



JOHN PAUL
THE GREAT
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY



2025

YEAR IN REVIEW

07

JPCatholic Ranked
#1 in Best Value

14

New Free Course:
Traditional Publishing 101

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Alumnae help bring
St. Maximilian Kolbe
to the big screen

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From Pitch to Premiere:
The Heartbeat of the Sea
animated short

Scan me



Front Cover:

Mary, Star of the Sea
Illustrated by Sophia Klein '25
for her senior capstone. Prints
available at sophiakleinart.com
See her full Marian series on pg. 6

6, 13, 23, 26

FEATURED ILLUSTRATIONS

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

**UPCOMING
EVENTS**

Christmas Concert
December 4, 2025

Taming of the Shrew
March 7–9, 2026

Parents Weekend
May 8–10, 2026

jpcatholic.edu/events

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Snapshots of 2025

Dear friends,

As we approach the end of 2025, I express my immense gratitude for the blessings the Lord has bestowed on us this year.

We were richly blessed by the Class of 2025—our 17th class—that graduated on August 30. They grew significantly in their openness to encounter Jesus, which is the most important part of our mission. Further, they impressively mastered their professional crafts. Graduation Week highlighted many of their portfolio projects, including the new Theology & Philosophy thesis presentations, the game development project *50 Minutes 'Til Impact*, the collaborative animated film *The Heartbeat of the Sea*, the Visual Arts Showcase, the Business Pitch competition, the *Little Women* musical, and the many senior film projects. We now boast over 1000 graduates, formed to Impact Culture for Christ.

The completion of production on *Pickle for Pickleball*, the third project in our Feature Film program, was a monumental accomplishment. Just a month later, we celebrated the acquisition by a distributor of our second film, *No Reception*—it's now available to watch on major platforms like Amazon and Google.

For the first time, we had the complete Easter Triduum services on campus thanks to Fr. Dominic Smith, O.S.A. (BS '13), our part-time chaplain. Six students were transformed greatly, with 5 confirmations and 1 baptism. Praise God.

We welcomed our 20th incoming class on September 26—our second largest ever. Additionally, JPCatholic significantly improved our U.S. News college rankings to #7 overall in our 15-state Western Regional College category (among 97 colleges) and #1 in Best Value.

Our major Creative Arts Complex renovation successfully exceeded our **\$750K Across the Finish Line** campaign goal, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of our benefactors. The construction is nearing completion, and our students and faculty are eagerly anticipating its Grand Opening in 2026! This expansion will greatly enhance our students' experience and expand their capacity to produce content across the entertainment spectrum.

Our student residences moved to Marlowe Palomar Heights, a brand new apartment community within walking distance of campus, and closer to the heart of historic downtown Escondido—very timely, since the Grand Avenue Vision Project recently enhanced our street, creating a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly cityscape with wider sidewalks, roundabouts, and outdoor dining.

This fall, we launched our **Witness to Truth** fundraising campaign to raise \$1 million for scholarships to allow more talented young creatives, entrepreneurs, and storytellers to receive a transformative Catholic education rooted in faith and excellence. Please prayerfully consider supporting this important campaign.

Our students and their families, along with our faculty, staff, trustees, and benefactors, make JPCatholic an extraordinary community. I am grateful to count you among our friends and supporters, and I thank you for your contribution to our mission. Please continue to keep our work in your prayers. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Sincerely,



Derry Connolly, PhD
Founding President

CREATIVE ARTS COMPLEX NEARS COMPLETION

**“Across the Finish Line” Campaign
Exceeds Funding Goal**

103% - \$772,500 Raised & Pledged

Goal: \$750,000

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our donors, our “Across the Finish Line” campaign has not only met but exceeded its \$750,000 goal, reaching 103% of funding for the furnishing and equipment of the new Creative Arts Complex.

This milestone marks a major step forward in bringing state-of-the-art facilities to our student filmmakers, actors, and artists. The 30,620 sq. ft. complex will more than double our academic space, housing Cinematic Arts, Visual Arts, and Performing Arts, with a new courtyard for student life and community events.

We’ve made tremendous progress on renovations this year, and we’re excited to share that the building is on track to open in early 2026. None of this would have been possible without the support of our community. We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who has helped bring this long-anticipated vision to life, empowering our students to pursue creative excellence in service of truth, beauty, and goodness.





During Parents Weekend this past May, we held a special blessing for the new archway, given by alumnus Fr. Dominic Smith, O.S.A.



GRAND OPENING

Stay tuned for an announcement soon on the Grand Opening date this spring!



Sophia Klein '25
Marian Apparitions
Gouache and gold pen, 16x20
@sophia_klein_art
sophiakleinart.com

U.S. News Ranks JPCatholic #1 in Best Value Among Western Colleges



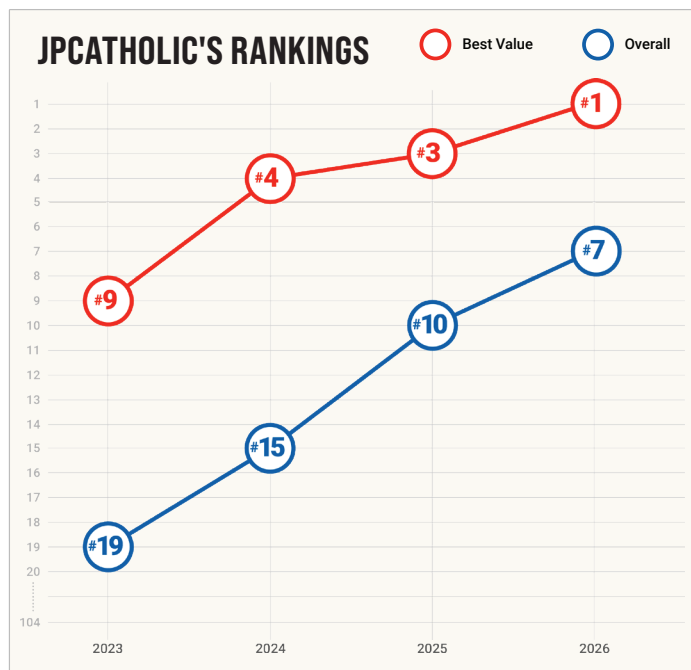
Of the 97 schools in Regional Colleges West, JPCatholic is ranked #1 Best Value and #7 Overall

U.S. News & World Report, the premier go-to source for national college rankings, placed John Paul the Great Catholic University at **#1 for Best Value** and **#7 overall** in its list of Regional Colleges West for 2026. Among the 97 schools of the category, JPCatholic also ranks **#6 for Social Mobility** (tie).

This marks the third consecutive year that JPCatholic’s ranking has risen in the former two categories.

“This #1 Best Value and #7 Overall ranking are a strong affirmation of the excellence, dedication, and mission-driven work of our faculty and staff,” said President Derry Connolly. “The U.S. News rankings highlight our commitment to providing an outstanding education that delivers strong return on investment: high quality, affordable, and impactful for students and their families. We are honored by this national recognition and deeply grateful for what it represents.”

Every year the publication conducts extensive research of schools across the nation, first by arranging them into various subcategories (national universities, liberal arts colleges, regional colleges, etc.) and then ranking them within those categories according to a wide array of metrics. Rankings are driven primarily by quantitative data; that is, by measurable quantities such as retention rate and student-faculty ratio, rather than opinion surveys or third-party oversight.



To learn more about the rankings, visit jpcatholic.edu/go/ranking



New Academic Chairs

This fall, we were pleased to announce the appointment of five new academic chairs:



GEORGE SIMON

Chair of Film



KATELYN SLATER

Chair of Performing Arts



JUSTIN PANLASIGUI

Chair of Theology



MEGAN JAUREGUI ECCLES

Chair of Creative Writing



CHRIS LIS

Chair of Business

Fashion Design Program Launches

This fall, we officially launched our new Fashion Design emphasis, welcoming the first students into the program. Over the past year, Prof. Elena Chirkova has continued to lay the foundation by offering elective courses such as Fashion Illustration, Fashion Analysis II, and Basic Sewing II.



Illustrations
by student
Aaron Cantu

Innovator *Spotlights*

Entrepreneurial students and alumni continue to bring their visions to life



HAS/BEEN

Ira Mulingbayan '25

The winner of our 2025 Business Pitch Competition during Graduation Week, Ira was awarded funding to help start a deeply personal line of streetwear that blends bold style with expressions of resilience and self-confidence.

