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Hillsdale College Presents 2026 Judith Finn Memorial Award to Master's Graduate Jameson Payne

Hillsdale presents the award each year to an outstanding master's graduate.

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College presented the 2026 Judith Finn Memorial Award to Jameson Payne of Twinsburg, Ohio, this spring. The award is presented each year to a graduating master's student. Payne received his master's degree in politics in December from Hillsdale's Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship.

"Jameson is a brilliant student with a passion to see American law informed by its founding principles," said Ronald J. Pestritto, dean of the graduate school and professor of politics. "His work reflects a desire to understand first principles and to get to the truth by engaging seriously with great thinkers."

The Judith Finn Memorial Award is presented each spring to a Hillsdale College master's graduate based on his or her thesis or comprehensive exam and overall graduate program performance. The winner is selected by a committee of faculty members from the Graduate School of Statesmanship.

"The quality of Hillsdale's students and faculty has exceeded all expectations," Payne said. "The students here are all serious about getting to the truth, and they're very open-minded and insightful. Likewise, the professors demonstrate impressive command over the texts they teach; there's a genuine passion for the subject and an eagerness to help students in their own intellectual pursuits."

The Judith Finn Memorial Award was established by her husband Michael Finn and her family following her passing in 2015. It honors her legacy of civic engagement and scholarly work. Finn earned a master's degree in political science from Michigan State University but — as

noted by her family — "would have much preferred a degree from Hillsdale College had its graduate school been established 50 years earlier."

Payne received his Bachelor of Integrative Studies in Physics and Political Science from Kent State University and is now working at the U.S. Department of Labor in the Office of Policy. He intends to attend law school and pursue a career in public-interest litigation. His main research interest is in the American founding and how its principles should inform modern constitutional and administrative law. His master's thesis was titled "Leviathan's Rise: Nietzsche, Tocqueville, and Weber on Administrative Tyranny."

For photos of Payne, click here. For photos of Hillsdale College, click here. For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click here.

About the Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship
The Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship was founded in 2010 "to educate students in the language of American constitutionalism and to place its graduates in positions of public service in politics, in journalism, in the Academy, and elsewhere." Its courses of study, which culminate in either a Master of Arts or a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics, are centered around the core texts from the Western and American traditions of political thought — what Thomas Jefferson called the "elementary books of public right." All admitted students received a full-tuition scholarship and admitted Ph.D. students receive an additional living stipend. For more information, gradschool.hillsdale.edu.

About Hillsdale College
Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, Imprimis, with a circulation of more than 7.5 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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