

Strategic Framework: 2025 Year-End Update

December 22, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

Having completed a busy and unusually complex semester, and approaching a joyous holiday season, we write to share an update on progress toward the vision set forth in [Notre Dame 2033: A Strategic Framework](#).

The context for this update is different from [a year ago](#)—or even [the beginning of the fall semester](#). As University President Rev. Robert A. Dowd, C.S.C., noted in the Staff Town Halls and his [Faculty Address](#), the past year has been one of great disruption in higher education and great clarity about our mission as a leading global Catholic research university.

We are grateful for Fr. Dowd's leadership as we continue to navigate a rapidly changing federal landscape with significant consequences for staff, graduate students, and faculty. For example, USAID funding to support research has been almost eliminated, a decision that had a disproportionate impact on the Keough School of Global Affairs and the Pulte Institute for Global Development within the Keough School.

At the same time, we can point to numerous ways in which we are making advances. Our faculty are submitting grants for record-setting amounts, and our overall research funding remains solid even as we recognize that we do not yet have an approved federal budget for next year. At this writing, our federal funding is only slightly less strong than two years ago. National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation grant awards are running slightly ahead of 2024 numbers; Department of Defense grant awards are down. [Lilly Endowment just awarded our Ethics Initiative \\$50.8 million](#)—the largest grant to Notre Dame from a private foundation in the University's history—for work on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

This pattern of challenges and successes is similar on immigration. We worry about recent restrictions placed on international graduate students attending US universities and the impact of these policies on our programs, especially in science and engineering. Still, the student numbers for Notre Dame are more encouraging than we anticipated, thanks to the hard work of Notre Dame Global, our Enrollment Division, and the Graduate School. Only a handful of our international undergraduates were unable to make it to campus this fall because of immigration restrictions. A larger number of graduate students could not begin their programs, and the overall decline in international students applying to U.S. programs is concerning. But this year, the vast majority of international graduate students who accepted a Notre Dame offer also made it to South Bend despite an increasing number of international travel bans. As Fr. Dowd [recently stated](#), "We are committed to

continuing to support our international students, staff, and scholars who are essential to fulfilling our mission as a global Catholic research university.”

Other challenges to our financial and educational model include the endowment tax (where we will soon be in the highest category, 8% on realized gains), new limits on the amount professional school students (especially in law and business) can borrow to finance their degree programs, and continued volatility in college athletics. On all of these topics, we are working with Congress to discern alternative strategies at once responsive to fiscal concerns but also supportive of the superb work done by so many universities.

Last spring, in response to this unsettled landscape, we announced a staff hiring freeze and 2.5% reduction to the University’s budget. These steps enabled us to present a balanced budget to the Board of Trustees. We are grateful to everyone across campus who has pitched in to do more with less and make the best use of our existing resources. We are also grateful to our colleagues in Development who have propelled us forward with another record year.

Most of our private university peers have taken, or are planning for, more severe financial measures. We see these challenges, too. But we also see opportunity, and have authorized a full slate of faculty searches this year with the goal of moving forward faster than our peers, many of whom are not hiring any faculty, and continuing to advance the ambitious vision outlined in *Notre Dame 2033*.

Investing in People



Partnering with KinderCare, an [award-winning](#) cross-functional team from NDHR, Finance, Facilities Design and Operations, and the Office of General Counsel made a new on-site childcare center a reality for University faculty, staff, and students with children as young as 6 weeks old.

Our efforts to invest in people were recently recognized on the national level when [Forbes named Notre](#)

[Dame America's Best Large Employer for 2025](#), leading 700 other organizations with more than 5,000 employees. Over the past three years, Notre Dame has [expanded its employee wellness center](#) and enhanced caregiving and education benefits for employees, including [opening a new child care facility](#) where faculty, staff, and students can enroll their children starting at 6 weeks of age.

At the Fall Staff Town Halls in October, the University launched [a refreshed set of values](#). As we go about our work to become the leading global Catholic research university, our campus community is encouraged to personify the five values of Catholic Mission, Community, Collaboration, Excellence, and Innovation.

