affirmation to students and parents of the great value offered in the education and formation at JPCatholic. We are very proud of what it represents – praise God."



First Class Relic of St. John Paul II Installed in JPCatholic's Chapel

On October 22, the feast of our namesake Pope Saint John Paul the Great, JPCatholic installed a first class relic of the patron saint in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Chapel on campus. The relic is a fragment of the pope's garment with his blood, which he was wearing during the 1981 assassination attempt.

The relic was installed following a special Mass and reception for the saint's feast day. It was given to JPCatholic earlier this year by the Diocese of Sacramento. In addition to the relic, the Diocese gave JPCatholic a box previously owned by Pope John Paul II, which he used to store some of his vessels for Mass. Both items are on permanent display in JPCatholic's chapel, alongside a signed copy of his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.

2024 Faculty Additions

We were pleased to add a number of distinguished professionals to our faculty this year, including:



TIM RECKART

Animation

Tim is an award winning animator and director; his stop motion short film *Head Over Heels* was nominated for the 2013 Oscars. He directed *The Star* (2017) for Sony Pictures Animation, and additional credits include *Anomalisa*, *Tumble Leaf*, and the Hallow commercial which aired during this year's Superbowl.

Courses: Stop Motion Animation, Directing for Animation



JAMIE OLIFF

Animation

Jamie is an animator at Walt Disney Animation Studios. He has been actively involved in the animation industry since 1984, with extensive credits including *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Tarzan*, *Hercules*, *Mulan*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Fantasia 2000*, *National Treasure*, *Cuphead*, and *Kung Fu Panda: Secrets of the Masters*.

Courses: 2D Animation I, Storyboarding



SAM SORICH

Film

Sam is an award-winning filmmaker and founder of Glass Darkly Films. His extensive experience in filmmaking includes over a decade working with Salt and Light Television and Spirit Juice Studios. He was the creator of *8beats*, an anthology series comprising 8 short films inspired by the Beatitudes. Sam has two documentaries releasing soon, one on Henri de Lubac, executive produced by Ignatius Press, and another on the life and legacy of René Girard.

Courses: Color in Post-Production, Fundamentals of Production



CHRISTOPHER LIS

Business

Chris earned his BA in political science from Loyola Marymount University, a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from CSU Long Beach, an MSc in Political Economy from the London School of Economics and Political Science, as well as an MBA from Claremont Graduate University, where he is currently finishing his PhD in public policy. He holds real estate licenses in California, Utah, and Georgia, and co-founded Grapevine Wealth Management.

Courses: Political Economy, Introduction to Products and Markets, Competitive Strategies



IMPACTING CULTURE SPEAKER SERIES

We also hosted several distinguished guest speakers on campus this year, including:

TEREZKA ZABKA

As General Counsel for the San Diego Padres, Terezka shared about her professional journey, and how to integrate your Catholic values into the workplace.

KEVIN KUSTER

Former creative director of Playboy, Kevin shared how a life altering encounter with the Holy Spirit transformed his life and led to the founding of his non-profit Watts of Love.

ANGELO LIBUTTI

A Catholic animator and filmmaker, Angelo's credits include *The Lion King* (2019), *The Good Dinosaur*, and Marvel's *What If...?*

DR. ROGER QUY

Author of "GOD WITH US: The life-changing story of Jesus", Dr. Quy shared his insights on how to reach young people with the Gospel message.

Did you know? Some of these lectures are available to watch for FREE at jpcatholic.edu/online

Inaugural Business Pitch Competition

On August 29, during Graduation Week showcase events, two student businesses pitched to a panel of entrepreneurs in our inaugural Business Pitch Competition. The experience gives students in our LaunchPad program the opportunity to earn funding, helping advance their business to the next stage of growth.

Hosted by Prof. Joe Connolly, the event featured a panel of judges including Joline Mann, Director at The Real Mole Doctor and Founder of Purposer; Ted Bendrick, President and Owner of TVX Video; and Gabriel Geagea '13, Director

of Business Development at TAN Books and Adjunct Professor of Sales & Project Management at JPCatholic. The panel determined how to allocate a bucket of funding provided by the University.

Each business was given 15 minutes to present their company, sizing up the problem and opportunity, outlining the value their product or service delivers; how they stand out from their competition; and specific ways the company could use funds to advance their goals. The panel then responded with questions, followed by a period of deliberation.

Meet the Entrepreneurs



ARCHANGEL DRONES

@archangeldrones

Luca Hoang '24 has been growing his drone company in our LaunchPad, combining his love of aviation with photography. At the pitch event, he shared his plans to leverage additional technology to collect data and offer digital imaging for construction sites, civil engineers, and land surveyors.

Luca was awarded \$750, which will help fund important certification and training to advance Archangel Drones to the next stage.



VINNY'S GAME CABINET

@vinnysgamecabinet

Christian Doche '24 pitched Vinny's Game Cabinet, a company founded by himself and Donovan Bakin '24. The duo are developing a board game company, starting with Final Felony, a card game they describe as Munchkin blended with RPG storytelling. Players take on the role of criminals fighting for redemption through accessible yet strategic gameplay.

They were awarded \$550 to help cover the costs of an initial prototype and bring the game closer to publication.

Tale as old as time...

Summer 2024 Musical Production

During Graduation Week, JPCatholic Theatre Productions presented two performances of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* to packed houses at the Ritz Escondido. The production was co-directed by Profs. Courtney Moorehead Balaker and Katelyn Slater, with Therese Boucher '25 as Assistant Director, Mary Wenner '22 as Stage Manager, Megan Geier '18 as Choreographer, and Prof. Robert Giracello, PhD, as Musical Director.



