



2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Sié Chéou-Kang Center
for International Security and Diplomacy
Josef Korbel School of Global and Public Affairs
University of Denver



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International Security & Diplomacy
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



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ABOUT US



The Sié Chéou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy at the Josef Korbel School of Global and Public Affairs is a center of excellence within the University of Denver, known nationally and globally for its creative, multidirectional approach to international security and diplomacy. At our core, our research and programming advance knowledge and practice around global security, prosperity, and social justice through innovative research, interdisciplinary education, and thoughtful engagement with those who strive for a more just, prosperous, and peaceful world.

Our affiliated faculty are leaders in their fields, and our diverse community includes Sié Fellows, postdocs, visiting scholars, practitioners-in-residence, decision-makers, activists, and artists.

Since its founding in 2009, the Sié Center has grown into a hub of path-breaking, collaborative, rigorous, and practice-oriented research, emerging as one of the country's leading centers for excellence in research and training on international security and diplomacy.



Read the Sié Center's
featured piece in
[Korbel's newsroom](#)

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Global politics is undergoing rapid change. Longstanding wars in Sudan and Ukraine alongside new conflicts in the Middle East challenge us to examine our approaches to understanding violence anew. The Sié Chéou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy is dedicated to deepening that understanding, but also to suggesting pathways for sustainable peace and enhanced human welfare.

The global balance of power is shifting, encouraging countries across the world, starting with the United States, to revisit the economic models on which the global economy had been predicated for generations. Foundational alliances are under threat, while international cooperation among major powers appears ever harder to achieve, even as increasingly extreme weather portends serious disruption and loss of life.

Amidst global uncertainty and increasing conflict, the Sié Center over the last year has supported research and programming that tries to unveil the root causes of conflict and productive ways forward. As our annual report outlines, our faculty are exploring everything from gender dynamics in conflict and leadership to nuclear proliferation and the need for critical minerals in the energy transition. Korbelt students are integral to the Sié Center's research. Through the turmoil, we at the Sié Center are grateful for community engagement and input, and particularly for faculty collaboration on our events. We look forward to another dynamic year together, exploring economic inequality, human rights, and we hope, the foundations for enduring peace.

– Dr. Rachel Epstein

Professor of International Relations
Director of the Sié Chéou-Kang Center for
International Security and Diplomacy

~\$90,000

Combined New Grant
Funding Awarded

23

Affiliated
Faculty

25

Awards

3

Visiting
Scholars

19

Events,
Simulations,
and Other
Programming

12

Publications

10

Sie Fellows

70

Average
Attendance

52

Student Research Assistants

25

Special
Guests and
Speakers

50+

Faulty Speaking Events,
Interviews, and
Media Appearances

BY THE NUMBERS

YEAR IN REVIEW:

FALL QUARTER EVENTS

POLICY POP-UP SERIES

SEPT. 18, 2025

Pressing Issues & Conflicts in Global Security

Faculty and students discussed Russia's invasion of Ukraine and tensions in Poland, a potential re-emergence of conflict in northern Ethiopia, the war in Gaza and the role of the International Criminal Court.

GLOBAL SECURITY & WAR IN UKRAINE

SEPT. 29, 2025

Ukrainian attorney-turned-army-volunteer Alex Gorgan and French war correspondent Florent Marcie joined professors Rachel Epstein and Hilary Matfess to discuss life on the front lines, co-hosted with the Ukraine Aid Fund.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY SERIES

OCT. 9, 2025

Storytelling & Hispanic culture through dance, featuring Ballet Hispánico Artistic Director Eduardo Vilario.
(Cultural Diplomacy initiative — see p. 15)

POLICY POP-UP SERIES

OCT. 22, 2025

Democratic Resistance and Civic Engagement in a Time of Global Autocratization

A discussion of resistance to authoritarianism at home and abroad, the role of technology in protest movements and peacebuilding in divided societies.

YEAR IN REVIEW: WINTER QUARTER EVENTS

TRUMP 2.0 YEAR 1: POLICY, POLITICS & GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

JAN. 20, 2026

Co-hosted with the Scrivner Institute of Public Policy exactly one year after the inauguration, faculty experts reflected on the first year of the second Trump administration's domestic and foreign policy agenda and its implications for governance

THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL SPORT IN THE SHADOW OF MILAN CORTINA

FEB. 5, 2026

Korbel faculty and alumni panelists explored Olympics and Paralympics as sites of both unity and contestation. Guest speakers included representatives from U.S. Department of State, U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Kroenke Sports and Entertainment.

POLICY POP-UP SERIES

FEB. 12, 2026

Global Economic Issues of Today
Faculty George DeMartino, Ilene Grabel and Martin Rhodes fielded questions on the global economy.