Last year, the University made [an unprecedented investment in affordability and accessibility](#) through [Pathways to Notre Dame](#), which includes a new no-loan policy for undergraduate students, enhancing the ability of our middle- and low-income families to attend the University. [As Fr. Dowd noted in his Faculty Address](#), after a 6% decline in students from middle-income families over the past 10 years, we saw a 3% increase in 2025, making up half that distance in just one year. This year's international class is not only more socioeconomically diverse but also more globally representative than in years past.

Last year, we also instituted substantial increases in Ph.D. stipend levels for the Colleges of Arts & Letters, Engineering, and Science, and for the Keough School. This is enabling us to better compete for some of the world's most talented doctoral students. We also agreed to provide health care coverage for spouses and dependents of our Ph.D. students. We will continue to enhance our support of Ph.D. students, even as we assess the size of our Ph.D. programs in the coming year in light of placement data and program strength.

We are also increasing the number of talented and highly motivated postdoctoral fellows across the University, which is why the Office of the Provost, the Graduate School, and the Colleges of Science, Engineering, and Arts & Letters [launched a postdoctoral fellowships pilot program](#), with the first cohort arriving this fall. Across all initiatives and programs, we welcomed an additional 40 postdoctoral fellows to campus this year.

Undergraduate Education



A 125-member cohort of Notre Dame faculty and staff taught the new Moreau First-Year Seminar this fall, supported by undergraduate peer leaders who shared insights and mentored students in each section.

In undergraduate education, two significant changes took effect this fall—both of which had been in the planning stages for some time.

All incoming first-year students took the reconceptualized [Moreau First Year Seminar](#) this fall. This new iteration of the required course for first-year students is an even deeper collaboration among the Division of Student Affairs, the Office of Undergraduate Education, and the colleges and schools, and is taught by [an outstanding group](#) of faculty and staff leaders from across the University.

Second, the University transitioned to a four-year advising model based in the colleges and schools. Incoming first-year students work with the same collegiate-level adviser throughout their time at Notre Dame, unless there is a significant change in their curriculum that necessitates a change of adviser. By building a model where students have a consistent, trusted adviser from start to finish, we're not just streamlining support and balancing caseloads—we're deepening relationships. We are grateful to the deans and the more than 100 faculty and staff members who collaborated to make this possible.

To increase access to undergraduate research opportunities, the College of Science and the College of Engineering are piloting a program called [STRAND](#), which provides a central web-based location for researchers to post and students to apply for research projects at set times throughout the year using a clear and equitable platform. The team will use the spring 2026 semester to outline plans to expand it to more disciplines.

Another way the University is investing in creating an unsurpassed undergraduate experience is by [renovating South Dining Hall](#). The project will expand and reimagine the facility's servery for a modern

experience while preserving the historic character of the dining rooms. Despite the ongoing construction, the dining hall still serves up to 3,500 guests every day while the University is in session.

Progress on Priorities



The initiative directors recently gathered for a retreat with leaders from IRIS and the Provost's Office.