[instagram.com/hasbeenlabel](https://www.instagram.com/hasbeenlabel)

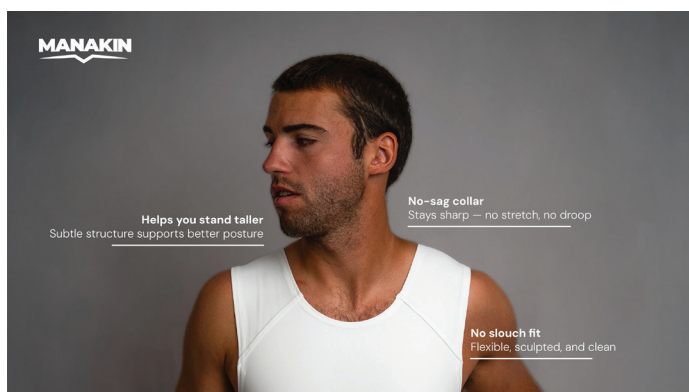


SNAPTUTOR

James Marshall '23

Inspired by a late night tutoring favor for his brother, James launched SnapTutor on September 21st, a platform that connects students instantly with qualified tutors, streamlining academic support like an “Uber for tutoring.”

[snaptutor.com](https://www.snaptutor.com)

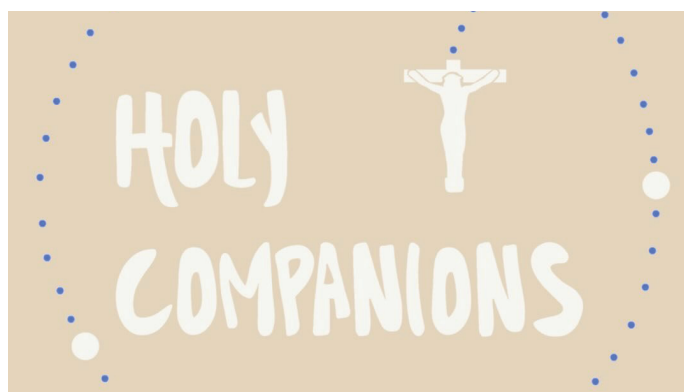


MANAKIN WEAR

Max Massell '21 & Isaac Toche '21

Manakin Apparel launched with their initial product Manakin Tank, a premium base layer made in the USA to help men feel confident, comfortable, and sharp in the clothes they already own.

[manakinwear.com](https://www.manakinwear.com)



HOLY COMPANIONS

Katharine Roach '26, Emily Bowdish '26, Melanie Luquin '27

Founded by three current students, Holy Companions is an Etsy shop that offers handmade rosaries “inspired by the fire of the Saints.”

[etsy.com/shop/HolyCompanions](https://www.etsy.com/shop/HolyCompanions)



Finance Emphasis Added for 2026

JPCatholic will launch a new Finance emphasis within our BS in Business in Fall 2026, focusing on wealth management, investing, corporate finance, and political economy. Rooted in Catholic business ethics, the emphasis is designed to prepare students for values-driven leadership in the financial sector. The program will be spearheaded by our new department chair Prof. Chris Lis, giving students practical skills and strategic insight to succeed in real-world financial environments.

“Some things are meant to be.”



Scan to see
behind the scenes



LITTLE WOMEN THE MUSICAL

During Graduation Week, JPCatholic Theatre Productions presented two performances of Alan Knee's *Little Women* at the Ritz Theater in Escondido. The production was directed by Prof. Katelyn Slater, with Mary Wenner '22 as Associate Director, Megan Geier '18 as Choreographer, and Prof. Robert Giracello, PhD, as Musical Director.

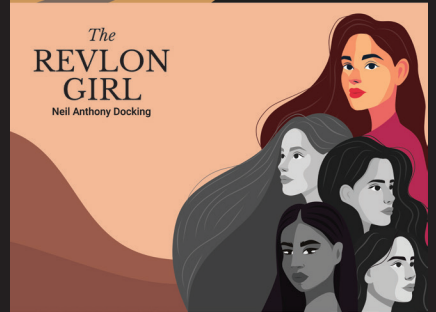


 JPCATHOLIC
THEATRE
PRODUCTIONS

WIT
Margaret Edson



The
**REVLON
GIRL**
Neil Anthony Docking



FALL 2025

THE
**TAMING OF
THE SHREW**
William Shakespeare



WINTER 2026

Subscribe for updates
jpcatholic.edu/theatre



HITTING A HIGH NOTE

Music Club raising the bar for live performances on campus

Among the many clubs on campus this year, few have struck as strong a chord as the Music Club. Led by Theodore Pashley and Mary Leskovicz, the club (also known by their band name The Rhapsodics) has become a driving force behind the resurgence of live music on campus.

Comprised of seven student musicians, The Rhapsodics hold auditions each fall and perform at major campus events throughout the year. Their mission? To cultivate a lasting culture of live music at JPCatholic that continues well beyond their own graduation.

Over the past year, their performances have drawn impressive crowds, totaling more than 400 attendees across their four flagship events. The year kicked off with Coffeehouse, an open mic night in collaboration with Student Council. Next, the

Winter Ball was a collaboration with Swing Dance Club that featured live jazz, mocktails, and charcuterie.

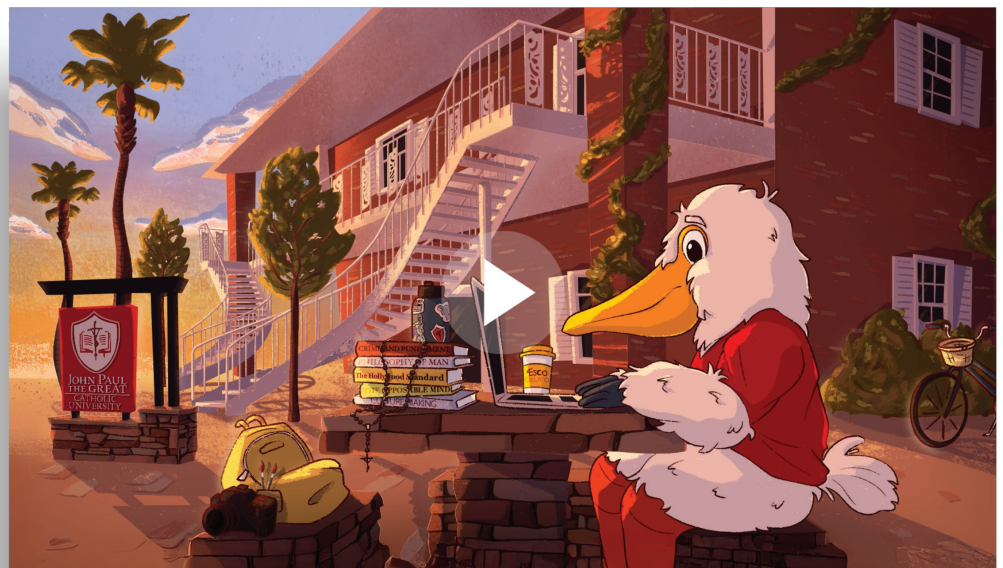
Funded by proceeds from the massively successful ball, the club hosted Jazz Night in the spring, transforming the Student Life Center into a full-fledged jazz lounge with mood lighting and a 90-minute live set. This summer, they concluded the year with Summerpalooza, an outdoor music festival in the SLC backlot that celebrated summer vibes with games, food, and of course live entertainment.