Scan to see
theatre BTS

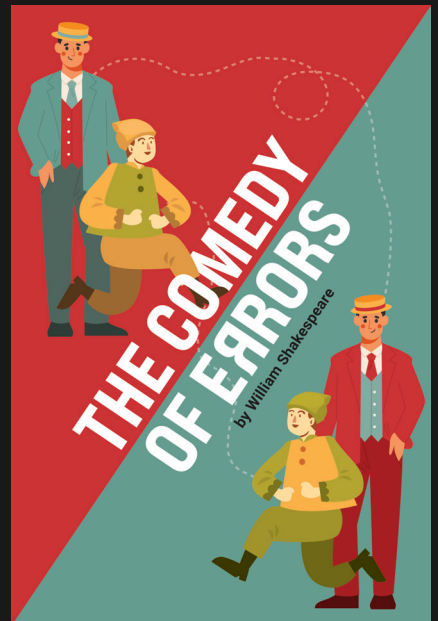




JPCATHOLIC
THEATRE
PRODUCTIONS



FALL 2024



WINTER 2025

Subscribe for updates
jpcatholic.edu/theatre

Musician Spotlight:

Raphael Whalen '24

Raphael Whalen was one of the first students to benefit from JPCatholic's new emphasis in Digital Music. He came to JPCatholic as a Theology & Philosophy student, but shifted more of his focus to music as Dr. Robert Giracello ramped up the course offerings in composing, songwriting, musicianship, and more. His debut album *Origin*, featuring ten tracks of cinematic pop, will be released this November.

How have you been able to grow as a musician at JPCatholic?

Looking back three years after arriving here, I've grown so much in personal cultivation and musicianship, in no small part due to Dr. Robert Giracello. His teaching style, his deep and intensive knowledge of music and culture, and his dedication to his students has lent to my development as both a creative and a musician, but perhaps foremost as somebody trained to appreciate and receive art. Additionally, the student body here is an ever-deepening talent pool, which first, gives rise to more projects than I've been able to say "yes" to (from films, to podcasts, to singer-songwriter productions); and second, spawns the opportunity to collaborate with incredibly talented people who stretch my own abilities.

What is your creative process when it comes to writing and composing music?

My creative process most commonly begins with sitting down at a piano and playing familiar patterns until I find something fresh. Fleshing out the idea comes next: the process of twisting the melodic fragment or lyrical germ into something of substance. I finally throw that into my digital audio workstation, record vocals and whatever analog sounds I need, and then move into post-production. The true struggle lies in figuring out what a song is really saying. For example, I wrote "Poseidon" years ago with only a mind to its aesthetic value, and only until it entered the greater context of *Origin* did it glean real purpose. Ultimately, intentionality is the hardest part here, and figuring out what this album was about is one of the things that took me the longest time.

Tell us about your upcoming album.

Origin has been on the front burner for several months now, but many of these songs and hooks have been on the shelf for anywhere between one and five years. Thematically, it's a deeply Catholic album, following the narrative of a man who ultimately discovers that doing his duty, no



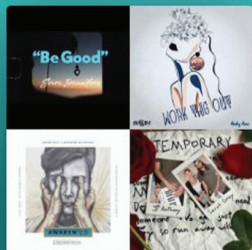
Raphael Whalen in JPCatholic's new "Pelican Reef" music studio.

matter what, is his ultimate purpose in this life—a *Pilgrim's Progress* arc, if you will. His journey goes through some dark places, but over the course of side B, he begins to recognize and embrace the cross. By the end, while he's by no means perfect, he's at least merited the hope of a peaceful life. Style-wise, it's cinematic pop at the intersection of Jon Bellion, AJR, and Panic! At The Disco; with subtler flavors of Billy Joel, Hans Zimmer, and the *Legend of Zelda* soundtracks. If you spin orchestral soundtracks for passive listening, and put on alternative fusion-pop like Jon Bellion for active listening, this record is for you!

Music Showcase:

Listen to student and alumni work, including Raphael's, at jpcatholic.edu/showcase

Scan to listen



Playlist



JPCatholic • 16 saves • 18 songs, 1 hr 3 min

JPCatholic Student & Alumni Musicians

1	Be Good Steven Braunstein	Be Good	Nov 15, 2023	3:49
2	The World Isn't Wide Enough Theo Pashley	The World Isn't Wide Enough	3 weeks ago	2:16
3	Plastic Flowers Lily Blando	Plastic Flowers	Sep 8, 2023	4:56
4	Work This Out SOUNDS, Andy Asco	Work This Out	Dec 6, 2023	3:07



Madeline Barcelona '24
Musings
Digital Painting
@peach.heart.art

Novel Writing Capstone Connecting Students With Literary Agent

This fall, the eleven students in Prof. Megan Eccles' Novel Writing III course had their work reviewed by Anjanette Barr, a literary agent with Dunham Literary.

JPCatholic's Novel Writing sequence represents a capstone experience for students in the Creative Writing emphasis, guiding the development, writing, and editing of a full-length novel over a nine-month period. In Novel Writing III, students spent 10 weeks editing and refining their completed novels. At the end of the Summer Quarter, each student had 10 pages of their novel read by Barr, who met one-on-one with the student on Zoom to offer professional feedback.

"A distinguishing part of our Creative Writing program is this focus on commercial writing, on having work ready to sell when you graduate," said Prof. Eccles. "So you're not just writing a bunch of short stories. You're producing something substantial that you're really passionate about writing, and at the same time it's a publish-ready product that has the potential to develop into a career."

Founded by Jennie Dunham in 2000, Dunham Literary has represented award-winning authors such as Phillip Hoose, Nick Bruel, and NYT best-sell-

ing author Tod Goldberg—a friend of Prof. Eccles who gave a guest lecture at JPCatholic last year.

Anjanette Barr has been a literary agent at the company since 2022. She is a member of the Association of American Literary Agents, Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, and Catholic Writers Guild.

