

## 2025 Iwanter Prize Winners Announced

### The Award Recognizes Excellence in Undergraduate Humanities Scholarship

MADISON, Wis. (August 26, 2025) – Recent graduate **Lauren Stoneman** (B.A. May '25 History, Philosophy, and Political Science with certificates in European Studies and Russian, European, and Central Asian Studies) received the 2025 [Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research](#), an annual award administered by the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for the Humanities. The \$2,000 prize is given to a graduating senior who, through a senior thesis and general academic distinction, demonstrates outstanding humanities-based scholarship of a broad and interdisciplinary nature.

It was another competitive year for the Iwanter Prize with many compelling entries. Two \$500 Honorable Mention Prizes were awarded to two students: **Natalie Suri** (B.A. May '25, History, Politics, and Educational Studies) and **Zitong Wang** (B.A. May '25, Japanese and International Studies).

The prize was established in 2000 by alumnus Sidney E. Iwanter (B.A. '71, History), who said that in this "landscape of such chaos and uncertainty, it is uplifting to witness such a continuing form of scholarship from these seniors."

### Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research: Lauren Stoneman

Lauren Stoneman won the Iwanter prize for her thesis: *On the Right to War: Reconciling Modern Nuclear Disputes with the Christian Just War Tradition*. In the project, Stoneman aims to better understand disputes in international nuclear defense law by turning to the teachings of the just war theorists; the premodern philosophers, theologians, and jurists who built the laws of war.

Stoneman writes: "By dissecting just war principles and applying them to modern nuclear issues, I come to new conclusions on the most intractable elements of the laws of war. In so doing, I demonstrate the relevance of morality to law, and more broadly, the merits of analyzing humanities disciplines in conjunction."



Karl Shoemaker, Robert F. and Sylvia T. Wagner Distinguished Professor of History and Law at UW-Madison, guided Stoneman's thesis project. Shoemaker writes that Stoneman's work "already reads like that of an advanced PhD candidate. Stoneman's research brings legal history to bear on present issues without falling into mere presentism, and with a clear eye toward how her topic offers no easy answers."



Stoneman’s honor’s thesis “demonstrates her keen interests in the historical and philosophical foundations of the right to nuclear self-defense in International Law. The questions that [Stoneman] is interested in pursuing for this project are also timely,” Shoemaker writes.

At UW-Madison, Stoneman was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. She also interned at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars to facilitate events for scholars and policy makers. Stoneman intends to continue her interdisciplinary work on philosophy, law, and conflict studies at The University of Chicago, where she will pursue a Master of Arts in International Relations.

“I fully believe that [Stoneman]’s past achievements are an indication of truly exceptional accomplishments to come,” Shoemaker writes.

The Iwanter Prize selection committee admired how Stoneman’s deeply researched and critically sharp scholarship brought early Christian thought and contemporary nuclear policy and threat into a solid—and original—constellation. The committee felt the essay demonstrated truly original research, deft movement between theoretical and practical concerns, and accomplished academic prose. Stoneman’s interweaving of moral theory, modern policy, and crisply presented intellectual history was particularly sophisticated.

## **Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research, Honorable Mention: Natalie Suri**

Natalie Suri won the Iwanter Prize Honorable Mention for her thesis: *Desegregation Policy Implementation in Austin, Texas: How Brown v. Board Made Educational Equality Improbable.*

“Seventy years ago, Brown v. The Board of Education was hailed as the solution to educational inequality yet there is still a large racial opportunity gap in American schools. I wrote my thesis because I wanted to strengthen my understanding of why,” Suri writes. “My work contributes to answering this question by detailing how the Austin Independent School District’s 1970s desegregation policies impacted minority groups. My analysis uncovers how the statistical rather than structural understanding of inequality that Brown promoted has hindered its potential to mold a more equitable educational landscape.”



Walter Stern, Associate Professor of Educational Policy Studies and History at UW-Madison, guided Suri's thesis project. Stern writes: "In addition to engaging with multiple subfields within history, [Suri's] thesis considers how politics, public policy, urban planning, and law affected students' experiences within public schools. Her work also pays careful attention to the connections between past and present educational inequality without judging historical actions and actors based upon contemporary standards."

"The story [Suri] tells is both complex and humane, revealing the complicated ways in which state actions affected ordinary lives," Stern writes. Suri "undertook this study because of her own curiosity about and interest in ameliorating racial disparities in education. Based on our conversations as she worked on her thesis, I know that she plans to draw upon the lessons she learned from this research as she embarks upon her career as a public school teacher in San Antonio, Texas."