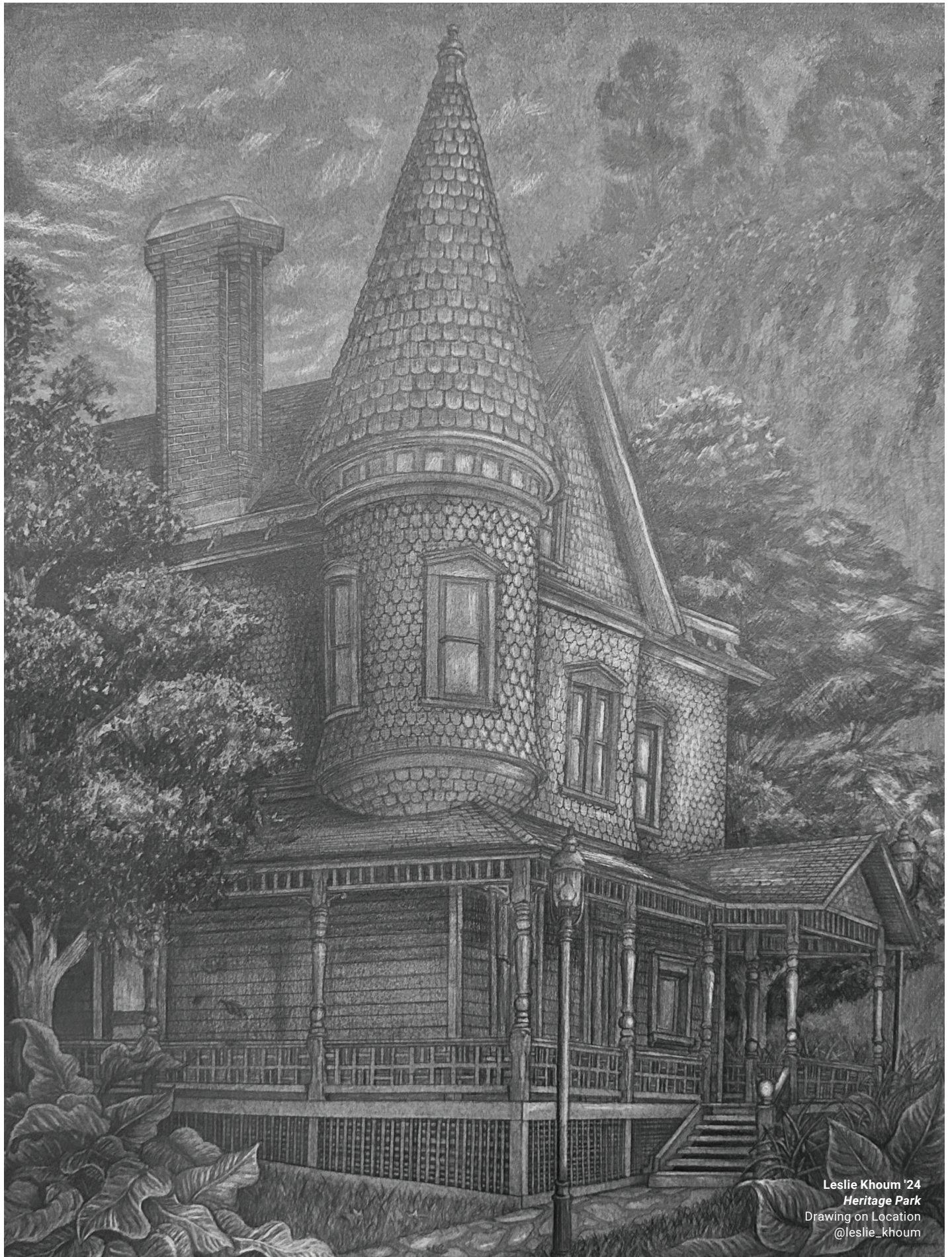
"Each concert feels like a new step forward, not just for us as performers but for what live music can be at JPCatholic," said Pashley. "I'm so proud of our team and grateful for the passion everyone brings; without them, none of this would be possible."

PELLY LOFI

Our mascot Pelly the Pelican launched his own Lofi video this spring, with the help of Josh Martin '23 (illustration and animation) and Luke Bennett '26 and Theodore Pashley '26 (music). Join Pelly for a study session at Maple Street Plaza in downtown Escondido by our Student Life Center: youtube.com/jpcatholic

Scan to watch





Leslie Khoum '24
Heritage Park
Drawing on Location
@leslie_khoum



TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING 101

New Course on JPCatholic Online

How do you navigate the publishing industry as a new author?

Prof. Megan Jauregui Eccles (Author, *Sing the Night*) demystifies the world of traditional publication, guiding writers through the journey from finished manuscript to published book. Covering everything from choosing a publishing path and finding an agent to navigating queries, editing, and contracts, the course combines practical industry insight with personal experience and encouragement.

SIGN UP FOR FREE
jpcatholic.edu/online

Scan to Sign Up



Prof. Jauregui Eccles Signs Two-Book Deal with Grand Central Publishing

Sing the Night will be released in February 2026

Author and professor Megan Jauregui Eccles has signed a two-book deal with Grand Central Publishing in the U.S. and Piatkus in the U.K. Her debut young adult fantasy novel, *Sing the Night*, is set to release on February 24, 2026. Pitched as *The Phantom of the Opera* meets *The Night Circus*, the novel blends music, magic, and gothic intrigue.

Sing the Night follows Selene, a young soprano who longs to win L'Opéra du Magician and be named King's Mage. But when the competition turns dangerous and a mysterious figure in a mirror tempts her with forbidden magic, she must choose between the future she's always wanted and a power that could consume her. Betrayal, ambition, and dangerous enchantments collide in this high-stakes tale of legacy and desire.

Already generating excitement in the publishing world, *Sing the Night* will be followed by a second novel in 2027. The series promises richly imagined worldbuilding and lyrical, gothic storytelling that will resonate with fans of Leigh Bardugo and Erin Morgenstern.



Beyond her work as a novelist and Chair of JPCatholic's Creative Writing program, Megan has published short fiction and essays in *Kelp Journal*, *Coachella Review*, and *Wild Greens*, among others. She holds a BA in Music from the University of San Diego and an MFA in Creative Writing from UC Riverside–Palm Desert.

Megan lives in the foothills of San Diego with her husband, six kids, and various farm animals. When she's not writing or rehoming rattlesnakes, she pairs lipstick to her favorite books on Instagram and plays *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Sing the Night is available for pre-order now at major retailers such as Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and Powell's Books. Visit www.meganjaureguieccles.com



“Pickle for Pickleball” Wraps Production

The sports comedy is expected to premiere in 2026

On July 3, JPCatholic students and faculty completed production on *Pickle for Pickleball*, a sports comedy produced within the school's Feature Film Program. Originally written by screenwriting student Anna Engel, the story follows an unlikely group of elderly women who find themselves caught up in a high-stakes pickleball tournament.

Filming took place over 22 days during the June break and into the beginning of JPCatholic's summer quarter. Locations spanned across San Diego county including Ramona's town hall, The HUB Pickleball Club in Spring Valley, and various locations around Escondido. Students also utilized a jail cell set

built in JPCatholic's soundstage as part of the "Feature Film Set Building & Prop Making" course.

Over 70 students of various majors were involved in bringing the film to life, including Prof. Weinheimer's Graphic Design Capstone course, where seniors contributed designs for props and signage used in the film. On set, students held roles such as Director of Photography, Head of Wardrobe, and Production Designer.

Last quarter Students moved immediately into post-production, through a course led by Profs. Sam Sorich and Kaitlyn Krikorian. The film is expected to premiere in 2026.

Learn more about the movie at jpcatholic.edu/go/pickleball

Scan to learn more





“ While the days were long and the conditions demanding, I learned so much about collaboration, problem-solving under pressure, and how to lead a department with both confidence and compassion. ”

Maisie Estrada, Senior
Head of Wardrobe



“ Working on the props in our graphic design capstone class was a lot of fun! Our tight knit class shared, generated ideas, and had a blast workshoping the props for the film. ... My favorite part was seeing the president, Dr. Connolly, making a cameo in the film while he was holding the newspaper prop that Grace worked on! ”

Karla Trujillo, Junior
Graphic Designer



“ I would probably list *Pickle for Pickleball* as one of my most valuable experiences in college so far. ... My time on a set of that scope and scale really helped me get a good feel for what it would be like to work in the industry full-time. ”

Cormac Tully, Junior
Key Grip

WITNESS *to* TRUTH CAMPAIGN

\$1 Million Campaign for Student Scholarships



Katharine Roach

“My scholarship package made it possible for me to attend JPCatholic and pursue my calling as a **creative entrepreneur**. I’ve learned how to approach business with faith and purpose, seeing it as a way to serve others and bring God’s truth into the world.”



Isabella Velasquez

“I’m deeply grateful for the generous scholarships from John Paul the Great Catholic University—without them, attending this school and pursuing my dreams as a **writer and storyteller** wouldn’t be possible. Because of this incredible gift, I’m able to use the talents God has given me to fulfill my mission of changing the world through my passion for storytelling, writing, and directing.”



Derek Stallings

“My faith has been strengthened here by the sacraments and constant opportunities for spiritual growth on campus. I hope to become a **professional apologist**, and my scholarship package is helping that dream come to life, since every day at JPCatholic is an opportunity to grow in knowledge of the faith and love for those around me.”

Thank you from our scholarship recipients!



At John Paul the Great Catholic University, we are forming students to be powerful witnesses to Truth in a world that desperately needs it. The Witness to Truth scholarship funds empower passionate young creatives, entrepreneurs, and storytellers to receive a transformative Catholic education rooted in faith and excellence. Your support directly reduces their financial burden and enables our students to pursue their calling with a viable financial plan.

Join us in this mission and be a part of raising up the next generation of Catholic leaders who boldly proclaim truth in love.

Scan to Donate



Which *scholarship fund* are you called to support?

FOUNDERS'

A photograph of an older man in a graduation cap and gown presenting a diploma to a young woman in a graduation cap and gown. The diploma has the John Paul the Great Catholic University logo on it.

SCHOLARSHIP FUND

ZERO TUITION

A close-up of a graduation cap with a tassel. The top of the cap has the text "THAT'S A WRAP" and "JPCU" with stars.

SCHOLARSHIP

JOHN PAUL II

A black and white profile photograph of Pope John Paul II, looking thoughtful with his hand to his chin.

MERIT FUND

FOR PERFORMING ARTS

BUSINESS INNOVATOR MERIT FUND

A glowing lightbulb on a dark background, symbolizing an idea or innovation.