"It's a privilege to offer assistance and encouragement to writers as they learn and exercise their craft," said Barr. "Publishing professionals are 'book people' by nature, and I'm no exception. I find great joy in being a small part of the support team for the authors I interact with! Smart writers who lean into the camaraderie and growth a program like this one can offer are the most fun."

“A distinguishing part of our Creative Writing program is this focus on commercial writing, on having work ready to sell when you graduate.”

The novels this year encompassed a diverse array of genres including fantasy, thriller, satire, family drama, sci-fi, and middle-grade fiction.



Megan Eccles, Professor of Creative Writing

Senior Eduardo Jáuregui Martínez wrote a tale of grief and ghosts in the fantasy lands of a Colonial-Mexico-like setting. "What I love about these three courses is the smaller size of the classroom, which allows for more connection and practical training," he said.

Senior Angela Whalen's novel is a thriller that explores the female experience of loss within a small-town world of misguided love, immersive lies, and mystery. "Taking Novel Writing I and II gave me permission to prioritize my writing—and now I'm finally seeing a book to completion," she said. "I cannot express my gratitude enough for these classes and for Prof. Eccles."



“Pelican’s Plume” Journal Wins Awards From Catholic Media Association

The Catholic Media Association released their 2024 collegiate awards in “The Catholic Journalist,” and recognized two JPCatholic students for their work on the University’s student journal “Pelican’s Plume” (Fall 2023 issue).

Delaney Rayner '24 received First Place for Excellence in Layout and Design. The award reads: *“The Pelican’s Plume boasts a visually appealing layout, with colors chosen to complement each submission, enhancing the reading experience without causing distraction. The interview and essays are thoughtfully laid out to highlight key elements and facilitate easy reading. Excellent work!”*

Evan Mock '24 received First Place for Best Single Photo, the cover image titled “Reside.” The award reads: *“A beautifully composed image, with effective movement and excellent colors and exposure.”*

“Pelican’s Plume” is an annual student journal from John Paul the Great Cath-

olic University, produced through the Literary Arts Journal Production practicum. In this course, students operate as a professional masthead, generate written and visual work for the journal, solicit submissions from the larger community of students and alumni, and hone their editing and proof-reading skills as they oversee the issue’s production. Eduardo Jáuregui Martinez and Angela Whalen Crowell were the Co-Editors-in-Chief of the Fall 2023 issue.

“It is wonderful to see the work and talent of numerous people come together so well in a piece like this,” said Mock. “This photo of mine in particular speaks to me of family, and God’s ever present hand in the order and serenity of creation.”

“I loved putting the design skills I’ve acquired over the years into action,” said Rayner. “I’m proud of all the hours of



work and dedication from my practicum classmates; it was rewarding to see our labor of love come to fruition and finally getting to hold the journal in my hands after seeing it on screen for so long.”

The journal can be read online, and hard copies are available to purchase in-person on campus.



Prof. Eccles’ Novel *Sing the Night* Acquired by 8th Note Press

Written by Prof. Megan Eccles, *Sing the Night* is a YA fantasy novel pitched as *Phantom of the Opera* meets *The Count of Monte Cristo* with a music-based magic system. The book and its sequel were purchased by 8th Note Press, the publishing house for TikTok parent company ByteDance. The company plans to release 10-15 books per year, and Eccles’ novel will be released in fall 2025.

“No Reception” Builds Momentum for Feature Films at JPCatholic

The family comedy was produced by students, faculty, and industry professionals as the second project in JPCatholic’s Feature Film Program

On August 28, JPCatholic premiered *No Reception* at the Ritz Theater in Escondido. The family comedy is the second project in JPCatholic’s Feature Film Program, an initiative the University launched in 2021 to integrate feature film productions into the curriculum.

“This program provides the opportunity that every film student is seeking; a chance to collaborate with amazing artists on full-length feature films,” said Prof. George Simon, who spearheaded the curriculum. “Our students brought creativity and passion to set everyday and provided an amazing witness to

their faith by their joy, professionalism, and love for one another.”

No Reception originated from students Mark Westin ‘23 and Natalia Roberts ‘23; Westin pitched their story concept at the first Feature Film Pitch Night in October 2021. While *O, Brawling Love!*



was selected to be the inaugural project, *No Reception* was later greenlit in January of 2023 as the second venture. Directed by Prof. Christopher Riley, production took place over several weeks in summer 2023 in Escondido and surrounding area; over 40 JPCatholic students were involved in the production both on and off set.

The comedy centers on germaphobe Cody Mullen (Alex Campbell), a San Francisco businessman who grew up in the foster care system. Upon the death of his estranged father and the potential for a huge inheritance, he embarks on the journey home to his family's vast mountain property. When his car breaks down in the wilderness, he is caught up in a feud between two eccentric hermits who give him a new outlook on family.

"*No Reception* is ridiculous fun," said Riley. "And it's meaty. It's about things that really matter within our families. I've taken to calling it a family revenge comedy. The production represents a wildly ambitious collaboration between students, faculty, and other industry professionals. Making a feature film is a massively complex project and our students rose to the challenge in every department."

Through the Feature Film Program, the University produces and distributes a feature film on a regular cycle, with the various stages of production built into the curriculum as electives. Students brought *No Reception* to the screen through courses such as story development, pre-production, set building, and editing, with seniors taking on significant leadership roles such as director



Prof. Chris Riley & Prof. George Simon at the *No Reception* premiere

of photography, assistant director, and production designer.

"Working on *No Reception* was a great opportunity to test my skills in a big setting, and challenge myself to grow as a cinematographer," said Angelika Sowa '23, director of photography. "This experience not only prepared me to work on professional sets but also helped me learn the complexity and art of leadership and project management, which I'm able to apply in every aspect of my life and career."

