Hope and Optimism Project awards nearly $2M to 18 research projects

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

The project, [Hope and Optimism: Conceptual and Empirical Investigations](http://hopeoptimism.com/), is funded through a grant from the [John Templeton Foundation](https://www.templeton.org/) and additional money from Notre Dame and Cornell.

[The initiative](http://news.nd.edu/news/47749-notre-dame-and-cornell-awarded-2-8-million-to-study-hope-and-optimism/) is bringing together philosophers, social scientists and theologians for residential and non-residential 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](http://philosophy.nd.edu/people/faculty/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](http://philreligion.nd.edu/) 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.”
Among the projects recently funded:

- “What Should I Hope From You?” by Adrienne Martin, a Claremont McKenna College professor of philosophy, politics and economics. Martin will examine how hope is invested in people, as opposed to objects. She will argue that through interpersonal hope and emotions such as disappointment, gratitude and appreciation, people encourage each other to meet challenging standards.

- “Are There Any Advantages to Racializing Hope?” by Andre Willis, an assistant professor of religious studies at Brown University. Willis will look at how practical hopes linked to citizenship — inclusion, recognition, membership and success — have framed the African-American religious experience. He will explore religious narratives of hope that African-Americans have built through a history in the United States that has often been marked by dehumanizing political conditions.

- “How Does Optimism Help Incarcerated Individuals Return to Their Communities, Overcome Barriers, and Become Positive Productive Members of Society?” by George Mason University psychologists Jeff Stuewig and June Tangney. The pair will explore the role optimism plays in the lives of incarcerated individuals and those reintegrating after being released. They will determine how optimism becomes a form of resilience among those in the criminal justice system and how that optimism changes over time based on types of experiences in that system.

In addition to an original grant of $3.8 million, the John 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.

“It’s great to be able to bring some of the results of this rarified academic research and put it into the public on screen and stage,” 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. “We think we’ve found a fantastic group of interdisciplinary scholars and topics to explore.”

The collaborative venture will total more than $4.7 million.

Researchers from University of Colorado Boulder, University of Oxford, Carnegie Mellon University and several other schools will lead additional projects receiving funding. A full list is available at al.nd.edu.
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/or optimism in human life. Additional award funding will support the 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.

For more information about the project, visit hopeoptimism.com [link: http://hopeoptimism.com/].


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