

Strategic Framework: June 2026 Update

June 05, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

Finals are over. Grades are in. Commencement is complete. Reunion is beginning. It's an appropriate moment to recap some of the events of the past year and think ahead to next fall.

Our distinctive mission as a leading global Catholic research university is more important than ever, and our momentum in implementing the strategic framework continues to grow. Every member of the Notre Dame community plays an important role in this mission, and we are grateful for the time, dedication, and care you bring to work every day—for each other and for our students.

Investing in People



Confetti in 'Commit Alley' at The Rally 2026. Photo by Matt Cashore

One of the most exciting developments this spring was the expansion of [Pathways to Notre Dame](#). In March, Notre Dame [announced](#) that families with annual income up to \$150,000 will receive need-based financial aid that covers at least the full cost of tuition, and families with income up to \$200,000 will receive need-based aid that covers at least half the cost of tuition. Many families with incomes over \$200,000 still qualify for generous financial aid with more than 70% of all undergraduates receiving some type of financial aid. In addition, most students from families with annual income up to \$60,000 will receive need-based financial aid that covers tuition, fees, housing, and food. This announcement reflects the University's long-standing commitment to ensure a Notre Dame education is affordable and accessible to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

This follows the initial Pathways commitment University President Rev. Robert A. Dowd, C.S.C., announced at his inauguration, making Notre Dame one of only 10 universities to be need-blind for all applicants—domestic and international—while also meeting 100% of demonstrated financial need for every student. This led to a 56% increase in applications from middle-income students and a 71% increase in international applications in the Class of 2029, a sign that Notre Dame is attracting a broader pool of talented students who see Notre Dame as an affordable option.

To advance the University's commitment to increasing the number of postdoctoral fellows at Notre Dame, the Office of the Provost, the Graduate School, and the Colleges of Science, Engineering, and Arts & Letters created the [Provost's Postdoctoral Fellowship program](#). The first cohort arrived in fall 2025 and the second cohort begins in fall 2026. These extraordinary early-career researchers were chosen through a highly competitive process—fewer than 2% of applicants were accepted—and will join Notre Dame from renowned institutions around the world.

We 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 vision outlined in [Notre Dame 2033: A Strategic Framework](#). We are grateful for all of the faculty and staff who dedicated their time and energy to these searches over the past several months, and we look forward to welcoming a superb group of scholar-teachers in August.

We also recently celebrated faculty and staff excellence through the 2026 [University Faculty Awards](#), for outstanding research, teaching, and service to the University, and the [Presidential Awards](#), which recognize staff who model our Notre Dame values of Catholic Mission, Community, Collaboration, Excellence, and Innovation. Congratulations to all of the awardees! [Nominations for the Presidential Team Irish Awards](#) are due June 15.

Undergraduate Education



Professor Gretchen Reydams-Schils leads a Program of Liberal Studies seminar outside of O'Shaughnessy Hall in spring 2026. Photo by Matt Cashore.

Even as Notre Dame has become a major research university, we continue to focus on strengthening our ability to deliver an unparalleled undergraduate experience, from the [reconceptualized Moreau First-Year Seminar](#) to investments in residential life, including the [two new South Quad residence halls](#) scheduled to open in the fall and the major [renovation of South Dining Hall](#).

New challenges and opportunities are also emerging. [Notre Dame Learning](#) is helping faculty learn to harness the potential benefits of AI in the classroom (and to evade its potential pitfalls). Students and faculty at Notre Dame have expressed an eagerness for richer and more diverse conversations on contested issues in our ideologically polarized society and we will announce initiatives on this topic in the fall. Similarly, we will begin a dialogue at the department level to examine grade inflation, a topic generating sustained discussion not only at Notre Dame but at peer institutions.

This semester, approximately 400 undergraduates took a new version of Engineering Physics I, the first course redesigned as part of Notre Dame Learning's [Foundational Course Transformation Academy](#). Five physics faculty members collaborated with a team of teaching, learning design, academic media, and technology experts, along with partners across campus, to transform this required course for engineering majors. Next up is a redesign of the Calculus I/II sequence.

A [pilot program called STRAND](#) led to a 57% increase in engineering students participating in undergraduate research by providing a clear and equitable platform for posting and applying for research opportunities. Statistically significant increases were observed across student demographic groups and plans are already underway to expand the program to more of our colleges and schools.