Timothy Battle '24 was one of JPCatholic's acting students cast in the film. "Working with Professor Riley was a wonderful experience, and I was able to get a sense of what it's like working on a project with such a big scope," he said.

"I'm incredibly proud of my classmates who made this film possible."

Beyond giving students hands-on experience and IMDb credits, the program is also designed with distribution in mind, aligning with the University's mission to impact audiences through wholesome entertainment. *O, Brawling Love!* is currently available for streaming on Amazon Prime Video, and *No Reception* is expected to be widely distributed in 2025.

“ Working on *No Reception* was a great opportunity to test my skills in a big setting, and challenge myself to grow as a cinematographer. ”

JPCatholic is already involved in pre-production on a third film, *Pickle for Pickleball*. With a story from Anna Engel '24, the sports comedy will shoot in June 2025. A proof of concept trailer was filmed this summer and screened before the premiere of *No Reception*.

Creative Arts Complex Construction in Full Swing

When renovations are complete in mid-2025,
the 30k square foot building will more than
double the University's academic space



Scan to Donate



From left to right: Prof. Max Hulbert, Eleazar Palma, President Derry Connolly, Prof. Katelyn Slater,
and Prof. Joe Connolly visit the construction site to see the latest work.

This year JPCatholic broke ground on renovations for our new Creative Arts Academic Complex at 131 S Broadway, adjacent to our current academic building. Previously the home of Johnson Furniture and Sears Roebuck, the structurally-sound 30,620 sq. ft. building sits on 1.3 acres. JPCatholic purchased the property in 2016 using a generous \$1.5M gift from the Caster Family Trust and debt financing.

The structure will be divided into two separate buildings: Cinematic Arts and Visual Arts in one building and Performing Arts in the other. A courtyard will connect the two, serving as a venue for community events, outdoor performances, and student life activities. This complex will more than double our academic space and equip our growing student body with the resources needed to produce impactful projects across the creative arts. Plans include a new soundstage, illustration studio, acting rehearsal studio, along with additional classrooms, computer labs, and more.



Help us get *Across the Finish Line!*

After two years of planning, design, and construction, the renovation phase is nearing completion, and we seek your philanthropic help to raise \$750,000 for the furnishing and equipment phase to get this \$8M+ campus centerpiece across the finish line and ready for teaching and learning.

55% - \$410,000 Raised & Pledged

Goal: \$750,000

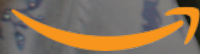
O, BRAWLING LOVE!

ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE & THEATRE



NOW STREAMING

prime video



Scan to watch



THE
FEATURE FILM
PROGRAM



Alumni-Founded Akimbo Studio Partners with JPCatholic

Founded by Nate Sjogren, the Idaho-based animation studio has provided numerous internships and jobs for alumni



This February, JPCatholic announced a formal partnership with Akimbo Studio, a motion design studio founded by alumnus Nate Sjogren '11. Based in Boise, ID, the studio has created motion graphics for clients such as Rocket League, TikTok, Vans, Ascension Press, Scott Hahn, The Bible Project, and Word on Fire.

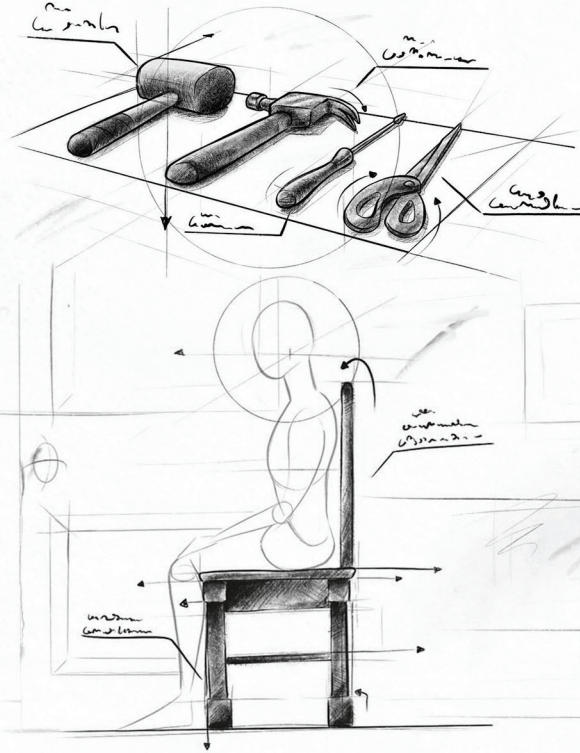
Last year Akimbo launched an in-house Catholic animation counterpart Numa Creative, an initiative to bring the truth and beauty of Catholicism to life through animation. "This department is the fruit of the faith-filled talent from Akimbo's relationship with JPCatholic," said Sjogren.

"This partnership has been many years in the making," he said. "We are proud to boast that currently over half of our full-time contractors and employees are JPCatholic alumni, all of whom I found in my Motion Graphics courses over the years. The raw talent and amazing people that are the result of this partnership is a gift that keeps on giving!"

Mia Schaller graduated from JPCatholic's Illustration program in 2022, and her Akimbo internship senior year transitioned into full-time work after graduation. "I've been pushed far past where I thought the line of my creativity ended and I have learned so much," she said. "Working here has been a huge blessing."

Through Numa Creative, JPCatholic alumni Andrew Inoue, Philip Storniolo, and Josh Martin created illustrations and motion design for *Jesus Thirsts: The Miracle of the Eucharist*, a documentary released in theaters this June. As it so happens, that film also involved alumni Haley Rossi and Ryan Cain, whose cinematography contributed to the film.

Other Akimbo collaborations have even included partnering with JPCatholic's



Illustrations from Josh Martin for *Jesus Thirsts*

olic's Feature Film Program; Inoue and Martin both worked with producer James Jacobus to create an animated prologue for *No Reception*.

