



KLAU INSTITUTE
FOR CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS
KEOUGH SCHOOL OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS

2025-2026

YEAR IN REVIEW





UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a tree with vibrant yellow leaves, likely in autumn. Below the tree, a speed limit sign is visible, indicating a limit of 20. The background of the entire page is a dark blue gradient with faint, stylized leaf patterns.

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Attendees at "Migration, a Pilgrimage of Hope" visit Casa Scalabrini 634 in Rome. The Klau Institute was a lead sponsor of the three-day conference held in October 2025.



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

This has been a year of terrific growth at the Klau Institute. We have welcomed two new faculty colleagues, Amy Hsin and Alex Kustov. We have educated record numbers of students in our Civil and Human Rights Minor as well as our Melsheimer Fellows Program. And we have built and supported networks of human rights scholars even beyond Notre Dame. In a year that has seen so many threats to human dignity at home and around the globe, it is both a privilege and deep responsibility to pursue our mission of education, research, and engagement on topics of civil and human rights.

Thank you for your continued support of the Klau Institute.

In Notre Dame,

Jennifer Mason McAward

Jennifer Mason McAward
Director, Klau Institute for Civil and Human Rights
Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame





BY THE NUMBERS

2025-26 AT THE KLAU INSTITUTE



19

Melsheimer Fellows

892

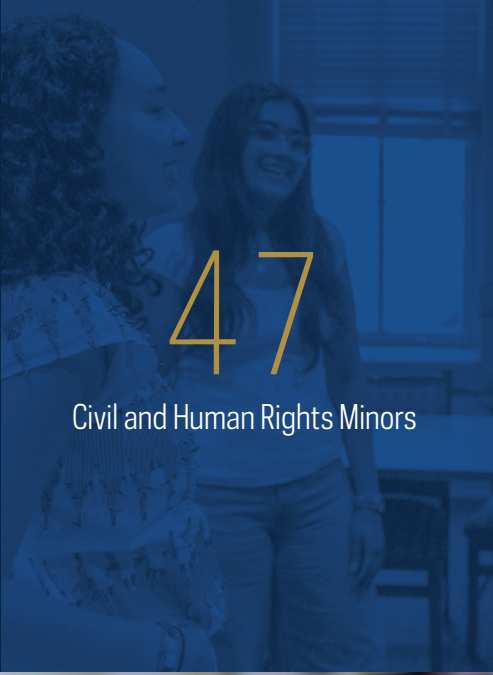
Hours of Service Melsheimer
Fellows Gave to Community



258

Hours of Research by Melsheimer
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A blue-tinted background image showing two women in conversation. One woman has curly hair and is wearing a patterned top, while the other has long dark hair and is wearing a light-colored top.

49

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A blue-tinted background image of two students, a woman and a man, smiling and holding plates of food. The woman is on the left and the man is on the right.

32

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38

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A blue-tinted background image of two women in conversation. One woman is on the left, looking towards the other woman on the right, who is speaking.

11

Faculty Members on Migration
Research Working Group



Educate. Inquire. Engage.

The Klau Institute takes a three-pronged approach to promoting the God-given dignity of every human person: provide transformative education, facilitate innovative research, and convene meaningful engagement with people of diverse viewpoints and experiences.

The past academic year was one of growth for the institute in all of these key areas — we increased participation in our academic programs, solidified our research initiative around global migration issues, and deepened our relationships with partners across the United States and around the world.

Read about the Klau Institute's biggest news and highlights from 2025-26 in the pages ahead.

A focus on human dignity

Klau Institute's Migration Research Initiative leaped forward in 2025-26

Mass migration has become an urgent issue in all regions of the world, and one of the most challenging issues of our time. Factors such as war, poverty, and climate change are driving vulnerable people to leave their homelands, and feeding a growing backlash in countries that are receiving migrants and refugees.

The Klau Institute's Migration Research Initiative launched in 2024 as an acknowledgment that global migration, with its implications for human rights and human dignity, is of clear and increasing importance around the world.

The initiative seeks to understand the human experience of those who move across borders.