Over the summer, the new [Center for Academic Transformation and Excellence](#) will move into Bond Hall,

bringing a variety of learning resources and academic engagement services together into a central hub. This new center will make it easier for undergraduate students from all colleges, schools, and years to access the support they need to flourish at Notre Dame. The Graduate School, in turn, has moved into the Main Building, closer to some of its most important partners, including Notre Dame Research, Notre Dame Global, and the Provost's Office.

Research Highlights



Professor Jim Schmiedeler was one of 30 faculty members featured at a Notre Dame Forum event marking 20 years of the “What Would You Fight For?” series. Photo by Michael Caterina.

To date, 134 cross-disciplinary teams have been funded through the framework, including nearly 400 faculty members from every college and school. They are studying everything from how to improve cell-based cancer therapies to how Catholic schools can enhance democracy. The University also received \$218 million in external funding for research and scholarship through competitively awarded grants and contracts in FY25, propelling the University past the \$200 million mark for the fifth straight year. As we approach the close of FY26, we are on track for another \$200 million-plus year, with active research projects underway in 73 countries worldwide.

Our Department of Theology was [ranked #1 in the world for a second straight year](#) and Notre Dame faculty across every department, center, college, school, and institute continue 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, among others, election to the [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) and the [National Academy of Engineering](#).

Initiative Updates



The recently opened Wilma and Peter Veldman Psychology Clinic is Notre Dame's academic investment in mental health as part of the University-wide priority on health and well-being. Photo by Jon Hendricks.

Arts

The [Arts Initiative](#) continues to advance interdisciplinary research and creative practice in collaboration with academic departments, the Franco Family Institute for the Liberal Arts and the Public Good, Raclin Murphy Museum of Art, and DeBartolo Performing Arts Center. This year, it funded 13 faculty-led research projects, supported public engagement with 19 visiting artists and scholars, recruited additional postdoctoral and post-MFA fellows, and fostered student-led arts inquiry through its [Arts Fellows](#) program. As the 2027 [Notre Dame Arts Biennial](#) nears, the initiative has begun collaboration with 40 funded projects with local, regional, and global partners.

Data, AI, and Computing

In its first year, the [Data, AI, and Computing Initiative](#) advanced purposeful excellence in data, AI, and computing by mobilizing research, curriculum, convening, and organizational alignment. The inaugural [RISE AI Conference](#) brought more than 330 participants from more than 16 countries, 55 companies, and 38 universities to campus. The initiative also launched [a curriculum task force](#) and funded [19 working groups](#) representing 139 faculty across priority areas to identify promising directions for research, recruitment, team science, and translational impact.

Democracy

The [Democracy Initiative](#) hosted [Democracy Talks](#) with governors, ambassadors, Pulitzer Prize winners, university presidents, the Archbishop of Washington, DC, and others, reaching more than 3,000 campus attendees. The [Democracy Catalyst grant program](#) expanded to more than 100 faculty working on 70-plus

projects that will produce dozens of new books, articles, convenings, and classes on the subject of democracy. All of this work continues to center Notre Dame as a trusted leader in studying and strengthening democracy.

Ethics

Through the [Ethics Initiative](#), the University continues to advance scholarship and public engagement on ethics and the common good, including the Jenkins Center for Virtue Ethics' support of the Department of Philosophy's hire of a new endowed chair in virtue ethics and shaping national conversations on technology ethics through the [DELTA network](#) and [ND-IBM Technology Ethics Lab](#). Recent press coverage, including in [The Atlantic](#), [New York Times](#), [CNN](#), and [NPR](#), indicates that Notre Dame is becoming a recognized leader in AI ethics, connecting the Christian faith tradition with the work of technology leaders in Silicon Valley and beyond. Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical on artificial intelligence, *Magnifica Humanitas*, amplifies the importance of this ongoing work.

Global Catholic Research

The [Global Catholic Research Initiative](#) (GCRI), which formally launched in spring 2026, has announced [new Catalyst Grants and Amplification Grants](#) to support interdisciplinary research, convenings, and collaborative scholarship on global Catholicism. Applications are due June 15. GCRI has also expanded partnerships with centers and institutes across campus as well as with scholars and institutions across Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Recently launched projects focus on women religious and the preservation, digitization, and accessibility of global Catholic archives.

Health and Well-Being

Bioengineering & Life Sciences

Renowned biomedical engineer [John Fisher](#) was [appointed director](#) of the [Bioengineering & Life Sciences Initiative](#). Fisher joins the University at a pivotal moment for the initiative, as it accelerates efforts to expand research, training, and shared infrastructure, including [a Cryo-TEM instrument](#) installed on May 14 and a [new Center for Biomedical Discovery](#) that will support researchers with centralized access to cutting-edge technologies. Complementing this activity, the College of Science announced the new [Reisenauer Institute for Rare Diseases](#).

