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Project awards nearly $2 million to 18 research projects

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An interdisciplinary collaboration between Cornell University and the University of Notre Dame has awarded nearly $2 million to 18 projects in five countries to examine the theoretical, empirical and practical dimensions of hope and optimism.

“We think we’ve found a fantastic group of interdisciplinary scholars and topics to explore,” said Andrew Chignell, associate professor of philosophy at Cornell’s Susan Linn Sage School of Philosophy and co-director of the Hope and Optimism Project.

The project, Hope and Optimism: Conceptual and Empirical Investigations, is funded through a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and additional money from Cornell and Notre Dame.

The initiative is bringing together philosophers, social scientists and theologians for residential and nonresidential fellowship programs, conferences, writing projects by the co-directors, and creative stage and screen competitions.

“Hope is a concept that we talk about every day, but we don’t understand it all that well,” said Samuel Newlands, the William J. and Dorothy K. O’Neill Collegiate Associate Professor of Philosophy in Notre Dame’s College of Arts and Letters, co-director of the Center for Philosophy of Religion and co-director of the Hope and Optimism project. “There is an incredible range of topics being explored, and that shows us just how ubiquitous hope is in our lives.”
In addition to a grant of $3.8 million, the Templeton Foundation is adding another $350,000 to expand public engagement, including the production of a documentary chronicling the process and findings of the Hope and Optimism project.

Funding for the collaborative venture will total more than $4.7 million.

Additional phases of the Hope and Optimism Project will include a playwriting contest and a filmmaking contest. Hope on Stage will award $10,000 to the writer of an original play that explores the nature, role, sources or risks and benefits of hope and optimism in human life. Additional funding will support production of the play in professional theaters in Ithaca, New York, and Los Angeles in spring 2017. Hope on Screen will give $10,000 in prizes to amateur filmmakers who explore hope and optimism in a short video, including $2,500 for first prize.

Visit the Hope and Optimism Project for project details.

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