MERIT FUND

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

A portrait of St. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval philosopher and theologian, with a church building in the background.

MERIT FUND

ST. VERONICA

An illustration of St. Veronica, a woman in a blue and red robe holding a white cloth with the face of Christ on it.

CREATIVE ARTS MERIT FUND

BRINGING KOLBE'S COURAGE TO THE BIG SCREEN

Two alumnae share their experiences on the set of *Triumph of the Heart* in Poland

Written and directed by Anthony D'Ambrosio, *Triumph of the Heart* released in theaters this fall, moving audiences with its powerful portrayal of St. Maximilian Kolbe's final days. Behind the haunting beauty of the film lies the dedication of an international crew, including two graduates of JPCatholic.

For Katerina Gerlach '22 and Angelika Sowa '23, *Triumph of the Heart* was more than just another credit. It was a labor of love to spread the story of the Franciscan friar who laid his life down at Auschwitz. A Polish native, Sowa grew up just hours from where Kolbe was martyred. She and Gerlach both share a special devotion to the Polish saints Kolbe and Pope John Paul II.

Just months after graduation—and being Director of Photography on JPCatholic's student-crewed feature *No Reception*—Sowa was connected to D'Ambrosio's team through Prof. George Simon. As a Production Assistant in Poland, she was tasked with managing pre-production logistics to ensure a seamless start to the indie feature. She later continued on the project as an Editor, helping to shape the film's narrative, and currently serves as Marketing Manager, promoting the film's inspiring message to a global audience.

Gerlach, who has already worked on 14 independent features since graduation,

was brought on to the project mid-production in fall 2023. She began as Script Supervisor, but was quickly promoted to Second Assistant Director. And when a crew member's departure created a gap, Gerlach stepped up to become First Assistant Director, a demanding role that oversees the day-to-day operations on set—and one that she had previously filled for JPCatholic's feature *O, Brawling Love!* She later worked as Post-Production Coordinator, facilitating communication between the director and the editors, colorists, foley artists, and composer.

Much of the film was shot in a 19th-century prison in Piotrków Trybunalski, repurposed to resemble Auschwitz. "It was super cold on set," Sowa recalled, "but it worked perfectly for the world we were building." Despite the bleak environment, both women were struck by the camaraderie of the team. The international crew was composed of many who were even there as volunteers. "It was incredible to see how many people Anthony could rally around this story," Gerlach said. "Many weren't even Catholic, yet they were drawn to it."

Working on an international indie feature comes with many challenges, especially on a production budget of \$355k. Their training at JPCatholic, they say, gave



“It’s captivating because it shows St. Maximilian Kolbe as a real person. He wasn’t perfect—no saint is—but the film doesn’t shy away from the gritty reality of evil and the heroic choices that ordinary people can make.”

them the confidence to meet those demands. “By the time I graduated, I’d worked on 85 short films,” said Gerlach. “That hands-on practice is how I really learned the roles of Script Supervisor and AD.”

Having worked with D'Ambrosio on the marketing and administrative side, Sowa pointed to the business curriculum: “I feel like me and my classmates really had production skills nailed, especially because of experiences like the Feature



Gerlach with director, Anthony D'Ambrosio



Gerlach with lead actor, Marcin Kwasyński

Film Program. But now I understand why JPCatholic put so much focus on marketing and entrepreneurship. Anthony is a great entrepreneur, which can be rare among directors, and that combination is why this film exists.”

Gerlach also expressed her admiration for D'Ambrosio's leadership. "He had a clear artistic vision, which made my job as AD so much easier," she explained. "And every morning, he'd gather the actors for meditation and prayer, helping

them get in the mindset for the day. It made a huge difference for the tone and morale on set."

Triumph of the Heart premiered in Poland on August 13th, followed by the U.S. premiere in Dallas on Sep. 8th. Through a grassroots effort, D'Ambrosio's company Sherwood Fellows got the film into over 650 screens in the U.S. in September. Now, they are licensing the film for community screenings, encouraging parishes and schools to host events. Plans for distribution on streaming will follow in November.

Why should people see this film? "There's so much negativity in the world right now," said Gerlach. "And in many ways this film is dark, but there is a clear through-line of hope. You don't often leave movies these days with that feeling."

"It's captivating because it shows St. Maximilian Kolbe as a real person," added Sowa. "He wasn't perfect—no saint is—but the film doesn't shy away from the gritty reality of evil and the heroic choices that ordinary people can make. This story is beautiful for the soul and the eye, almost like a Caravaggio painting brought to life."



Sowa (second from left) at the premiere of *Triumph of the Heart* in Poland



Sowa and Gerlach were part of an international crew that made the film in Poland.



Gerlach being interviewed by Katie McGrady at the U.S. premiere

Learn how you can see the film at triumphoftheheart.com

Prof. Sorich's Documentary Spotlights Life and Legacy of *René Girard*

Things Hidden: The Life and Legacy of René Girard was released online on Christmas Day 2024. The feature-length documentary was produced, directed, filmed, and edited by Sam Sorich, an award-winning filmmaker who joined JPCatholic's faculty last year. The film has been made available for free on YouTube by the non-profit Imitatio.

René Girard (1923-2015) was a French thinker, historian, and author whose academic contributions included philosophical anthropology, literary criticism, mythology, theology, and sociology. Through archival footage and interviews with scholars and personalities such as Bishop Barron, Cynthia Haven, Peter Robinson, and Peter Thiel, along with Girard's own wife and son, Sorich offers a deeply personal examination of Girard's life and an accessible introduction to his theories on mimetic desire and scapegoating. The film also features Girard's conversion to Catholicism, and the impact it had on his philosophical contributions.

Prof. Sam Sorich is the founder of Glass Darkly Films. After studying philosophy



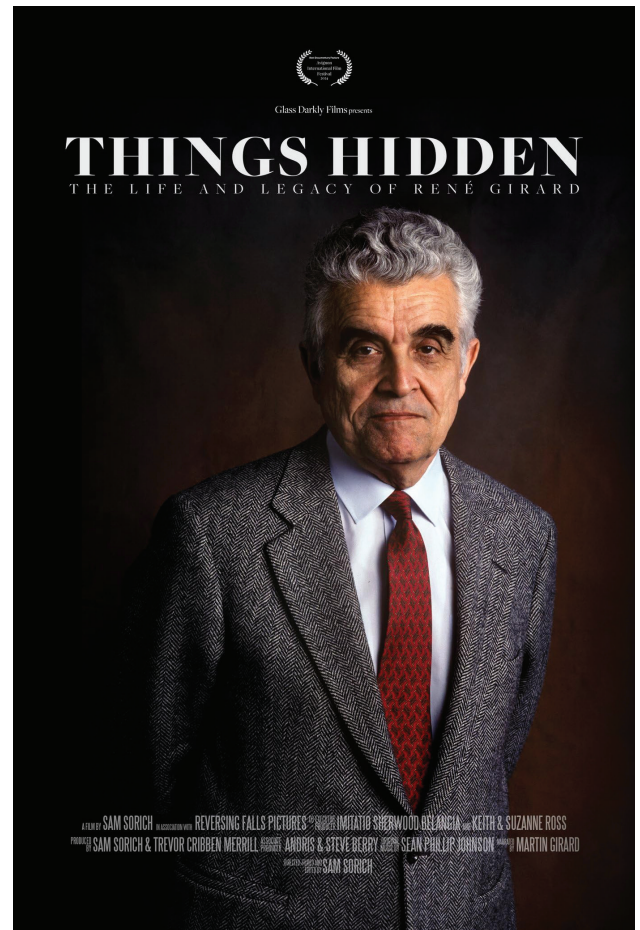
as an undergraduate, Sorich worked as an editor and camera operator at Salt and Light Television in Toronto. He then returned to Chicago as a freelancer working closely with Spirit Juice Studios for many years. In 2017, following the first Catholic Creatives Summit, he created and co-executive produced 8beats, an anthology series comprising eight short films inspired by the Beatitudes.

Sorich's engagement with the thought of René Girard began in college, during a time when he was deconstructing his faith and grappling with whether to embrace Christianity or dismiss it as just another myth. "If Christianity could not demonstrate its uniqueness among other religions—many of which claim a miracle-working, dying, and rising

“ From the outset, my goal for this film has been evangelical. Girard was a voice that took challenges to Christianity seriously and answered them convincingly.