Rooted in the Catholic Church's teaching that every human life is sacred, the initiative is committed to leading migration research and conversations that maintain a focus on justice and human dignity. The initiative leverages the worldwide network and relationships of the Keough School of Global Affairs and the University of Notre Dame as a whole. And it has received crucial support from the Notre Dame Poverty Initiative.

The initiative took a leap forward during the 2025-26 academic year by adding two migration scholars as faculty, creating a multidisciplinary working group of faculty from across the University, and hosting major conferences on migration in Rome and on campus.



Rev. Daniel Groody, C.S.C., speaks in February 2026 at a Klau Institute event, "The U.S. Immigration Crackdown: Moral, Legal, and Policy Perspectives." An overflow crowd of more than 100 people came to the panel discussion.



Attendees at "Migration, a Pilgrimage of Hope," a conference held in October 2025, visit Casa Scalabrini 634 in Rome.

Migration, a Pilgrimage of Hope

This three-day conference, held in October 2025 at Pontifical Urban University in Rome, brought together more than 200 scholars, theologians, and religious leaders as well as representatives of NGOs, faith-based organizations, and migrant and refugee communities to discuss how theology may offer insights into issues of global migration.

The Klau Institute was a primary sponsor of the conference, which was hosted by the Scalabrini International Migration Institute and held under the auspices of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe, the International Union of Superiors General, and the Union Superiors General.

Rev. Daniel Groody, C.S.C., the University's vice president and associate provost for undergraduate education as well as a professor of theology and global affairs, played a leading role in organizing the conference. He said theology can enrich conversations about migration by providing moral and ethical frameworks for studying the issue, spiritual resources to respond to migrants with compassion, and a counternarrative to those who dehumanize, demean, and degrade migrants.

"Migration is one of the most challenging, complex, and important issues of our times," Groody said. "It is complex because it is studied by virtually every discipline, but it is simple because it speaks to the core of the value of human life."

Faculty hires bring expertise, leadership to Migration Research Initiative

Two migration scholars joined the Keough School of Global Affairs during the 2025-26 academic year to serve as core affiliated faculty members of the Klau Institute and key contributors to the Migration Research Initiative.

Professor of Migration Amy Hsin, a sociologist and social demographer, researches how immigration policy affects opportunity.

"As a global Catholic research university, Notre Dame is able to bring both a scholarly approach and a moral perspective to studies of migration. Both dimensions need to be considered if we are going to advance our understanding of the dynamics of migration and deepen our appreciation for the dignity of migrants."

- KLAU INSTITUTE DIRECTOR JENNIFER MASON MCAWARD

“As a researcher, I want to help people see how policies can create opportunity for the most vulnerable and help address poverty,” Hsin said. “Better policies can help more people build stronger futures.”

Much of Hsin’s recent work has focused on undocumented college students in New York City. Her upcoming book, *Beyond Dreamers: Transitions to Adulthood in an Uncertain Age*, aims to provide a more detailed portrait of this community.

During the past academic year, she contributed to a FWD.us report outlining the benefits of *Plyler v. Doe* — a 1982 Supreme Court case that ensured all children in the United States can access public

education regardless of their immigration status. In addition, she joined a group of scholars who submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in the case of *Trump v. Barbara*, arguing that birthright citizenship strengthens the country’s economy and promotes better educational and health outcomes.

Associate Professor of Migration Alexander Kustov studies how democracies manage immigration, ethnic relations, and demographic change while maintaining public trust, with a focus on how policy design shapes public opinion.

“My argument is that you really have to think carefully about policy design,” Kustov said. “Popular policies that are well administered build support

Midwest Migration Conference

Twenty migration scholars, including 11 from other universities and nine from Notre Dame, came to campus in April for the 2026 Midwest Migration Conference, sponsored by the Klau Institute.

The discussions tackled a broad array of timely themes — from asylum politics and anti-immigrant backlash to the role of faith in decisions to migrate, the reintegration of returnees in Central America, and the experiences of racism among Chinese immigrants in France — alongside broader questions of immigrant identity, intergenerational change, and U.S. immigration enforcement.

Rather than following a traditional lecture format, the conference adopted an innovative workshop model designed to spark substantive dialogue with researchers presenting works in progress, receiving expert feedback, and engaging in open cross-disciplinary exchange.