4 YEARS OF WAR IN UKRAINE

FEB. 24, 2026

A faculty panel — including Korbel's Lewis Griffith and Rachel Epstein, Nadia Kaneva of the Media, Film & Journalism Studies department, and human rights experts from the Sturm College of Law — assessed the state of the war four years after Russia's invasion.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY SERIES

FEB. 28, 2026

This unique engagement with Ephrat Asherie, co-creator of Ephrat Asherie Dance's newest work, Shadow Cities, explored the relations between African American vernacular dance and jazz. (Cultural Diplomacy initiative — see p. 15)

POLICY POP-UP SERIES

MARCH 4, 2026

War In Iran
Faculty Micheline Ishay, Ahmed Abdrabou and David Goldfischer led an informal discussion on the escalating conflict.

YEAR IN REVIEW: SPRING QUARTER EVENTS

NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE CLEAN ENERGY ERA

APRIL 9, 2026

Faculty Deborah Avant and Linda Méndez-Barrientos joined guest speakers Devin Finn and Tricia Olsen to recap an international meeting of experts on the ethical dilemmas of the critical minerals race.

THE NEW WORLD DISORDER & THE QUESTION OF GENOCIDE

APRIL 23, 2026

From Nagorno-Karabakh to Sudan: A fireside chat with Dr. A. Dirk Moses of the City College of New York, moderated by Professor Marie Berry, with Dr. Simon Maghakyan of the University of Oxford and Colorado College.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY SERIES

APRIL 27, 2026

Cumbia and Culture Across the Globe with Latin GRAMMY-nominated Colombian singer-songwriter and accordionist Gregorio Uribe.
(Cultural Diplomacy initiative — see p. 15)

EMBASSY SIMULATION WITH AMB. DAVID YOUNG

MAY 8, 2026

Students represented competing interest groups in an escalating diplomatic scenario, with real-time feedback from former U.S. Ambassador to Malawi David Young.

AMERICA'S SECURITY IN A NEW ERA OF GREAT-POWER COMPETITION

MAY 14, 2026

The Anschutz National Security Lecture Series welcomed Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution to discuss the evolution of U.S. defense strategy and Colorado's role in national defense.

MEET THE MEDIATORS

MAY 20, 2026

Peacebuilding Through Dialogue in Conflict-Affected Communities. Practitioners from Northern Ireland and beyond shared what works to rebuild trust and foster peace after conflict and polarization.

MEET THE TEAM

FACULTY, STAFF, & VISITING SCHOLARS



Director
Rachel Epstein



Program Manager
Mandy Loader

KORBEL FACULTY AFFILIATES



Deborah
Avant



Naazneen
Barma



Marie Berry



Debak Das



George
DeMartino



Rebecca
Galemba



Ilene Grabel



Lewis Griffith



Oliver Kaplan



Kara Kingma
Neu



Hilary Matfess



Linda Méndez-
Barrientos



Martin Rhodes



Carol Spahn



Rachel
Sigman



Tim Sisk

VISITING SCHOLARS



Roudabeh Kishi,
Visiting Scholar



Kimberly Pfeifer,
Visiting Scholar



Ariel Petrovics,
Visiting Scholar

NON-RESIDENT AFFILIATES



Lisa
Conant



Devin
Finn



Cullen
Hendrix



Kelley
Loper



Julia
Macdonald



Tricia
Olsen



Francisco
Rodriguez



Andrea
Stanton*

FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

Our interdisciplinary faculty bring leading expertise across security studies, gender, environmental policy, global economics, human rights and diplomacy to both their own scholarship and the Sié Center's collaborative projects. This year, faculty published widely-read books and articles, secured major grants, briefed policymakers, and mentored the next generation of scholars and practitioners, ensuring the center's work stays as interdisciplinary and policy-relevant as the challenges it addresses.

Here are just a few of our faculty's many notable highlights this year:

Debak Das

Professor Das contributed articles in a variety of media outlets this year as well as served as a panelist at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs and the Geostrata online panel "Moral Exhaustion in Nuclear Arms Control." He also hosted "Faculty & Student Workshop on Nuclear Security" in partnership with the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) and other local universities.

Hilary Matfess

Professor Matfess released two new books, *Putting Women In Their Place: Gender, Power, and World Politics*, and her newest release, *After Liberation: Women and the Politics of Expectations in Rebel-to-Party Transitions* in which she examines how former rebel groups and female soldiers decide to stay militant or adopt peaceful politics after a war ends.

Deborah Avant

Professor Avant received the Distinguished Scholar Award by the International Studies Association's International Security Studies Section and Interdisciplinary Studies Section at the ISA annual meeting.

Rachel Epstein, Oliver Kaplan, Tim Sisk, George DeMartino, & Tricia Olsen

Their book Speaking Science to Power: Responsible Researchers and Policymaking was shortlisted by the Conflict Research Society for its 2026 Book of the Year Prize.

Rebecca Galembo

Professor Galembo's Court Transparency Project shared phase one of its data at a community vigil outside the Aurora GEO detention center. The Courtwatch Project and related work has been featured in multiple corresponding articles and media appearances.