”

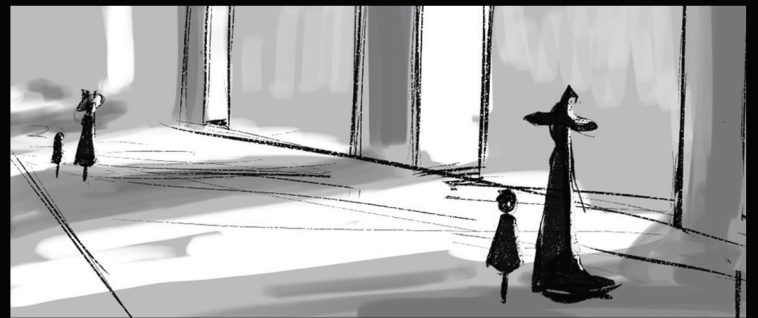
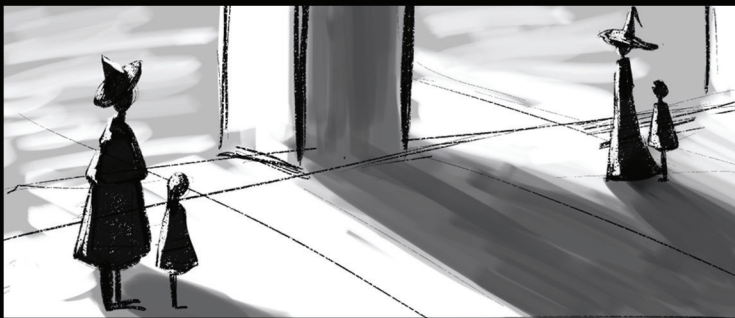
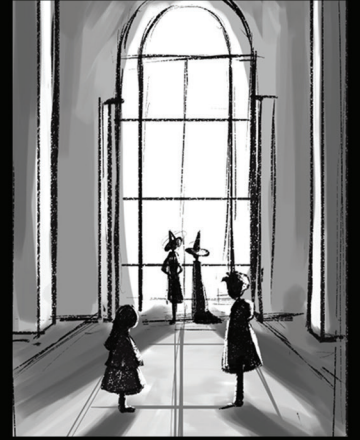
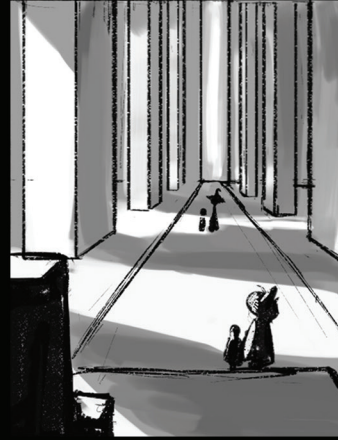
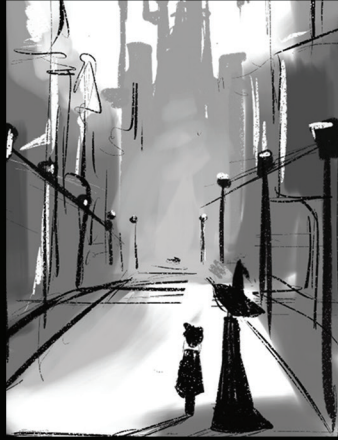
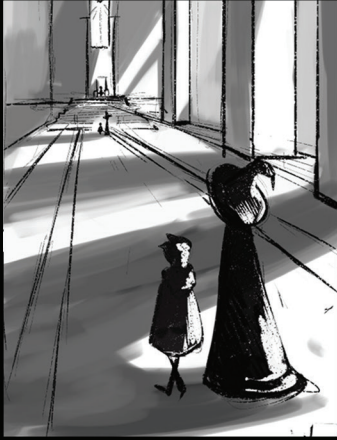
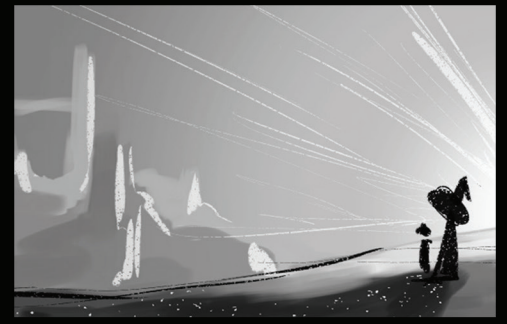
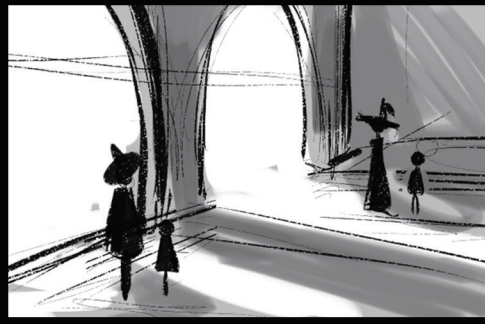
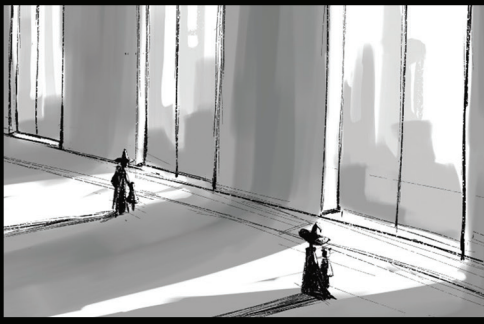
figure at their center—then it seemed to me a mere copycat religion, unworthy of belief,” he said. “From the outset, my goal for this film has been evangelical. Girard was a voice that took challenges to Christianity seriously and answered them convincingly. He offers an unexpected and compelling perspective on why Christianity is true, one that resonates with a modern, skeptical audience.”



Driven by his encounters with Girard's works, Sorich began developing a documentary in 2016, embarking on a cross-country odyssey in his van to interview key figures in the philosopher's sphere. A few years later he attracted a variety of funders including Imitatio, an organization dedicated to spreading the works of Girard. The non-profit was co-founded by entrepreneur Peter Thiel, who attended Girard's lectures during his time at Stanford.

Imitatio's support has enabled the film to be widely and freely available for all. "Girard's theories remain relatively unknown, and I hope this film will serve as a catalyst for others to discover his groundbreaking insights," said Sorich.

Now a professor at John Paul the Great Catholic University, Sorich has taught courses on documentary filmmaking as well as Girard's mimetic theory. In addition, his forthcoming documentary on the life of Henri de Lubac, executive produced by Ignatius Press, is expected to release in 2026.



FROM PITCH TO PREMIERE

In this heartfelt 2D animated short, a young boy suffering from a terminal illness sets sail on the adventure of a lifetime.

The HEART of the C

1 The Pitch

When Kateri Esposito '25 joined JPCatholic, she probably didn't expect to start working on her senior capstone as a freshman. But while pitching a story for Prof. Hulburt's Animation Pre-Production course, the concept generated a lot of excitement from her classmates, and they thought – why don't we actually make this? After discussions with Prof. Hulburt, he greenlit it as an Animation capstone.

2 Forming the Team

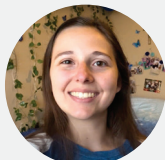
A project of this scale would need a big team, and Kateri began recruiting for key roles from among her classmates. The team would eventually grow to more than 40 students and alumni, including:



Claeanne Ysmael
Animation Director



Anthony Courser
Producer



Bella Velasquez
Editor



3 Alumni Mentorship

Prof. Hulburt encouraged Kateri to connect with Josh Martin '23, whose ambitious 2D animation capstone *Elephant Tracks* went on to receive over 15 awards and recognitions. Kateri had actually served as a colorist on that project and reconnected with Josh to seek his advice on her own capstone. Josh served as a mentor for Kateri throughout the development and production, and he was so impressed by the project that he even volunteered to join the animation team himself!

The young protagonist Daniel was voiced by Kateri's cousin Liam Mauti



HEARTBEAT OF THE SEA



4 Story Development

Kateri continued to develop the narrative with the help of students and faculty, refining it to an 8-page script. In crafting the story, she drew on her screenwriting classes with Prof. Riley, as well as her Philosophy courses, to explore themes of suffering, hope, and human purpose. What does it take for a life to mean something? What kind of difference can someone make in just eight short years on earth?

5 Pre-Production

Starting the capstone experience as a freshman gave valuable extra time for pre-production and production. Kateri's team developed concept art, storyboards, and a color script to help guide the project. Many more students were brought on board to collaborate on these assets for the project.

6 Production

Animation Capstone is technically a 9-month sequence (3 courses); *The Heartbeat of the Sea* took advantage of an extra year of pre-production, plus 12 months total of production. A large team was formed to assist Kateri and Clareanne in completing 14 minutes of animation. They used tools like Adobe, Krita, Callipeg, and Procreate to accomplish the keyframing, inbetweens, coloring, cel lighting, and background art.

7 Casting & Sound Design

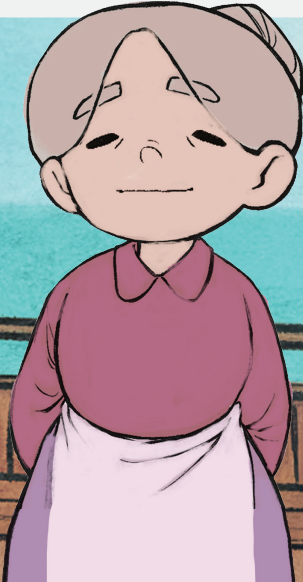
Kateri and her team held auditions to fill all the speaking roles. Voice talent ended up including acting junior Lisa Ruiter as Daniel's mother, and even Catholic media producer Jim Morlino as Daniel's canine companion Scuppers! The team used JPCatholic's "Vault" studio to record the lines, and the new Pelican Reef music studio to record Foley.