While at UW-Madison, Suri focused on contributing to systemic change. Through the Associated Students of Madison, Suri devised and organized a recurring event called the First Generation Student Community Builder during the Wisconsin Welcome which aims to increase first generation student's confidence in navigating campus. Suri was also a mentor with the Center for Academic Excellence and taught religious school at the local reform synagogue, Temple Beth El, solidifying her wish to be a teacher. Suri is currently a fifth grade Science and Math Teacher in the San Antonio Independent School District and is a proud member of the 2025 Teach For America Corps.

The Iwanter Prize selection committee admired how Suri's thesis brought into clear focus all that schools offer and what is lost in a numbers-only approach to integration. Suri's use of primary sources and her synthesis of those sources, such as letters to the editor and legal decisions, with existing scholarship was particularly sophisticated.

## **Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research, Honorable Mention: Zitong "Yolanda" Wang**

Zitong "Yolanda" Wang won the Iwanter Prize Honorable Mention for her thesis: *How 'Japanese' Is Japanese Street Fashion? The Curious Transnational Case of Japanese Sartorial Subcultures in Tokyo and Beijing.*

Wang's thesis is an interdisciplinary study based on the theory of Transculturalism, Invented Tradition, and Symbolic Interactionism. Wang conducted qualitative interviews in both Tokyo and Beijing to question two widely existing beliefs on Japanese subculture fashion. One, Japanese

subculture fashion being purely Japanese and subcultural, and two, the binaries between the local and foreign and between the mainstream and subcultural.

Wang writes: “My study offers a close look at newer cultural flows between Japan and other countries, providing an in-depth analysis of its influence on the world at large. In addition, from a political view, this thesis highlights how branding and exporting culture have become a common political strategy that has gained widespread use in recent decades and proposes a hypothesis regarding the future global structure of cultural hegemony.”

Adam Kern, Professor of Japanese Literature and Visual Culture at UW-Madison, guided Wang’s thesis project. Kern writes that Wang’s thesis “was a magnificent success.”

“Her work is not only theoretically informed, but also deeply interdisciplinary, weaving together Transnational Studies, the sociological theory of Symbolic Interactionism, performance studies, writings on Invented Traditions, Subculture Studies, and Fashion Theory, which itself is an interdisciplinary field that explores sartorial phenomena in terms of economic, social, political, and symbolic importance,” Kern writes.

Learning is not new to Wang. “This study is not the first time I have taken an interdisciplinary view of academics. Since I was a child, I have found it interesting to connect knowledge learned from different sources and make discoveries,” Wang writes.

At UW-Madison, Wang distinguished herself with a 4.0 GPA in both of her majors. However, Wang writes: “A 4.0 GPA is not my final destination but my starting point.” Wang intends to pursue further lines of inquiry as a Master of the Arts student in East Asian Studies at Columbia University.

The Iwanter Prize selection committee felt that Wang’s thesis represented the ideals that the award is intended to recognize: clarity, interdisciplinarity, and scholarly depth. The creatively conceptualized thesis was distinguished by its vibrant objects of inquiry, deft explanations, and larger insights into social and symbolic importance in cross-cultural contexts.

## About the Iwanter Prize

The Iwanter Prize itself is about legacy and the passing of intellectual curiosity from one generation to another. The prize was established in 2000 by alumnus Sidney E. Iwanter (B.A. '71, History), a native of the Greenbush neighborhood in Madison. While an undergraduate, Iwanter's own curiosity and will to document the knowledge of the previous generation led him to secretly record the lectures of



*Iwanter in the 1967  
Madison Central High  
School Yearbook*

Professor of History and political activist Harvey Goldberg. In 2004, Iwanter generously donated these "bootlegs" to UW-Madison (the lectures are available from the [Harvey Goldberg Center](#)). Additionally, the George L. Mosse Program in History conducted [an oral history with Iwanter](#); you can find out more about his childhood in Madison, attendance at UW-Madison, career in Hollywood, and why he set up the Iwanter Prize.

Iwanter, who now lives in Los Angeles, continues to support the undergraduate humanities and the love of learning at UW-Madison, stemming from his belief that, "a well-rounded humanities education is the keystone to an informed electorate and a healthy society."

*More information about the Iwanter Prize and past winners can be found at: <https://humanities.wisc.edu/research/iwanter-prize>*