

2024 Prize Notes

2025 Tredway Library Prize for First-Year Research Judges' Statement

The Thomas Tredway Library is pleased to announce **Derek Truong** as the winner of the 2025 Tredway Library Prize for First-Year Research. Derek's compelling paper, "The Struggle for Equity in Education: Affirmative Action and Systemic Change", was written for FYI 101, taught by Dr. Mike Egan. Derek is majoring in Neuroscience with a minor in Chinese. He actively participates in the Photography Club, Phi Omega Phi, and serves as a peer tutor for the Reading and Writing Center. Derek is also a certified nursing assistant.

Derek's paper analyzed both the oppressive and liberating roles the education system holds within society. He grounded this research by examining this paradox within the case study of affirmative action, particularly alongside the experiences of Asian Americans and other historically marginalized perspectives. By examining educational theories, Derek argued that a critical analysis of affirmative action demystifies this paradox and exposes deeper systemic inequities in the education system. With a nuanced view of affirmative action based on theory, Derek concluded that systemic and pedagogical changes can occur with internal reforms, such as integrating a more inclusive curriculum that reflects a diverse student body.

To challenge popular thought about affirmative action, Derek demonstrated growth in constructing his analysis by evaluating complex and diverse sources. Additionally, he described the value of this research for solving real-world problems:

"This project helped me grow into a more intentional researcher. I learned some skills that every effective researcher should have in their repertoire: building arguments using theory, challenging surface-level assumptions, and representing diverse perspectives with careful consideration. Most importantly, I saw how research can be used as a tool for understanding not just academic issues, but also the social systems we live within and how to begin changing them."

In support of the paper, Dr. Mike Egan shared that Derek "demonstrated his strong skills as a scholar and researcher in my course and through this paper, by taking on challenging readings and putting himself in a position to make complex arguments."

Overall, the judges were impressed by how Derek critically evaluated theoretical perspectives to synthesize and develop his own critique of a contemporary societal issue. In particular, Derek's paper pushed beyond popular arguments to creatively illustrate the dual roles of oppression and liberation within education.

This year, the judges are also happy to announce that **Selina Yawson** is an honorable mention awardee for her paper, "Chasing Dreams in Modern America: Can We All Still Reach the Stars?". The paper was written for an FYI 101 course taught by Dr. Umme Al-Wazedi. Selina is majoring in Accounting and Data Analytics. She also serves as a Viking Mentor, holds the position of Vice President of Service for Alpha Phi Omega, and is the social media manager for the African Students Association.

"Chasing Dreams in Modern America: Can We All Still Reach the Stars?" is an excellent and timely examination of the American Dream during a time of political polarization and economic uncertainty. Yawson synthesizes systemic social critique with close literary analysis, applying a reading of Langston Hughes' poetry to address the current moment. Her unique selection of sources and well-reasoned call to action earned the paper an honorable mention.

Please join us in congratulating Derek Truong and Selina Yawson for their excellent work! Their papers will be available in [Augustana Digital Commons alongside previous prizewinners](#).