8 Scoring

In addition to studying Animation and Screenwriting, Kateri completed a minor in Digital Music and composed the score for her own film! She recruited music student Theo Pashley to mix and master the score, as well as create an original song for the credits, "Lost at Sea."

9 Premiere

After an intense and rewarding journey, *The Heartbeat of the Sea* premiered on August 29, 2025 to a packed theater at the Ritz in Escondido, as part of JPCatholic's Graduation Week showcase. Kateri and her crew were able to witness their labor of love on the big screen, and see firsthand how it moved audiences to tears.



Where can you watch it?

After a year of film festivals, the project will be released online for everyone to see!

Follow their Instagram:
[@the_heartbeatofthesea](https://www.instagram.com/the_heartbeatofthesea)

View more concept art and watch an exclusive behind the scenes video at jpcatholic.edu/go/heartbeat

Scan to learn more



ATOMIC BABY GAMES PRESENTS



50 MINUTES 'TIL IMPACT

50 Minutes 'Til Impact Poster

Concept art by Nieves Hippler

Line art, coloring, & shading by Daniel Muguero Olagaray

Graphic Design by Corrina Borjon

A space train adventure game from the Game Development Class of 2025

This September, the senior Game Development class of 2025 released *50 Minutes 'Til Impact*, a retro-futuristic adventure set on a luxurious space train bound for disaster. Players step into the shoes of Clara Rose, a passenger caught in a looping 50-minute countdown before the train collides with an asteroid. To break the cycle and save everyone on board, Clara must navigate the train's compartments, interact with its colorful cast of passengers, and solve puzzles that blend exploration, code-breaking, and visual novel storytelling.

This ambitious project was developed as part of Game Development Capstone, a three-course sequence where seniors team up for nine months to operate like an independent studio. Under the mentorship of Prof. Rodney Figueroa, students take a game from concept to launch, gaining hands-on experience and publishing it on Steam. The capstone has become an

annual highlight of the program, giving each graduating class the chance to showcase both their technical expertise and creative vision.

The story was originally conceived as a sci-fi script by screenwriting student Brayden Masse, who then teamed up with the gaming students to adapt it into an interactive game. Joshua Elias '25 took on the leadership role of Creative Director, while also spearheading the game design. The production mirrored a professional studio pipeline, with students dividing into specialized roles across design, art, sound, narrative, and implementation in Unreal Engine 5.

Elias coordinated weekly sprints, to ensure all the teams were on track to complete tasks ranging from environment art to puzzle design and marketing, often drawing on talent from other departments at the school. An original score was produced by students under the guidance of Prof. Robert Giracello, and several students were cast as voice actors.



"It was an honor to work with so many talented individuals across several majors on this project," said Elias. "Leading it has been an experience full of challenges, passion, and commitment that led to the final game, and I'm truly grateful to everyone involved for trusting in me and the project's vision."

Clara

Log

Auto

Watch a behind the scenes video, and play the game for free on Steam at jpcatholic.edu/go/50min

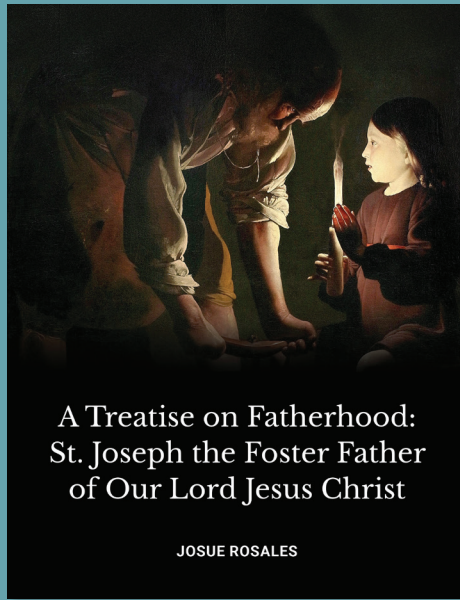
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Theology & Philosophy Thesis Papers

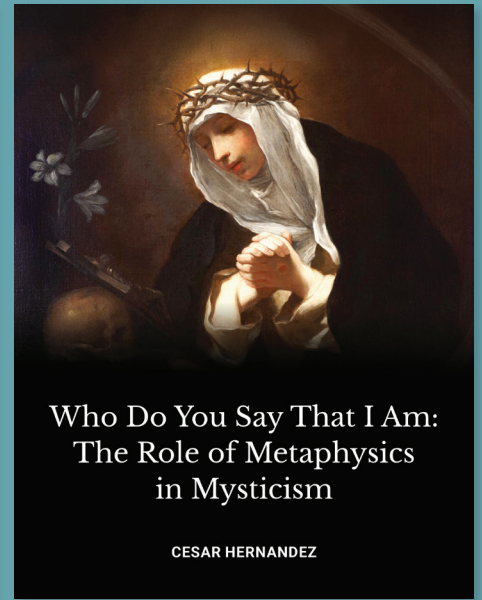
This summer, our Graduation Week showcase events included live presentations from our Theology & Philosophy students on their thesis papers. You can view the full papers at jpcatholic.edu/go/thesis

Scan to read



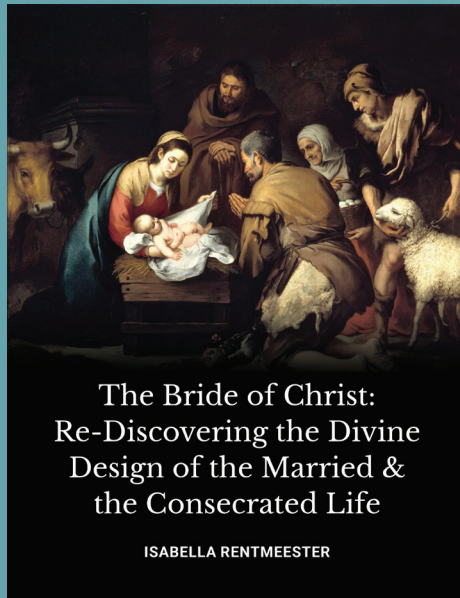
A Treatise on Fatherhood:
St. Joseph the Foster Father
of Our Lord Jesus Christ

JOSUE ROSALES



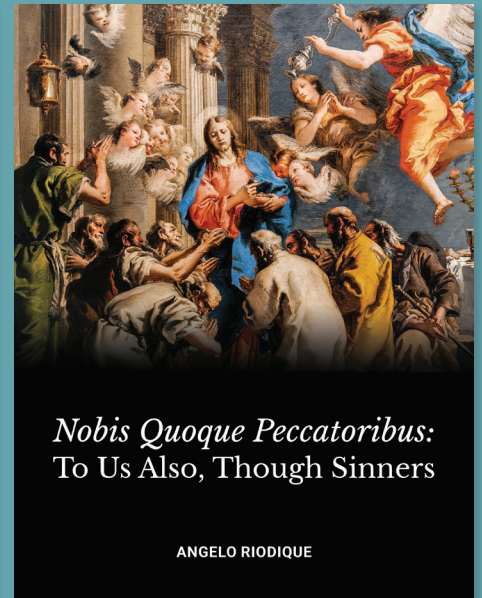
Who Do You Say That I Am:
The Role of Metaphysics
in Mysticism

CESAR HERNANDEZ



The Bride of Christ:
Re-Discovering the Divine
Design of the Married &
the Consecrated Life

ISABELLA RENTMEESTER



Nobis Quoque Peccatoribus:
To Us Also, Though Sinners

ANGELO RIODIQUE





California Augustinian Students in Formation Enroll at JPCatholic

This fall, three students in formation from the Order of Saint Augustine—James Schloegel, Aaron Figueroa, and Gregory Skiano—enrolled at JPCatholic for their studies in Theology & Philosophy.

The new relationship was facilitated by JPCatholic chaplain, Fr. Dominic Smith, O.S.A., who himself graduated from JPCatholic in 2018 with a degree in Communications Media. He was ordained as an Augustinian priest in 2022, the eleventh JPCatholic alumnus to be ordained.

“When I was a student at JPCatholic, I received a sound Catholic education that contributed to my religious formation,” said Fr. Dominic. “They taught me how to use modern forms of media to proclaim the Gospel message in my ministries. Just as the university has helped me become a better Augustinian, I know it will also help our brothers in initial formation.”