Attendees of the 2026 Midwest Migration Conference pose for a photo in McKenna Hall.



Erin Corcoran, executive director of the Keough School's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, speaks at Pontifical Urban University.

among voters, and that is where policymakers should focus to make the largest impact.”

In his recently published book, *In Our Interest: How Democracies Can Make Immigration Popular*, he argues that immigration becomes politically sustainable when lawmakers craft policies with clear benefits and manage them well. The Klau Institute hosted a launch for the book, which was published by Columbia University Press, during the spring 2026 semester.

Since coming to Notre Dame, Kustov has also authored a policy brief, “To Protect Humanitarian Immigration, Build Public Trust First,” and written several op-eds for outlets including *The Atlantic* and *The Washington Post*.



Amy Hsin



Alexander Kustov

Migration Research Working Group

Led by Hsin, this multidisciplinary group of 11 faculty members from across the University of Notre Dame combines expertise in sociology, global affairs, American studies, law, and economics. 🔥

Visit klau.nd.edu/migration to learn more about the Migration Research Initiative.



Education as a human right

Klau Institute contributes to Vatican's Global Compact on Education

Nearly 30 scholars from Catholic universities on five continents came together at the University of Notre Dame in March 2026 for a roundtable on dignity, democracy, and human rights education.

The Klau Institute organized the roundtable through its ongoing work with the Vatican's Global Compact on Education. Since 2022, the institute has been the lead research partner on the Global Compact's theme of dignity and human rights.

Over the course of two days the group of scholars at Notre Dame examined best practices in undergraduate and graduate education while considering the roles of experiential learning, issues-based education, and Catholic social tradition. They also discussed questions such as how the Catholic Church's historic involvement in promoting democracy and human rights can help inform responses to today's challenges.

"Education is not neutral. Education is not

only the transmission of knowledge. Education is a human right and a shared responsibility," Maria Cinque, a professor of teaching methodologies and special pedagogy at Università di Roma LUMSA, said during the roundtable's opening panel discussion.

Two themes that emerged throughout the roundtable's discussions were the need for people-centered human rights education and ways to develop programs for young people that counter the dehumanizing aspects of technology and politics around the globe.

Klau Institute Director Jennifer Mason McAward talked about how she approaches teaching courses on civil and constitutional rights — an area of law that is highly technical and heavy with rules and policies. However, at the heart of each case is a human being whose rights were violated. McAward focuses class discussions on those people and their stories.

Left: Rev. Peter Mbaro of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa speaks on a panel about human rights education in the global context. Center: Maria Cinque of Università di Roma LUMSA talks about Pope Leo XIV's concept of "educational constellations." Right: John McGreevy, the Charles and Jill Fischer Provost at the University of Notre Dame, provides a historical view on democracy and global Catholicism during the roundtable's keynote address.



“I think some subjects more easily lend themselves to that approach than others, but I think all subjects can,” she said. “And I think if instructors help students see explicitly how what they’re learning can be used to advance human dignity, that can change the tone of a course and it can really affect the formative experience of students in that course by expanding their moral imaginations.”

Earlier in the academic year, Klau Institute Associate Director Arlene F. Montevecchio represented the institute in Rome at the Vatican’s Dicastery of Culture and Education. The meeting was held in October as part of the larger Jubilee of Education Week.

At the roundtable, Montevecchio highlighted how Pope Francis, who launched the Global Compact on Education in 2019, gave us tools to combat individualism and to begin building structures of justice that will in turn uphold dignity and human rights.

“He described solidarity as a ‘way of making history, where the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few.’ He also famously introduced to us the culture of encounter — opportunities to recognize the dignity of another and vice versa, and for us to realize that we are all always standing on holy ground,” Montevecchio said.

The roundtable received financial support from the University of Notre Dame’s Democracy Initiative and was co-sponsored by the University’s Global Catholic Research Initiative. 🔥

Visit klau.nd.edu/human-rights-education to learn more about the institute’s work in this area.



“Since its origins, the Gospel has generated ‘educational constellations’: experiences that are both humble and powerful, capable of interpreting the times, of preserving the unity between faith and reason, between thought and life, between knowledge and justice.”