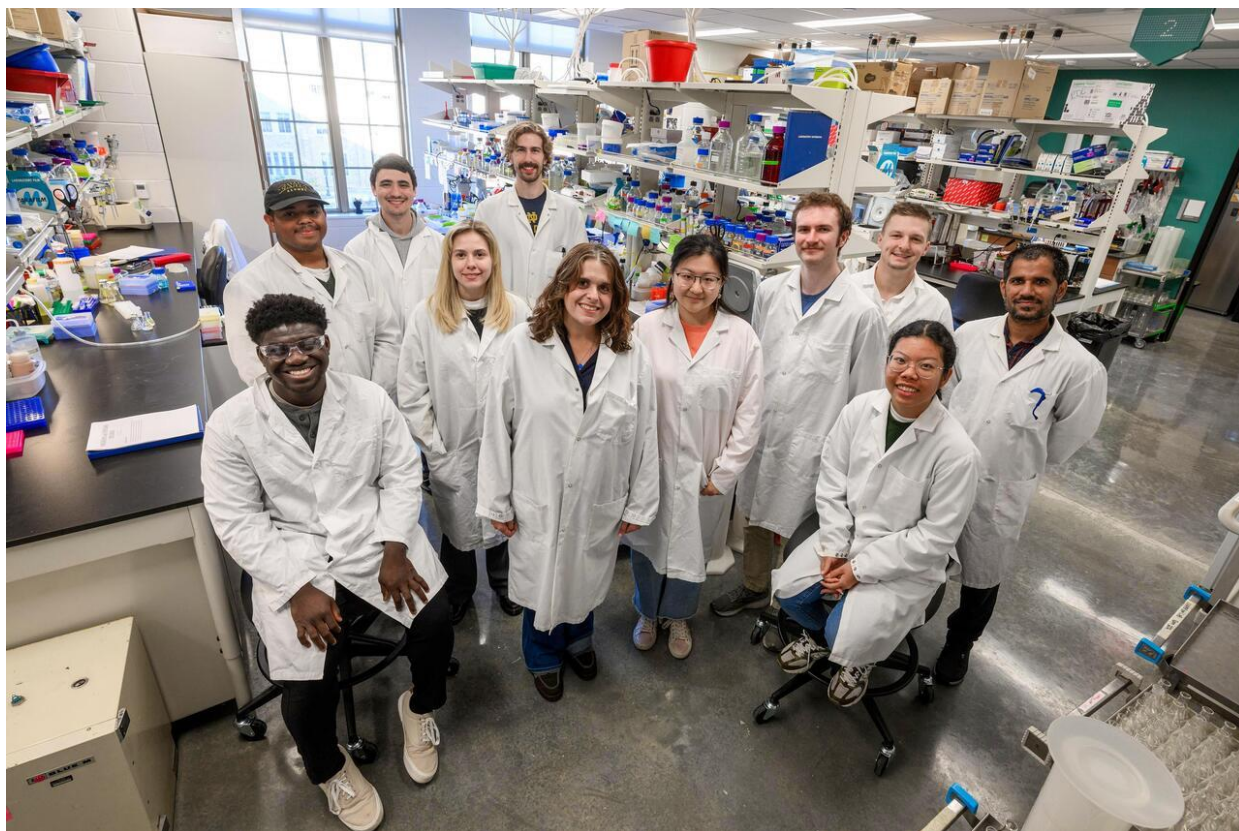
The University-wide strategic initiatives continue to support innovative faculty research, student formation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and meaningful engagement opportunities that help elevate partner units across the University and advance Notre Dame. You can learn more about their progress at the links below:

- [Arts](#)
- [Bioengineering & Life Sciences](#)
- [Democracy](#)
- [Ethics](#)
- [Humanities](#)
- [Just Transformations to Sustainability](#)
- [Mental Health](#)
- [Poverty](#)

[Faculty directors for the final two priority areas have now begun their work](#): Nitesh Chawla is leading the new [Data, AI, and Computing Initiative](#), and Kathleen Sprows Cummings directs the new [Global Catholic Research Initiative](#). The spring Connections series will be an opportunity to learn more about their vision and early progress. Mark your calendars for these dates and watch for more details next semester.

- February 3: Data, AI, and Computing
- March 25: Global Catholic Research
- April 27: Mental Health

Research Highlights



Biology Professor Patricia Campion and her team in their new lab space in McCourtney Hall East.

Over [the past year](#), Notre Dame faculty across every department, center, school, and institute continued to produce scholarship and creative works that advance knowledge and improve lives. Many faculty members have been [recognized with external honors](#), book and paper awards, and distinguished prizes, including admission to some of the most prestigious honorary organizations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the National Academy of Inventors. Our faculty have also won highly competitive preeminent grants from agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the Air Force Office of Scientific Research, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, among others.

The opening of the second building of the East Campus Research Complex, McCourtney Hall, gives scientists and engineers 200,000 additional square feet for groundbreaking health research. A portion of the building remains unassigned, so that the University can continue to attract premier researchers and remain open to emerging opportunities.

Another way the University continues to advance its research, scholarship, and creative endeavor is through new partnerships, such as [the multiyear research collaboration](#) between Notre Dame and Beacon Health System to jointly develop collaborative, health-focused research projects that are of interest to both

organizations, particularly in the areas of oncology and health data. A new [long-term partnership](#) with Under Armour will pursue innovation through joint research by co-investing in research initiatives that span multiple colleges and disciplines.