The Augustinians are a mendicant religious order founded in the 13th century, dedicated to community life, preaching, and service. Today they have approximately 2,500 priests and friars worldwide—including Pope Leo XIV, the first Augustinian pope. The Province of Saint Augustine in California is based in San Diego, and has been an active presence in the diocese

since the 1920s, when they established St. Augustine High School and began ministry at St. Patrick’s parish. Their ministry at both has continued through today, and nine fully professed Augustinian friars currently serve within the diocese.

“JPCatholic provides the intellectual formation, close-knit community, and Christ-centered environment that I’m seeking as I continue my Augustinian formation,” said Figueroa.

“Studying Theology and Philosophy here is the perfect fit,” said Schloegel. “JPCatholic is fueled by the sacramental life and committed to the teachings of Christ and the Church. I can’t think of a better place to grow in faith and intellect.”

Since 2009, JPCatholic has also been the destination for Chaldean Catholic seminarians to complete their undergraduate degree, resulting in eight alumni who are now Chaldean priests. These include Fr. Ankido Sipo, BS ’12, MA ’15, who now teaches theology and philosophy at JPCatholic, and Fr. Simon Eshshaki, BS ’12, MA ’15, who expands his evangelization work beyond the parish to TikTok, where he has attracted over 500k followers.

To learn more about the Augustinians in San Diego, visit californiaaugustinians.org

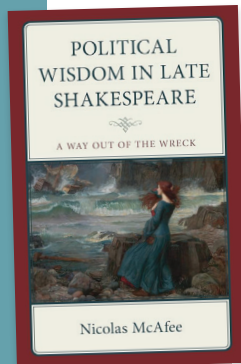
ALUMNI updates

Neil Watson '10 and Anna (Doherty) Watson '12 recently moved from Ave Maria to Michigan. After a decade of leadership experience at companies like Adidas and Tillamook Creamery, and teaching at Ave Maria University, Neil is now a full-time Marketing professor at Hillsdale College.

Luke Miller '11 is leading efforts at St. John the Baptizer in Santee to build a new church designed in a traditional Ukrainian style.

John-Henry Keenan '13 produced two campaign ads for President Donald Trump during the 2024 presidential campaign, which the President posted on multiple platforms. Together they received over 60M views.

Devanie Cooper '13 is President of St. Paul Institute, living as a full-time missionary and consecrated. Their Fiat Initiative and Vita Benedicta have grown to a network of 30 mentors and spiritual directors accompanying over 200 women across the US, Canada, Australia, and the Middle East. They are committed to the interior renewal of women through spiritual direction, formation, outreach, and retreats.



Nicolas McAfee '15 MA '17 was hired at Christendom College this year as Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Economics. His book *Political Wisdom in Late Shakespeare: A Way Out of the Wreck* was recently published by Lexington Books.

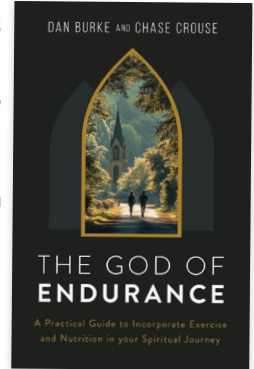
Ben West '15 is helping a new Catholic animated series from Tiny Saints and Coronation Media as showrunner. Other alumni involved in development include **Kristen Meiser '16**, **Isabelle Peterson '22**, **Joe Fifelski '19**, and **Haley Rossi '14 MBA '15**. The show exceeded their \$175k crowdfunding goal, and is expected to move into production in 2026. tinysaints.com



Rachel Peterson '16 hit her five year anniversary working for former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and recently got a Masters in Public Policy from Liberty University.

Chase Crouse '16 MA '18

has seen continued success with Hypuro Fit, his coaching company that promotes physical and spiritual fitness from a Catholic perspective. Rooted in Theology of the Body, their program blends expert-designed workouts with real-time tracking to help you grow in self-mastery. This year, Chase's company was featured in several publications like Catholic News Agency, and he also recently published a book through Sophia Institute Press with Dan Burke: *The God of Endurance*.



Nicolas Alayo '18 has amassed over half a million followers on Instagram and TikTok for a scripted romantic comedy micro-series he started in 2024. *Eavesdropping* follows two former high school classmates who reconnect 10 years later and attempt to navigate their renewed friendship (and possibly more) as adults. The Season 2 finale even hosted a live screening in downtown L.A. with 200 attendees.

[@eavesdropping.show](https://www.instagram.com/eavesdropping.show)



Ariel Gade, MBA '19 was recently promoted to Casting Director at The Merry Beggars, the entertainment division of Relevant Radio. Dedicated to creating "Good Stories. Real Virtue. Strong Families," The Merry Beggars produces original audio dramas for the whole family, including their award-winning *The Saints* series and acclaimed adaptations like *A Christmas Carol*. In her new role, Ariel helps bring these faith-filled stories to life by guiding the casting of voice talent for productions that reach tens of thousands of listeners each week.

Brigitta (Sanchez-O'Brien) Barrows '18 has been working since 2022 on the popular Bible show *The Chosen*, currently serving as Director of Global Marketing & Publicity.

Christopher Weingart '19 and **Carley Kormanis '21** have both received Emmy wins for their work at Spirit Juice Studios: Chris won for *Aid for Women: Meriane's Story*, and Carley won for both *The Kim Crosby Story* and *For Drew Ross*. Their documentary work has involved travel to destinations like France, Portugal, Ireland, and Japan.



Andrew Koltuniuk '20 wrote and directed *Letting Go of Jack* as the first feature from alumni-founded studio The Guild. The movie was awarded Best Drama at the Hollywood Reel Independent Film Festival, and is now streaming on Amazon! Watch now: theguildfilms.com/lettinggoofjack

Ryan Cain '20 was the lead assistant editor for the feature length documentary *Carlo Acutis: Roadmap to Reality*, now streaming on Credo.

Tam Nguyen '21 started a YouTube channel with his siblings to create Minecraft short films. The channel has over 600k subscribers and 140 million views! [@cubus_maximus](https://www.instagram.com/cubus_maximus)

Yssa Mitra '21 is now a Production Coordinator at Blur Studio, which works on franchises such as *League of Legends*, *Elder Scrolls*, and *Sonic*.



Hazel (Pulse) Schuster '23 does graphic design work for an established luxury home brand, Signature Hardware, whose products have been featured on HGTV, Architectural Digest, and Country Living.

Mikaela Adams '23 is teaching theology at JSerra Catholic High School, one of the most selective private schools in Orange County, with a strong reputation for academics, supportive community, and Catholic values.

Joshua Martin '23 is following up his award-winning capstone project *Elephant Tracks* with another 2d animated short called *Rain Check*: Two strangers on an awkward first date must navigate chaos to find an unexpected connection.



[@raincheck_shortfilm](https://www.instagram.com/raincheck_shortfilm)

Gemma (Rausch) Ramirez '23 works as Advertising Specialist at Yellow Line Digital, which continues to have a formal partnership with JPCatholic for internships and jobs. She and husband Jonathan Ramirez '22 also have two children now!

Bailey Garland '24 is now the Facilitator/Co-host of a radio show on the Guadalupe Radio Network called "The Quest," which provides insights for the Christian journey.

Luca Hoang '24, **Nicholas Gresch '25**, and **Clareanne Ysmael '25** were recently hired by Voyage Comics, which publishes graphic novels of the saints, along with other faith-based entertainment. Luca and Nicholas are working in business operations, while Clareanne is working as a contract artist.

Grace Reel '24 interned with Family Theater Productions during our LA Quarter last year, then continued as a contracted designer while she finished studying Graphic Design at JPCatholic. One of her designs, for the show *Chime Travelers*, was featured on a billboard on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood!



New Alumni Resources & Events!

Alumni Portfolio Site

Have your work and contact info featured when employers are looking to hire JPCatholic alumni.

Alumni Reunion

Date announcement coming soon!

Weekly Job Newsletter

Get updated with the latest opportunities curated by our Professional Connections office.

Visit jpcatholic.edu/go/alumni

Scan me



First Study Abroad in France

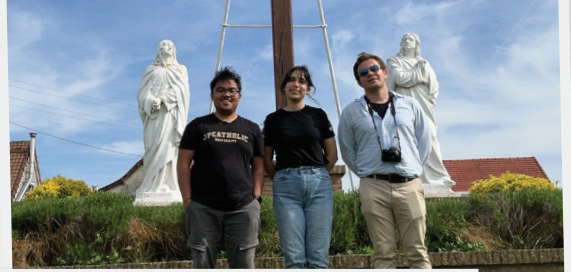
Spring 2025

This past spring, three JPCatholic students—Angelo Riodique, Eduardo Jauregui, and Karla Avila—had the unique opportunity to pilot a new study abroad experience in Normandy, France, through a partnership with Académie Saint Joan of Arc.