To learn more, visit akimbo.tv and numacreative.co

Scan to watch



Akimbo created an animated prologue for JPCatholic's feature *No Reception*, using student art such as this piece from Claeanne Ysmael '25



Sjogren also teaches motion design at JPCatholic, and over the years has used his classroom as a recruiting ground for talented students to work for his company. The new partnership formalizes the relationship, offering JPCatholic students first opportunity to apply for new openings.



Alumni Spotlight:

Josh Martin '23

Creator of *Elephant Tracks*

Last August, Josh Martin premiered “Elephant Tracks” at JPCatholic’s Senior Project Screening. The 2D animated short film was the product of almost three years of development and production, with Josh leading a team of nearly 30 students and alumni to bring his vision to life. Since premiering, the film has been making its festival run and has received over a dozen festival selections, nominees, and awards in categories such as: Best Animation, Best Student Film, and Best Original Score, raising the bar for JPCatholic’s animation senior projects.

What is Elephant Tracks about, and what sparked the inspiration for this story?

At its core, Elephant Tracks is the story of a mother-son relationship. It’s about a

man named Wesley, overcome with guilt and grief, who begins a journey of healing and forgiveness with the help of his childhood stuffed animal come to life. I think those relationships are so important and some of the most tricky to navigate as humans, so I wanted to tell the story of one.

Tell us about the production process. What are the biggest values you took away from your senior project experience?

The process of working and directing such a large group of people was a new experience for me at first, but it was very formative. There is so much talent on our team, and I am so proud of every person that contributed. Having all of these talented students at JPCatholic wanting to work on projects like mine was so valu-

able. Everyone put in so many hours and so much hard work and the project most definitely wouldn’t be what it is without them. I’m especially grateful to Lindsay Newman who came on board to help me refine the story.

What are you doing now, one year after graduation?

Right after graduation I started working with Akimbo Studio. I am working on projects such as Real+True, Bible Project, and *Jesus Thirsts* doing illustration work. I love using my gifts to give back to God and give glory to him. In addition to that, I am developing a new animated short film I am excited to share more details about soon!

A collage of award logos and a framed illustration. The central text reads "ELEPHANT TRACKS" in large, stylized white letters. To the right is a framed illustration of a woman holding a young boy, with a small elephant-like creature appearing to fly out of the frame. Surrounding the text are various award logos, including: "LIFT-OFF GLOBAL NETWORK SESSIONS OFFICIAL SELECTION", "QUARTER FINALIST Festigious INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL MONKEY EDITION 2024", "OFFICIAL SELECTION INDIE X FILM FEST LOS ANGELES SEPTEMBER 2024", "FINALIST student LOS ANGELES Film Awards", "ONIRO'S FILM AWARDS New York AWARD WINNER", "OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD INDIE SHORT FEST LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL, SEPTEMBER 2024", "Gothamite monthly film awards SEPTEMBER 2024", "NOMINEE BEST ANIMATION TMFF THE MONTHLY FILM FESTIVAL 2024", "WINNER AWARD OF EXCELLENCE BEST SHORTS COMPETITION ANIMATION", and "WINNER AWARD OF EXCELLENCE BEST SHORTS COMPETITION ORIGINAL SCORE". At the bottom right is the "NEW YORK FILM & ACTOR AWARDS OFFICIAL SELECTION" logo.

Watch the film now!



Fr. Simon Esshaki: TikTok Evangelist

With over 600k followers across TikTok and Instagram, Fr. Simon is spreading the Gospel far beyond his home parish

Like many other Chaldean Catholic seminarians, Simon Esshaki came to JPCatholic to complete his undergraduate degree (in New Evangelization) followed by an MA in Biblical Theology. Upon graduation in 2015, he was ordained and assigned to St. Michael's Chaldean Catholic Church in El Cajon. Now, alongside his parish work, his studies to become a canon lawyer through CUA, and the courses he teaches at JPCatholic, he is a popular personality on TikTok and Instagram, sharing the truths of the Faith with an online audience.

How did your education at JPCatholic help prepare you for your current vocation as a priest, and your role as an online creator?

I was blessed to have the opportunity to go to JPCatholic during my seminary years, and it was the perfect environment for me to grow in my faith, as well as learn about Catholic teachings in an authentic way. In addition to the philosophical and theological training was the education I received in media and in the new evangelization. When I joined the seminary and ended up going to JPCatholic as part of my formation program, I never imagined that I would receive many tools to be able to spread the message of the gospel in a way that the people of this culture understand. My

education was not just reading books and listening to lectures; it was about how to communicate the message of Christ to a world that is in dire need of it.

When did you start posting content on TikTok, and why do you think your videos resonated with so many people?

When the first lockdown of the pandemic happened in 2020, I realized that, since people are not coming to church, we need to find a way to reach them. I would post on Instagram and YouTube, but I wanted to try everything possible in order to reach as many people as possible, especially the young. One day my teenage cousin told me she saw a video of a Protestant Christian posting Christian content on TikTok, and about the fact that there was a lot of Christian content on the app. This was a shock to me, as I thought the app was only for teenage kids and music videos. I was hesitant at first because, at the time, I can't remember seeing any other priests posting on the app. I decided to give it a try, and since there was not much of a Catholic presence on the app, and barely any Catholic priests posting, my content was very appealing to people. I would post short videos showing the beauty of the Gospel and I also answered a lot of people's questions, clarifying some doubts



and confusions they had about the Bible and the Catholic faith. I also started doing food reviews and other types of videos which showed to people that I was a normal person and made them more attracted to my content.

What advice would you give to current and future JPCatholic students who strive to use media in service of a New Evangelization?