Global Engagement



Law School Dean Marcus Cole (center) meets with the University of Cape Town's vice chancellor and dean of the Faculty of Law to celebrate a new partnership agreement between the two institutions.

The geopolitics of the moment reflect nationalist tensions in much of the world. Nonetheless, Notre Dame's commitment to becoming a more global university has never been stronger. Our mission calls us to educate leaders who can work across cultures, advance research that addresses shared human problems, and serve a Church that is the world's most multilingual, multicultural, and global institution.

Many well-regarded colleges and universities see full-pay international students as central to their financial model. Notre Dame's strategy is different. We believe Notre Dame should be a university of choice for the most talented Catholic students worldwide. The impact from Fr. Dowd's Pathways to Notre Dame initiative, which guaranteed that both domestic and international students would be eligible for need-blind financial aid packages, has been immediate: Undergraduate applications to Notre Dame from outside the United States increased by 71% in a single year, and this year's incoming class represented 82 nations. Our Enrollment Division colleagues [have had particular success](#) in recruiting socioeconomically diverse students from the Catholic Global South.

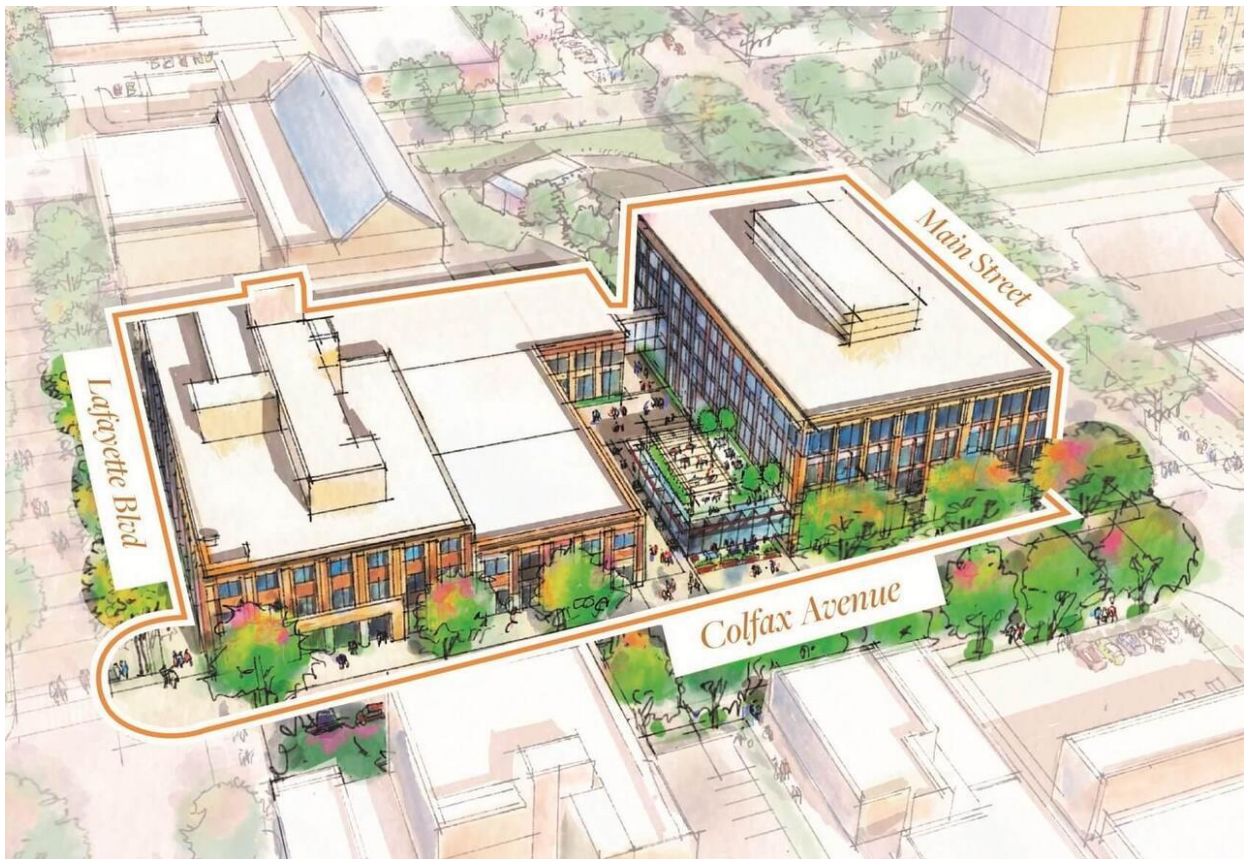
Part of becoming a more global university is also developing deeper partnerships with institutions and other universities outside the United States. Through its [Just Transformations to Sustainability Initiative](#), Notre Dame is now a lead university partner in the [Borgo Laudato Si'](#), an educational and research center