Stationed at a parish in Rouen, the students earned practicum credit while immersing themselves in parish life, assisting with catechetics programs, and serving in works of mercy. One of the churches they helped serve was St. Joan of Arc Church, located in Rouen’s Old Market Square, the very place where St. Joan of Arc was martyred in 1431.

In addition to their parish work, the students visited important cultural and religious sites across France. A highlight of the quarter was celebrating Easter in France, joining the local Catholic community in the joy of the Paschal season.

“It really struck me how much beauty and history there is in France,” said Avila. “The places we went to had so much story – especially the churches told the story of a time when Catholicism was so intertwined with culture. Serving in Rouen, it was inspiring to witness the devotion the remaining faithful today still have in their community, and to play a small part in helping reignite that fire.”

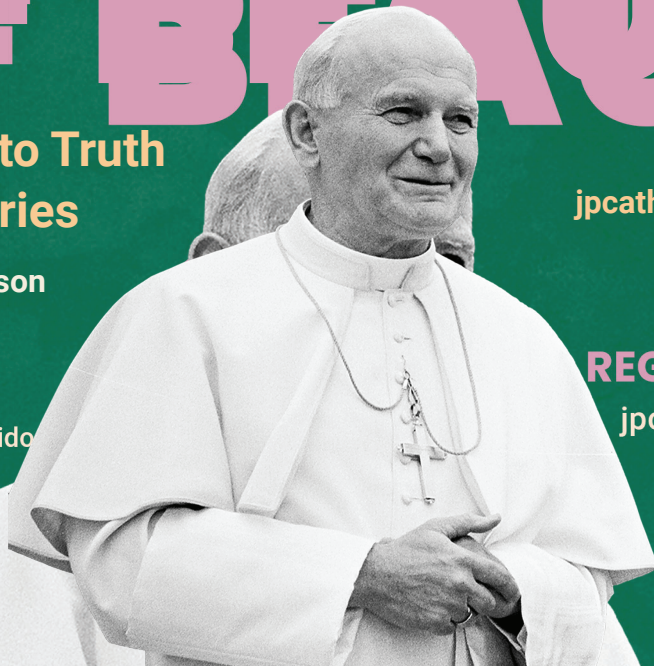


THE POWER OF BEAUTY

A Witness to Truth
Lecture Series

Register for free
jpcatholic.edu/go/lecture

Available in-person
and on Zoom
Watch Online

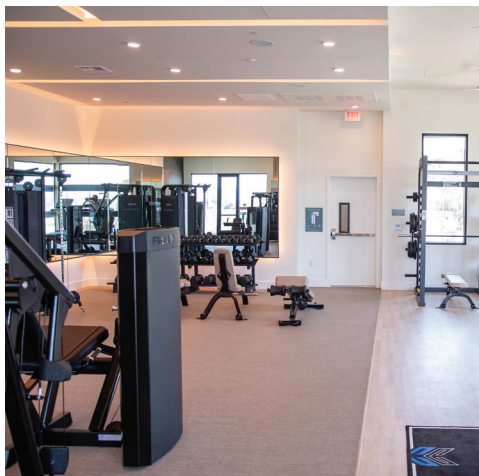


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Lorem ipsum
First, Last



New Residence Life at Marlowe Palomar Heights

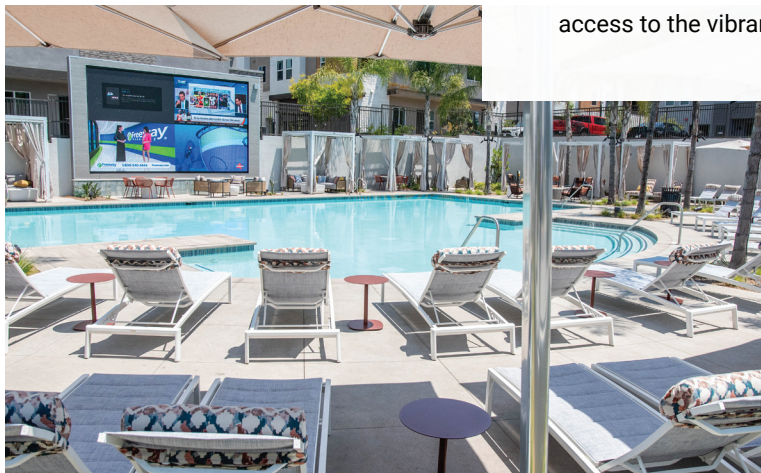


This fall marked an exciting transition for JPCatholic residential life as students began moving into the brand-new Marlowe Palomar Heights apartments in downtown Escondido. After more than a decade at Latitude 33, the University saw an opportunity to relocate into this brand new community located just east of campus.

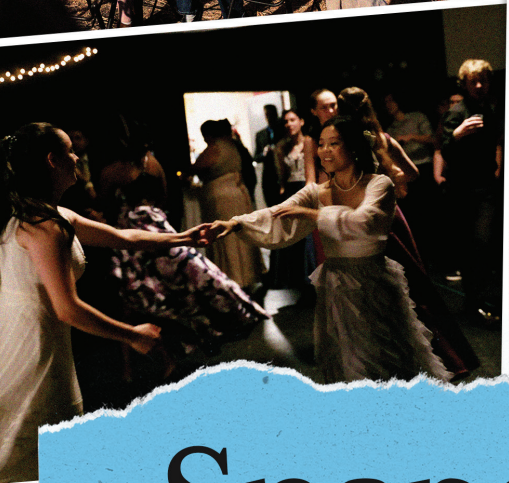
The move places students closer to the newly revitalized Grand Avenue, offering a more walkable route to class and easier access to the vibrant shops and dining of

downtown Escondido. Marlowe also brings enhanced security and a major upgrade in amenities, with features like a resort-style pool, rooftop lounge, and modern co-working and fitness spaces.

The timing couldn't be better, as JPCatholic welcomed its largest incoming class since 2021, with 128 new students joining us this year. By Winter 2026, the transition will be complete, and Marlowe will fully serve as home for the next generation of JPCatholic students.

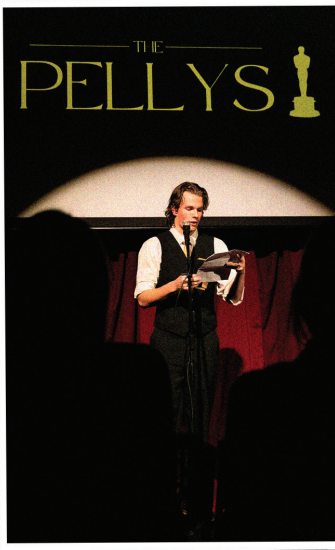


Photos from Marlowe by Greystar



ORIENTATION
This fall JPCatholic welcomed 110 new students to campus

Snapshots of 2025



The striking newboy found up a day of...
ard campaigning their fight against the...
ening editions of the World and the Journ...
th a meeting his slight in New Irving Hall...
Brome and a following streets, which was a...
markable the... citizen unused to...
s of the... newsboy might have...
it was... blink and his...
the m...



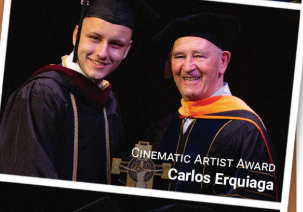
Matthew Rechen
proudly presents
NEWSIES
The Ritz Theater
301 E Grand Ave, Escondido
July 11, 2025
7:00pm



No Reception screening at Silicon Beach Film Fest



THE FOUNDER'S AWARD FOR IMPACTING CULTURE
Kateri Esposito



CINEMATIC ARTIST AWARD
Carlos Erquiaga



FINE ARTS AWARD
Sophia Klein

NEWSIES
The Ritz Theater
301 E Grand Ave, Escondido
July 11, 2025
7:00pm



Industry Insights:
Filmmaker Julian Curi



First Easter Vigil on campus



Christ the King Cup



JPCU MUSIC CLUB AND SWING DANCE CLUB PRESENT
SUMMERPALOOZA
TICKETS ON SALE TODAY
\$7 AT THE FRONT
FOOD AND DRINKS INCLUDED
SUN AUG



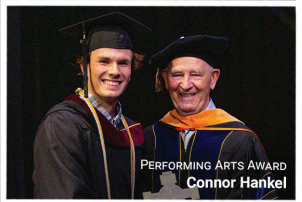
1st place in the IGDA 48-hour Game Jam!



Congratulations
to the **CLASS OF 2025**



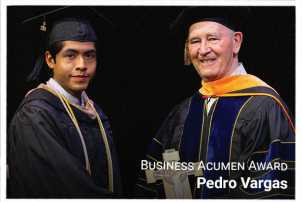
VISUAL ARTS AWARD
Clareanne Ysmael



PERFORMING ARTS AWARD
Connor Hankel



HUMANITIES AWARD & VALEDICTORIAN
Angela (Whalen) Crowell



BUSINESS ACUMEN AWARD
Pedro Vargas



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