Be yourself. Be faithful to Jesus and the teachings of the Church, and do it with love and respect. You are the bridge by which Jesus wants to reach people. It will not just be by stating facts and winning arguments, but by winning souls for Jesus. People need the mercy and compassion of Jesus, and if he is calling you to use media to evangelize, you have a duty and responsibility to convey that message to them in a language they would understand, guided by the Holy Spirit, as the first Apostles preached with such zeal and confidence, not in themselves, but in the grace of God which was guiding them.



Scan to watch



Deus Creator

A documentary short on the vocation of creatives

Maya Hajdu '24 produced and directed this documentary as her senior project, highlighting the spiritual importance and profundity of being creative, as it mirrors Our Ultimate Creator. The project features interviews with Delaney Rayner '24 on her passions for photography, graphic design, and making spaces beautiful.



Kiki Vorderbruggen '24
Little Scotsman
Digital Painting
@k.i.k.i.l.y.n.n.art

ALUMNI updates

Neil Watson '10 and Anna (Doherty) Watson '12 moved to Ave Maria, FL this year. After a decade of leadership experience at companies like Adidas and Tillamook Creamery, Neil is now Director of Marketing, adjunct Business professor, and an inaugural Fellow in the Institute at Ave Maria University.

Francois Flippen '10 MBA '11 has been growing his CPA tax business and is now up to three employees. He also is chairman of Padre Pio Academy, a small Catholic school in Front Royal, VA with 220 students.

Tara Stone '11 MBA '13 received multiple recognitions for her novel *680 Miles Away*, including Honorable Mention Award from Readers' Favorite in "Young Adult-Coming of Age" category, and 1st place in the "Religious/Spiritual Fiction" category for the CIPA book awards! Centering on a Colorado violinist, the novel explores themes of sisterhood, love, and the enduring impact of family secrets. Visit tarajstonewriter.com



Alec Calzada '13 and his family moved to Lincoln, NE, and in January he founded The Charging Station, a "Christian coffeehouse powering the hardworking American." The decor plays on the building's location in an historically industrial neighborhood, theming the café around electricity.

Adrienne (Schoenbachler) Thorne MBA '14 recently optioned her young adult dramedy feature script *Delivery Route* to an independent producer after the two of them connected on X. Production is anticipated to take place in spring of 2025.

Devanie Cooper '14 is President of St. Paul Institute, living as a full-time missionary and lay consecrated. She oversees the organization's Catholic bookstore, as well as "Mary and Elizabeth", an apostolate she founded in 2022 dedicated to the interior renewal of women. They provide spiritual direction, vocational accompaniment, and retreats for women.



Andy Barth '15 was ordained a deacon in the Institute of the Incarnate Word on Sep. 6th at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Haley Rossi '14 MBA '15 and John-Henry Keenan '13 joined for the Mass!

Nicholas McAfee '15 MA '17 is a Post-doctoral Teaching Fellow at the Center for Thomas More Studies, located at the University of Dallas. His book *Political Wisdom in Late Shakespeare: A Way Out of the Wreck* was just published by Lexington Books.

Robert "Eric" Jenkins '16 is Creative Director in marketing who continues to produce narrative films as well. Projects include "Hell to Pay", a Western short he wrote, directed, acted, and edited across the Great Basin Desert, now with over 30k views on YouTube; and "Knights of the Cross", an upcoming historical drama about Richard the Lionheart, on which he is Post-Production Supervisor.

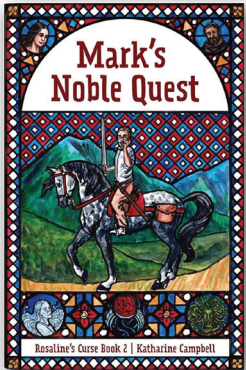
Katherine Martinez DeLeon (Sanderson) MBA '16 has been working for the past year and a half as Producer on "Dormilón", a stop-motion animated short sponsored by the LAIKA Film Independent Project Involve Fellowship. The film has a crew of 75+ and will premiere in 2025.

Luke Heintschel '15 MA '17 is the founding headmaster of Coeur du Christ, a private classical high school in the Catholic tradition in northern Idaho. The academy is changing the lives of young people in a community that hasn't had access to Catholic secondary education for more than 50 years!

Deacon Curtis Kennedy MA '17 was ordained a permanent deacon in June and now oversees all formation for men discerning the diaconate in the Archdiocese of Kansas City.

Therese DeCleene '19 has spent the last several years working as an assistant editor in Burbank on projects such as *Pacific Rim: The Black*, *Skull Island* (King Kong series), and *Blade Runner: Black Lotus*. Most recently she was editor on Netflix's *Tomb Raider: The Legend of Lara Croft*.

Rachael Workman McLaughlin '20 and **Gabe O'Malley '21** have written a feature film called *LIVE* that will be produced through the alumni production company The Guild. The psychological thriller is about a young streamer whose desperation to be recognized becomes deadly when a charming serial killer makes him both a sensation and his next victim. The Guild's first feature *Letting Go of Jack* (by **Andrew Koltuniuk '20**) will premiere in 2025.



Katy (Sohler) Campbell '12 has built on the success of her recent novels with the sequel *Mark's Noble Quest*, a novellette which explores themes of marriage, sacrifice, and masculinity. Visit katysfables.com

Nicolas Alayo-Matos '18 has been writing, directing, and editing ads for True Classic for the past 2 years. If you've seen witty videos show up in your feed advertising t-shirts, it was probably him!

Grace (Reding) Tamburro '19 is Producer /Creative Director at TLC Properties, a Christian property management company in Springfield, MO. She has also been a leader in her Catholic community; in 2022 she co-founded a young adult group called Fontis which has since grown to 50 members. The group facilitates volunteer work, Encyclical studies, socials, First Friday Mass, and helps recently graduated college students transition into an active parish life. Three couples who met in the group are already engaged!