— POPE LEO XIV, DRAWING NEW MAPS OF HOPE



'A dream job'

Melsheimer Fellowship connects students with Notre Dame Law School's Exoneration Justice Clinic



From left, Bella Vasquez and Josh Talache-Wheat meet with Exoneration Justice Clinic staff attorney Katie Takeuchi.

The Exoneration Justice Clinic at Notre Dame Law School is dedicated to correcting wrongful convictions and providing support to exonerated individuals. The clinic offers law students real-world experience in representing clients who were wrongfully convicted. However, the clinic has also allowed a select group of undergraduate students to participate in these efforts to correct miscarriages of justice.

The Exoneration Justice Clinic has partnered with the Klau Institute's Melsheimer Fellows Program to take on students passionate about preserving civil and human rights in the field of criminal justice and law.

The Melsheimer Fellowship is a two-year experiential learning program that the Klau Institute launched in 2024 with generous support from Thomas and Michelle Melsheimer. Through

the program, fellows serve the community with partner organizations including One More Citizen, La Casa de Amistad, and the Exoneration Justice Clinic or may choose to work as research assistants for a faculty member affiliated with the Klau Institute.

The fellowship program is designed to provide students with experiences that will help them see firsthand how the ideals of civil and human rights play out in people's lives. The program is energizing students' careers, too.

Two Melsheimer Fellows who graduated in 2026 — Josh Talache-Wheat and Bella Vasquez — were hired by the Exoneration Justice Clinic to continue as employees after graduation.

Talache-Wheat, a philosophy major with a minor in civil and human rights, worked at the clinic for two years as a Melsheimer Fellow. "I really love

working at the EJC,” he said. “It’s a dream job.”

He has received mentorship from expert attorneys and values this guidance as he begins a career in law. “This job is really amazing because you’re able to advocate for people that don’t have anyone else, all while working with the best of the best in this field,” he said.

Echoing Talache-Wheat’s sentiments, Vasquez expressed gratitude for her mentors at the clinic.

“I’m so appreciative of the attorneys at the EJC and how trusting they are with the students,” she said. “Of course, this is a daunting task because we have people’s lives in our hands. But their guidance and trust make this an incredible experience.”

In a field where the facts of the cases and the legal research can become removed from the lived realities of clients, Vasquez is grounded in the heart of her work.

“For me, this is most fulfilling when I get to have conversations with our clients. It puts a face to the name,” she said. “You can read up on the facts of someone’s life, but it’s really different being able to sit down with them and their family members. It humanizes the experience.” 🔥

Visit klau.nd.edu/melsheimer to learn more about the Melsheimer Fellows Program.



2025-26 Melsheimer Fellowship Placements

La Casa de Amistad

Diego Cubillo

Notre Dame Law School Exoneration Justice Clinic

Mia Chetalo
Joshua Talache-Wheat
Bella Vasquez

One More Citizen

Fatima Aguilar-Ruiz
Audrey Duran Martinez
Scarlett Fisher
Julia Kamysz
Katie Pampalone
Don Tran

Faculty Research Assistants

Matthew Amante
Veronica Bofah
Annelise Demers
Alexandra Gonzalez-Amaro
Amelia Hatfield
Emi Kartsonas
Daniel Mooney
Manouny Ouataru
JD Sniegocki



Klau Institute
staff with the
2025-26
Melsheimer
Fellows

EDUCATE

The Klau Institute contributes to students' education and formation in numerous ways, both inside and outside the classroom. Our academic community continued to grow in 2025-26 with more students than ever before enrolling in the Minor in Civil and Human Rights, and more than 30 students receiving institute funding to support internships, research experiences, and conference attendance.

CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS MINORS

There were 47 students enrolled in the Minor in Civil and Human Rights during the 2025-26 academic year, and 11 of those students graduated with the Class of 2026.

The 15-credit program, administered by the Klau Institute as part of the Keough School of Global Affairs, attracts students from many different interests. This year's graduating minors had majors as diverse as finance, history, philosophy, political science, and sociology.