established by Pope Francis that demonstrates how the principles of *Laudato si'* can become a reality. The Law School's [Global Lawyering Initiative](#), which aims to provide students and faculty with access to global learning and research opportunities, continues to expand, [signing a new partnership](#) with the University of Cape Town in South Africa this summer. We continue to explore new partnerships and deepen engagement with universities around the world.

The University further demonstrated its commitment to strengthening partnerships this fall when Notre Dame Global [hosted its inaugural Global Partners Conference](#), convening Notre Dame's university partners from around the world to share ideas, deepen existing relationships, learn more about the South Bend region, and spark new collaborations.

In recognition of its outstanding commitment to internationalization both on campus and across the globe, Notre Dame was recently honored with the [2025 Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization](#). This award affirms what we believe: that a more global Notre Dame is a better Notre Dame—more faithful to our Catholic mission, more distinctive in higher education, and more capable of preparing students to lead in an interconnected world.

South Bend & the Region



As [announced last week](#), Colfax Corner will feature a restored South Bend Tribune building and an adjoining modern research and office facility. It is phase one of the planned Tech and Talent District. (Credit: Gensler)

The commitment of Notre Dame to the local region—and the benefits Notre Dame receives from strong local partnerships—has never been more clear.

The [Wilma and Peter Veldman Family Psychology Clinic](#), opening next year in South Bend's East Bank neighborhood, will foster collaboration among faculty experts developing evidence-based treatments for mental health issues that can improve lives in the local community and across the country.

The University's [planned Tech and Talent District](#) in downtown South Bend, a collaboration between Notre Dame, Ancora, the City of South Bend, the State of Indiana, Lilly Endowment Inc., and the Judd Leighton Foundation, is expected to begin construction this summer. By locating more than 400 high-tech jobs in downtown South Bend and engaging the community with an active calendar of programming and events, this project—now titled Colfax Corner—will spark renewed energy in the city. It will also host a range of community-facing programs alongside existing nonprofit tenants, including South Bend City Church and the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Northern Indiana Corridor.

The University added another source of renewable power to its growing portfolio of sustainable energy projects. The [West Campus Solar Array](#), which sits between Carroll Hall and Indiana 933, will generate at least 1% of the campus's energy needs. It will be joined in the coming months by the Southeast Campus Geothermal Plant, which will allow the University to more efficiently heat and cool its buildings.

The semester-long inaugural [Notre Dame Arts Biennial](#) will debut in spring 2027, with a wide array of arts exhibits, performances, and other opportunities across campus, in the South Bend area, and at Notre Dame's [global locations](#). The events will be open to the public, and the initiative is actively seeking to partner with local arts organizations.

These are just a few examples [of the many ways](#) Notre Dame demonstrates its commitment to the region.

Looking Ahead

The turbulence within higher education and in the national economy at this moment is notable. Yet we are optimistic. Few, if any, universities are as well-positioned as Notre Dame to achieve its ambitions. Our fundamental goal endures: to build the leading global Catholic research university on par with but distinct from the world's best private universities. That goal has never been simple. It never will be. And yet it remains one of the most exciting projects in global higher education.

We are grateful for your continued partnership in fulfilling Notre Dame's mission and wish you and your families a joyous holiday season.

Sincerely,

John T. McGreevy

Charles and Jill Fischer Provost

Shannon Cullinan
Executive Vice President



University of Notre Dame

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