Mental Health

The recently opened [Wilma and Peter Veldman Family Psychology Clinic](#) will expand local access to mental health care through a combination of research, training, and service. The clinic will significantly expand the evidence-based mental health services that Notre Dame provides to the community, while also serving as the new home of the [William J. Shaw Center for Children and Families](#) and the newly launched [Human Neuroimaging Center](#).

Humanities

This was a year of firsts for the newly launched [Franco Family Institute for the Liberal Arts and the Public Good](#). The institute welcomed inaugural cohorts of humanities fellows and undergraduate public humanities interns, partnered with the Arts, Sustainability, and Global Catholic Research initiatives to support humanities

projects in its [Research Innovation Collaboratives](#), and hosted the [Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton Culture and the Public Good symposium](#), featuring Rainn Wilson, Jenny Odell, Vauhini Vara, and Shankar Vedantam.

Poverty

The [Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities \(LEO\)](#), with support from the [Poverty Initiative](#), expanded its capacity to scale evidence-based poverty interventions through national partnerships with [Right At Home](#) and [Catholic Charities](#). The [Poverty Research Fellows Program](#) has grown to 70 students, and research efforts led by recent hires include the new [Strengthening Families Initiative](#) and the [Migration Research Initiative](#). The University's commitment to global poverty research will also be enhanced by a partnership between Arts & Letters and the Keough School on the [Building Inclusive Growth \(BIG\) Lab](#).

Sustainability

The [Just Transformations to Sustainability Initiative](#) partnered with the Vatican's Laudato Si' Center for Higher Education to establish the Global Alliance for Laudato Si', an international network dedicated to supporting integral ecology and global sustainability. This March, the alliance convened nearly 100 researchers and institutional leaders at its [inaugural meeting](#) at the Laudato Si' Village. Representatives from more than 60 universities gathered to develop a shared research agenda and a long-term vision for the alliance.

Notre Dame also continues to invest in a more sustainable future through its campus operations. Last month, McCourtney Hall East became the [first University building certified as LEED Platinum](#)—a designation indicating the facility meets the most rigorous energy and water efficiency benchmarks, among [other criteria](#). Additionally, more [green roofs dot the campus landscape](#), helping to insulate buildings and cool the ambient temperature on hot days.

Follow our progress at strategicframework.nd.edu/initiatives.

Local and Global Partnerships



University President Rev. Robert A. Dowd, C.S.C., and Vice Chancellor Arch. Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe shake hands at the signing of a partnership agreement with Makerere University in Uganda. Photo by Matt Cashore.

Since the strategic framework launched in fall 2023, the University has signed more than 80 partnership agreements with higher education institutions around the world. Most recently, the University formalized an agreement with Makerere University in Uganda, one of Africa's oldest and most distinguished universities. This new memorandum of understanding aligns with Notre Dame's intent to expand and strengthen institutional partnerships across sub-Saharan Africa.

Closer to home, the [Colfax Corner project](#) in downtown South Bend continues to take shape, with demolition work for a new building at the corner of Colfax Avenue and Main Street already underway. The University's development partner, Ancora, [announced the facility's design will be led by Gensler](#), a globally renowned architecture firm. Gensler's design intends to honor the historic Art Deco character of the former South Bend Tribune building while creating spaces that promote innovation and community engagement. Colfax Corner is projected to bring more than 400 jobs to downtown South Bend and generate at least \$750 million in direct economic impact over the next decade.

The framework's call to strengthen ties with our community has also been advanced by [iNDustry Labs](#), the University's hub for collaboration with regional companies. Because of the partnerships they have built over years, iNDustry Labs has in the last few months advised local employers on how to [implement AI best practices](#), [win trajectory-changing government contracts](#), and [fill talent needs](#) using the power of the Notre Dame network. All of this activity supports the University and region's shared goal to make our economy more resilient and prosperous.

For more news and updates about Notre Dame's global and regional engagement, visit global.nd.edu and publicaffairs.nd.edu.

Thank you

The accomplishments listed above represent only part of the sustained and collective effort required to realize our aspirations. Much of that work takes place outside the spotlight, in the daily work of colleagues in every role and every corner of our campus, as well as in our global locations. As we head into the summer months, please know of our deep gratitude for your dedication to our students and to our shared mission. Together, we are becoming the Notre Dame the world needs.

Sincerely,

John T. McGreevy
Charles and Jill Fischer Provost

Shannon Cullinan
Executive Vice President



University of Notre Dame

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