Natalia Rodriguez, Minor in Civil and Human Rights Class of 2026

"My education in civil and human rights has provided a grounding and compassionate perspective for which to view the world," said **Natalia Rodriguez**, one of those graduating minors.

Rodriguez, a political science major who completed a supplementary major in Latino studies, is now in Boston participating in City Year, a year-long AmeriCorps program where she is helping in the classroom and with after-school programming. She is also preparing for law school.

"In the future, I hope to practice law, more specifically to represent and protect the rights of those our society has relegated to the margins," Rodriguez said.

Kelise Jackson, another 2026 graduate, said she was drawn to the interdisciplinary nature of the minor.

"The minor showcases the intersection between law, history, and public policy in shaping lived experiences of inequality," she said. "I think it's a special minor that aims to help students grow both academically and personally."

Jackson also aspires to be an attorney. She is starting law school this fall at Pepperdine University.

HUMAN RIGHTS LAW PROGRAMS

Notre Dame Law School's LL.M. and J.S.D. programs enroll international human rights lawyers from around the world who engage closely with the Klau Institute during their time on campus.

- Eleven students graduated from the LL.M. program this year, and one student — **Kyung Mo Kang** of South Korea — completed his J.S.D.
- Four LL.M. students — **Carlos Chinchilla** of Honduras, **Roselis Díaz De Freitas** of Venezuela, **Pablo A. Proaño** of Ecuador, and **José Pablo Sánchez** of Mexico — were named the institute's Rita Bahr Cari Fellows for this academic year. The fellowships are awarded annually to LL.M. students who have demonstrated a commitment to human rights in Latin America through their academic and professional careers.



Class of 2026, LL.M. in International Human Rights Law

SUMMER LAW FELLOWS

The Klau Institute selected nine Notre Dame law students to receive the institute's Summer Law Fellowships in 2026. The fellows worked for public interest organizations that promote civil or human rights across the United States.



Anna Daunt, *Federal Defender Program, Atlanta*

- **Zoë Bonnichsen**, Notre Dame Exoneration Justice Clinic
- **Anna Daunt**, Federal Defender Program, Atlanta
- **Maggie Feighery**, Notre Dame Exoneration Justice Clinic
- **Chloe Garner**, Ohio Justice and Policy Center
- **Jazmin Mikhael**, Federal Public Defender's Office, Central District of California
- **Aaron Qiao**, Notre Dame Exoneration Justice Clinic
- **Joseph Reilly**, Legal Aid of Western Michigan
- **Clare Van Dyke**, ACLU Foundation of Connecticut
- **Madeline Ward**, Wyoming Outdoor Council

Daunt said her experience working for the Federal Defender Program profoundly shaped her understanding of justice and strengthened her commitment to this work.

"This summer, I have gained proximity to people impacted by broken systems, and have learned in a human, personal, tangible way what change needs to be done to protect and advance human and civil rights," she said. "Specifically, I have come to appreciate the importance of both individualized advocacy and broader systemic reform in creating lasting change."

UNDERGRAD SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

In 2026, the Klau Institute supported internships for four undergraduates who worked with civil and human rights organizations during the summer.

Two of the students — **Leila Cury** and **JD Sniegocki** — had internships in Rome through Notre Dame's Global Professional Experience Program with support from the Klau Institute's Pasquale Family Endowment for Excellence. Both students' internships focused on migration issues.

Cury, a rising senior majoring in economics and global affairs with a

minor in French, interned at Caritas Internationalis. "This internship has reinforced my belief that effective migration governance depends not only on governments, but also on civil society organizations that work directly with migrant communities," she said.

Sniegocki, a rising senior majoring in global affairs and environmental sciences, worked at the Scalabrini International Migration Institute. "This internship has been a great opportunity to experience and contribute to the work of the Church on migration, gaining a deeper understanding of how different Church institutions and organizations work together to address this issue," he said.

Two other students — **Veronica Bofah** and **Mia Chetalo** — received funding to support their internships at legal aid organizations.

Bofah, a rising senior majoring in global affairs and Spanish with a minor in civil and human rights, interned with the Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy's NC Benefits Navigator Program.