Dustin Kahia '21 wrote, produced, directed, and edited "Monday Mourning" as part of his Directing II class at JPCatholic. The film has since taken the festival circuit by storm, picking up 25 nominations and 9 wins including Best Director at the International Motion Picture Awards. Watch the film now on YouTube @dustinkahia



Cierra Campbell '18 was awarded Entrepreneur of the Year Award by the Bixby Chamber of Commerce, and her company Bluebird Art Studio was voted Best Art School by the Broken Arrow community. They enrolled 350 students this summer, prompting her business to expand next door and double their space!

Aaron McAfee '18 started a new video podcast Escape Velocity. His most recent episode features a great interview with an Emmy Winning director of FX's *Shogun*.

Clare Schmidt '20 is a novice at the Abbey of St. Walburga, and sent a message that she "is praying for all y'all!"

Margaret Orsinger '20 has been working for Family Theater Productions in L.A., and recently graduated with her MFA in Screenwriting from Pepperdine University.

Isabelle Peterson '22 is now working as an illustrator and animator at Coronation Media, a company where several other alumni have worked, including Associate Creative Director **Haley Rossi '14 MBA '15** and Production Specialist **Joe Fifelski '19**.

Miranda Cenicerros '22 is now Show Producer at Relevant Radio, working with fellow alumna **Timmerie (Millington) Geagea '15** on her popular show Trending with Timmerie!

Katerina Gerlach '22 and **Angelika Sowa '23** both travelled to Poland to help film *Triumph of the Heart*, an upcoming drama about St. Maximilian Kolbe from Sherwood Pictures.

2024 Alumni Weddings

Paul Campa '18 & Maria Isabel Hernandez '19

Nicholas Crawley '22 & Grace Vedra '23

Ian Krog '23 & Elizabeth DeWitt '24

Julian Rosales '23 & Gianna Garcia '24

Nicholas Gresch '25 & Naylin Cruz '23

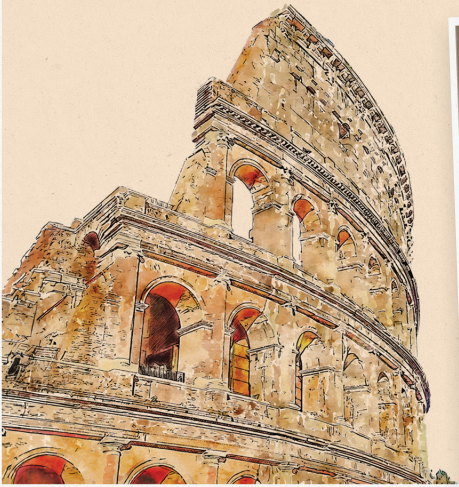
Ryan Hill '24 & Elizabeth West '24

Pelicans in Flight

JPCatholic students participated in more study abroad and travel experiences this year than ever before!

NEW STUDY ABROAD IN ROME

This fall we sent six students to Rome for a full quarter abroad, partnering with St. Thomas More College of Liberal Arts! Students are immersing themselves in the history and culture of the Eternal City, while taking courses like Art and Architecture in Rome, Poetics, and Philosophy of the Human Person.



STUDY ABROAD IN

France

Coming in 2025!

Next spring, students will have the opportunity to spend 10 weeks in Normandy, doing mission work with local Catholic parishes through the Académie St. Joan of Arc!



STUDY ABROAD WITH NET IRELAND

Three students flew to Ireland in August to begin our third year of partnering with NET Ministries for study abroad. Students earn practicum credit for participating in evangelistic outreach including parish retreats, street evangelization, and coffee shop ministry.





ALL EYES ON INDEPENDENTS

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Since 2018, JPCatholic has offered an elective credit experience traveling to Sundance Film Festival in Park City, UT. Students and faculty stay network with other filmmakers and attend a wide variety of film screenings at the largest independent film fest in the nation. A unique highlight of the trip is the Windrider Summit, which features panels bringing together Christian universities and filmmakers to discuss how to effectively incorporate Christian values into film. This January, Prof. Nathan Scoggins and Production Manager Kaitlyn Krikorian accompanied eight students to the festival, where they enjoyed films such as *Thelma* and *Didi*.



FILMING A DOCUMENTARY *in Hawaii*

This January, Elizabeth (DeWitt) Krog '24 led a team of students to Hawaii to produce her senior project, a cultural documentary called *Ke Aloha*. Their student crew spent four days on the beautiful islands of Oahu and Kauai, exploring the lives of Hawaii's hula masters. We got to enjoy the film premiere at our Senior Project Screening in August!



LOS ANGELES QUARTER

Our L.A. Quarter is hosting eight Pelicans this fall, facilitating internships at Alcon, Family Theater Productions, AMGI, RPM Talent Agency, The Greenhouse, and the Lila Rose Podcast. The program also helps students connect to our alumni network in L.A., and in October Prof. Scoggins hosted another unofficial Alumni Reunion!

HOLLYWOOD





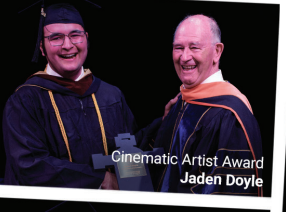
Snapshots of 2024



Monster Summer Premiere
Our students were invited up to Hollywood for the premiere of David Henrie's new movie!



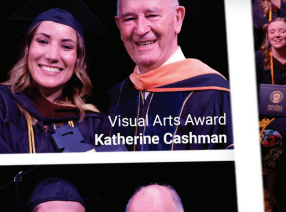
The Founder's Award for Impacting Culture, & Valedictorian: **Bridget Baker**



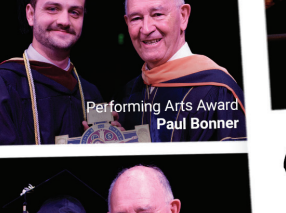
Cinematic Artist Award
Jaden Doyle



Fine Arts Award
Patrick Schloss



Visual Arts Award
Katherine Cashman



Performing Arts Award
Paul Bonner



Humanities Award
Margaret Alvine



Business Acumen Award
Luca Hoang



Congrats to the Class of 2024!