Chetalo, a rising senior majoring in global affairs with minors in civil and human rights as well as social innovation and entrepreneurship, had an internship at the Innocence Project of Florida.



Leila Cury and JD Sniegocki
Student interns in Rome

INQUIRE

The Klau Institute's scholarly community expanded its research output during 2025-26 with the addition of new faculty members and the continued development of ongoing initiatives.

JENNIFER MASON MCAWARD

McAward, the Klau Institute's director and an associate professor of law, spoke at several events about prosecutorial ethics and police suppression of criminal evidence as part of her ongoing research on the Brady rule. The rule, established by the Supreme Court in 1963, requires prosecutors in criminal cases to disclose any evidence favorable to the defendant prior to trial if that evidence is material to the defendant's guilt or punishment.

Her article, "Understanding Brady Violations," was published in the *Vanderbilt Law Review* in spring 2025.

In November, she was the moderator for a panel, "AI Suppression, E-Discovery Software and Brady," during a symposium hosted by the *Columbia Science and Technology Law Review*. In January,

she was a panelist and the convener for a discussion, "Brady v. Maryland at 60+," at the American Association of Law Schools National Conference.

McAward also received two AI Mini-Grant Awards from the University Provost's Office and Notre Dame Learning to support her research.

ZOLTÁN BÚZÁS

Búzás, an associate professor of global affairs in the Keough School of Global Affairs and a core affiliated faculty member of the Klau Institute, was on research leave during 2025-26.

He continued running the International Race and Rights Lab, which is supported by the Klau Institute, during his leave. With the help of student research assistants, the lab finished empirical analysis on a four-year project examining how China and the United States employ human rights accusations against each other. Búzás presented a sample of the results in February at the University of Pennsylvania.

In May, he hosted a virtual workshop on human rights and international relations with 25 scholars from around the world.

AMY HSIN

Hsin, a professor of migration in the Keough School and a core affiliated faculty member of the Klau Institute, arrived at Notre Dame at the beginning of the fall 2025 semester. As described earlier in this report in the feature on the Klau Institute's Migration Research Initiative, she has taken the lead in forming the initiative's multidisciplinary faculty working group.

Her scholarship on undocumented college students in New York City was incorporated into two valuable public outputs in the past year: 1) a FWD.us policy report on the impact of *Plyler v. Doe*, a 1982 Supreme Court decision that guarantees access to public education for undocumented children; and 2) an amicus brief to the Supreme Court defending birthright citizenship as justices considered the case *Trump v. Barbara*.

Hsin also completed a manuscript of *Beyond Dreamers: Transitions to Adulthood in an Uncertain Age*, co-authored with Sofya Aptekar of City University of New York. The book is forthcoming from Russell Sage Foundation Press.



Jennifer Mason McAward



Amy Hsin

ALEXANDER KUSTOV

Kustov, an associate professor of migration in the Keough School and core affiliated faculty member of the Klau Institute, joined the University at the start of the spring 2026 semester.

His book, *In Our Interest: How Democracies Can Make Immigration Popular*, received the 2026 Best Book Award from the American Political Science Association's Migration and Citizenship Section. He delivered book talks about *In Our Interest* this past spring and summer at the University of Kentucky, the University of Calgary, the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC, the Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, France, the Board of Latino Legislative Leaders Leadership Summit in Niagara Falls, New York, and the Council for European Studies Conference in Dublin, Ireland.

In June, Kustov received a Presidential Research Grant from the Russell Sage Foundation for a project titled "Persuasion by Changing Issue Priorities."

FACULTY FELLOWS

The Klau Institute's roster of faculty fellows consists of 38 scholars from numerous disciplines. The institute awarded research and travel grants to the following faculty members to support their work.

Steven Alvarado, an associate professor of sociology, went to El Salvador in December to present his migration research at the University of Central America and FUSADES, a Salvadoran research institute focused on economic and social development. In addition, he convened focus groups and conducted interviews with citizens to find out how the government's gang crackdown has affected their daily lives, their views of El Salvador's future, and their intentions to migrate.