Storybook Spring Formal



Summer Quarter Luau



Norbertine Visit

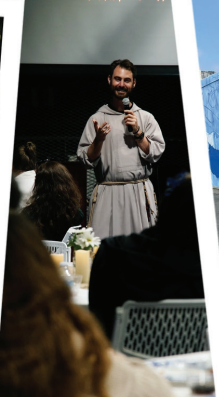


Hiking at Torre



Mission Monday

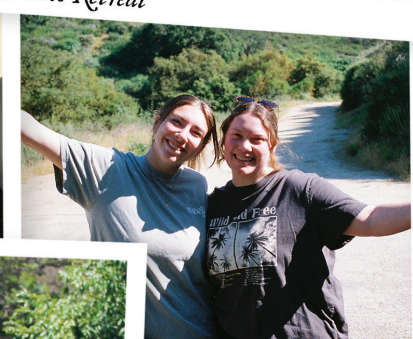




Artists Retreat

Theology on Tap

Hummingbird Mural



Spring Retreat

"The Vault" Recording Studio



Field Day



Orientation

In September, we welcomed 100 new freshmen and transfer students to campus for Orientation. Combined with students who began in Winter, Spring, and Summer, a total of 119 students joined the University this year. The new cohort comes from 25 different states, plus five countries abroad.



by Pines Beach



Our mascot Peli





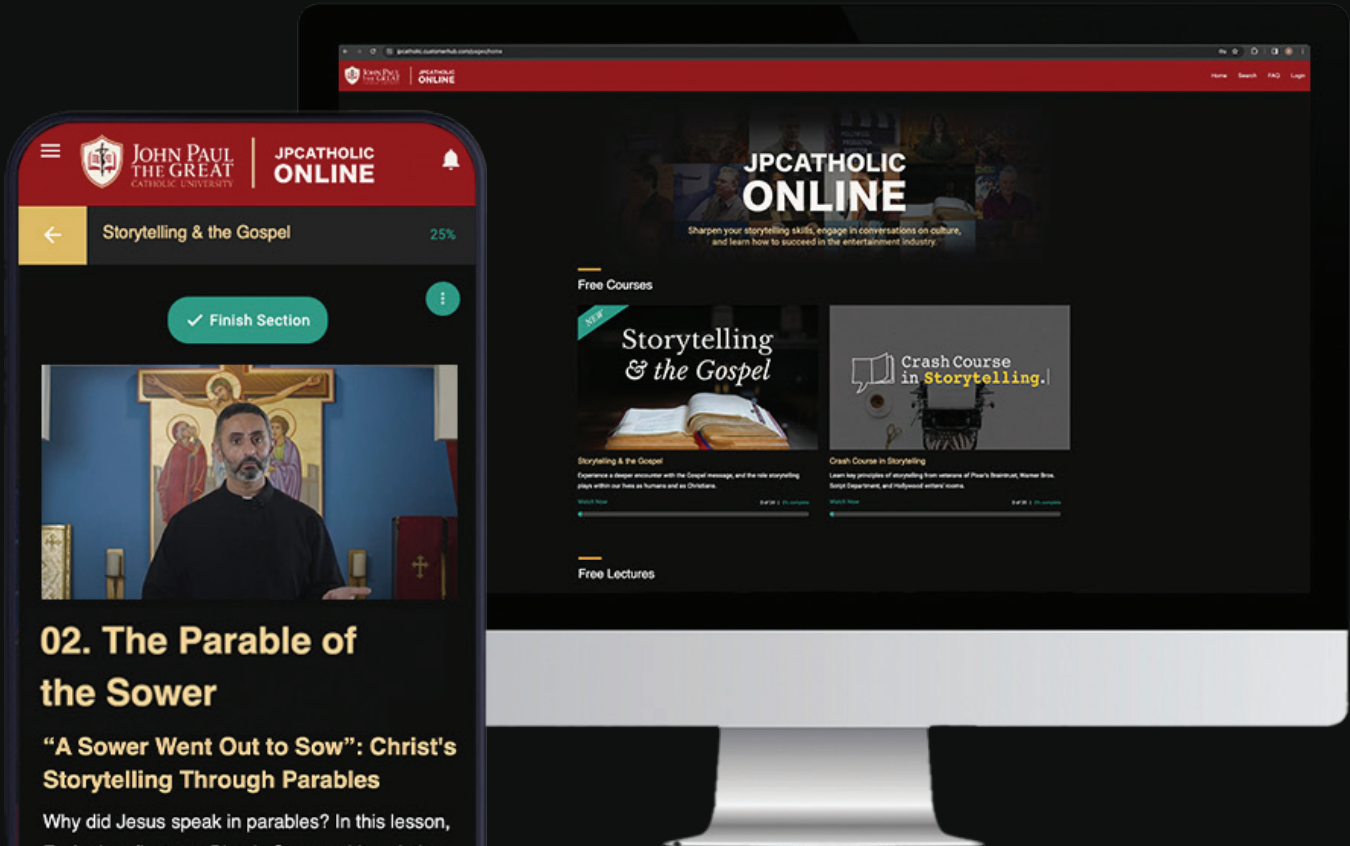
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02. The Parable of the Sower

“A Sower Went Out to Sow”: Christ’s Storytelling Through Parables

Why did Jesus speak in parables? In this lesson, Fr. Andy reflects on Plato’s Cave and its relation to Christ’s storytelling. He offers an in-depth analysis of the Parable of the Sower, and how