Eva Dziadula, a teaching professor of economics, traveled to Guatemala to advance the Virtual Borders project in collaboration with Notre Dame Learning. The goal of the project is to use different forms of media along with interactive elements to immerse viewers in the border experience, bridging the gap between the abstract concept of migration and its complex reality.

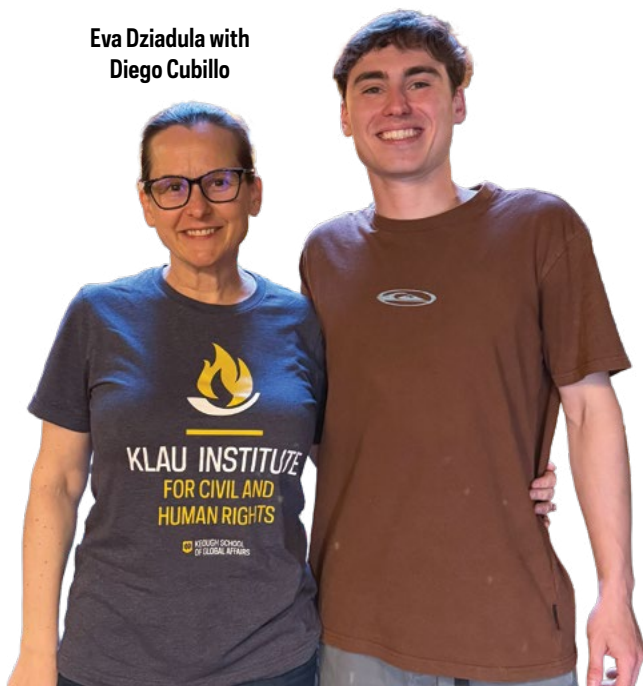
Dziadula was joined by students who were studying abroad in Mexico — including **Diego Cubillo**, who is one of the Klau Institute's Melsheimer Fellows and a minor in civil and human rights. The students assisted with capturing footage of the local environment and conducting interviews with migrants.

Joshua Lund, a professor of Spanish, spoke at the American Studies Association's annual meeting in November in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on the history of Black Cubans in solidarity networks during the interwar tumult of revolutionary projects.

Guillermo Trejo, a professor of political science and director of the Violence and Transitional Justice Lab, hosted a one-week meeting in February at Notre Dame for international human rights lawyers to develop legal strategy for victims of enforced disappearances in Acapulco, Mexico.

Sophie White, a professor of American studies, spoke at the American Historical Association's annual meeting in January in Chicago. Her presentation focused on her digital humanities project about voices of the enslaved.

Eva Dziadula with
Diego Cubillo



Alexander Kustov

BRIEFS

ENGAGE

The Klau Institute hosted or co-sponsored 49 events in 2025-26 on topics including migration, wrongful convictions and the death penalty, racial justice, and civil and human rights around the world. Below are some highlights from the past academic year.

BIG KICKOFF



The Klau Institute celebrated the start of the 2025-26 academic year with its biggest Fall Kickoff ever — nearly 200 students, faculty, and staff came to the event Sept. 10 on the quad next to Jenkins Nanovic Halls. The crowds enjoyed delicious food from Franky's Tacos while learning about the institute's academic community and student opportunities.

PIZZA, POP, AND POLITICS

ND Votes, a nonpartisan student initiative supported by the Klau Institute that aims to foster

conscientious engagement in political and civic life, continued the Pizza, Pop, and Politics series with four events in 2025-26.

Assistant Professor of Democracy and Global Affairs **Laura Gamboa** delivered the first lecture on Sept. 23. She talked about democratic backsliding — what it is and how to recognize when a country is sliding from democratic ideals toward authoritarianism.

On Nov. 20, Notre Dame Law Professor **Derek Muller** — a nationally recognized scholar in the field of election law — spoke on the topics of voting rights, election administration, and judicial power in the domain of elections.

Assistant Professor of Civil Rights Studies **Allison Mitchell** gave a presentation on Feb. 11 about what the Voter Education Project of the 1960s can teach us today.

On March 3, **Robert C. Johnson**, the Brian and Jeannelle Brady Associate Professor of Economics, discussed what voters should know about tariffs and trade.



Allison Mitchell



From left, Emmjolee Mendoza Waters, Gary Drinkard, Rev. Dr. Crystal Walker, and Ruth Friedman during the Catholic Mobilizing Network event.

CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK

On Oct. 8, the institute hosted the Catholic Mobilizing Network for a conversation, "Stories of Justice from Death Row."

The powerful discussion included **Gary Drinkard**, a man who was wrongfully convicted of murder in Alabama and spent six years on death row before being exonerated; **Rev. Dr. Crystal Walker**, a woman who lost her son to gun violence yet has become a staunch opponent of the death penalty; and **Ruth Friedman**, an attorney who has devoted her career to representing men and women who have been sentenced to death.

"The death penalty is vengeance. It's not justice, it's vengeance — plain and simple," Drinkard said.

Watch the full event on the Klau Institute's YouTube channel:



NYT REPORTER ON SOUTH AFRICA

In May 2025, a group of 59 white South Africans arrived in the United States as refugees on a flight chartered by the U.S. government. The new arrivals, many of whom were Afrikaner descendants of Dutch

settlers, were granted refugee status based on claims they faced racial discrimination and violence in South Africa. At the center of the situation was South Africa's land restitution program, which was designed to return land, under certain conditions, to Black communities dispossessed during the country's Apartheid era.

John Eligon, the Johannesburg bureau chief for The New York Times, shared insights from his reporting during "Post-Apartheid? Restitution and Racial Fear in South Africa" on Oct. 30.

Eligon has covered the story from all angles — including the passage of South Africa's Expropriation Act, reactions to the policy in different communities, the Trump administration's creation of a special refugee program for South Africa's racial minorities, and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's pushback against narratives amplified by President Trump, Elon Musk, and others.

[Watch the full event on the Klau Institute's YouTube channel:](#)



HUMAN RIGHTS LUNCH-AND-LEARNS

Students in Notre Dame's LL.M. Program in International Human Rights Law shared their expertise and experiences with the campus community during two Human Rights Lunch-and-Learns over the course of the year.

Fr. Scott Borgman spoke Nov. 13 on the Vatican's role as a moral and diplomatic force. Borgman, a Roman Catholic priest from California who spent the year on campus while pursuing his LL.M., explored how the Vatican offers a compelling case study in soft power influencing global justice.

On Feb. 25, the Klau Institute's Rita Bahr Cari Fellows — **Carlos Chinchilla** of Honduras, **Roselis Díaz De Freitas** of Venezuela, **Pablo A. Proaño** of Ecuador, and **José Pablo Sánchez Cardona** of Mexico — discussed human rights issues in Latin America.

DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION WEEK

The Klau Institute was a leading co-sponsor of Notre Dame Law School's Death Penalty Abolition Week

in March. One of the signature events was a conversation with **Anthony Ray Hinton**, a man who spent 30 years on death row in Alabama after being wrongfully convicted of two counts of murder. Klau Institute Director **Jennifer Mason McAward** moderated the conversation with Hinton, who was exonerated in 2015 and later wrote a novel, *The Sun Does Shine*.

"I am hoping, I am praying, that some of you men and women become lawyers who can fight for those who cannot fight for themselves," Hinton said. "Had justice worked, I would not have been indicted in the first place. It was only a lawyer who cared enough to give me justice and freedom."

BOOK DISCUSSION

With the Klau Institute's support, **Josie Soehnge Cohen**, a Ph.D. student in anthropology, organized a discussion group for graduate students around the book *Making Refuge: Somali Bantus in Lewiston, Maine*. The discussion, held April 1, attracted a multidisciplinary group of graduate students from across campus.



John Eligon



Anthony Ray Hinton and Jennifer Mason McAward

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IN MEMORIAM: ERNEST MORRELL

We mourn the loss and honor the memory of Ernest Morrell, Coyle Professor of Literacy Education, who died in February at the age of 54 after a long battle with cancer. A faculty fellow of the Klau Institute, he was a renowned scholar whose work positioned literacy as a means of social justice, empowering young people to access information, exercise informed citizenship, and participate fully in civic and cultural life.

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NAMMIE HALL

“Human dignity does not depend on a person’s abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love.”

— POPE LEO XIV, MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS



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