Ilene Grabel

Professor Grabel was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association for Evolutionary Economics for a three-year term, 2026-28. She also won the 2026 Outstanding Teaching Award at Korbel Honors, which recognizes extraordinary commitment to Korbel students and exemplifies commitment both inside and outside of the classroom

Marie Berry

Professor Berry received the university's 2026 Research Scholar Award - Established for her creative, rigorous, and impactful work. She also participated in this year's UN Commission on the Status of Women event "Social Healing Through Advocacy: Women's Leadership in Historical Redress."

Fritz Mayer, Rachel Epstein, Deborah Avant, & Naazneen Barma

Dean Mayer led a multi-day workshop and several virtual sessions with fellow Responsible Engagement lead researchers, alongside deans from across the country and the world, on the topic of "Rethinking International Affairs Education." The project's aim is to explore how international affairs and public policy degrees can tackle emerging global issues.

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

The Sié Fellowship is a two-year, full-tuition scholarship awarded each year to outstanding master's degree-seeking students from the U.S. and abroad. This year, we welcomed five new Sié Fellows to our community:

- Fahad Al-Salam (Bangladesh)
- Arxhend Blakcori (Kosovo)
- Ripa Ghosh (Bangladesh)
- Anna Guskova (Russia)
- Modeste Ndangamira (Rwanda)

We also celebrate five Sié Fellows who graduated this year: Simon Bayingana, Işıl Dikici, Dmytro Hryckowian, Anna Rehm and Nat Turiczek. Each has brought their own depth of care, experience and energy to the Sié Center during their graduate studies, and we can't wait to see what they accomplish next.

You can read full bios on our [website](https://korbel.du.edu/sie/people/students/sie-fellows/):
korbel.du.edu/sie/people/students/sie-fellows/



Simon Bayingana

Pursued his MA in International Studies with a focus on human rights, bringing years of community organizing, movement-building and climate justice advocacy from Uganda into his coursework at Korbel.



Işıl Dikici

Completed her master's degree in Global Environmental Sustainability, building on a prior career as a chemist and years spent volunteering on organic farms and with environmental NGOs to deepen her expertise in sustainable practices and stewardship.



Dmytro Hryckowi

Earned his MA in International Security, sharpening a focus on Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia first developed at George Washington University and deepened through five years working across the U.S. intelligence community, including at the FBI and ODNI.



Anna Rehm

Completed an International Security master's, building on an undergraduate foundation in international relations, political theory and Arabic from Michigan State University, and a commitment to diplomacy shaped by an internship with the Meta Peace Team.



Nat Turiczek

Finished their MA in International Human Rights with a focus on gender justice and advocacy, building on undergraduate research at Eckerd College on human rights systems and prison abolition, and prior work combating human trafficking in Cambodia.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

New Endeavors

Our interdisciplinary team of Sié faculty brings their leading expertise from many different fields to both their own work and to our collaborative projects.



CRAF'd: Women's Wings of Non-State Armed Groups

Nearly 40% of rebellions worldwide since 1945 have included at least one all-female unit, yet women's wings within non-state armed groups remain understudied. This project expands the Sié Center's Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) Project to focus specifically on these wings — documenting their roles in combat, social service provision and political negotiation in conflict-affected areas.

Funded by the Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd) and conducted in partnership with the Peace Research Institute Oslo's (PRIO) Women's Empowerment in Peace Processes (EMPOW) project, the work has three main outputs: an expanded quantitative dataset covering more non-state armed groups; new qualitative research on women's roles in rebel decision-making and their relationships with civilians, the state and civil society; and a policymaker's guide illustrated with case studies from Myanmar and Ethiopia. Together, these outputs aim to support the anticipation, prevention of and response to crises, and to promote long-term peace and stability.

Learn more about the project at www.waarproject.com

Korbel Research Team

Principal Investigator:

Hilary Matfess

Research Assistants:

Sama Abdulameer

Pascale Correa-Bruzzese

Amirah Creighton

Halle Fadil-Moore

Dariel González García

Isabella Knaus

Anna Kubas

Madison Mitchell

Modeste Ndangamira

Caroline Rhude

Jonathan Rockford

Michael Self

Tanner Richard

Molly Ross

Margaret Sampson-Green

Sammy Ventimiglia

Ariana Vigil

Julia Weeden



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Student Successes

We could not do our work without the dozens of students who support the Sié Center's faculty, projects, and programs. Our student research assistants gain valuable experience, develop skills, and network with leading experts.

Bearing Witness: Documenting Denver's Immigration Courts

As part of Professor Rebecca Galemba's Court Transparency Project, graduate research assistant Jenni Gutierrez-Marquez documented hundreds of hearings in Denver's non-detained and Aurora's detained immigration courts. She helped collect and transcribe testimonies from immigrants released from detention in collaboration with Casa de Paz, a Denver nonprofit supporting people navigating detention and release.

Her work was featured in various media outlets, including a front-page feature in the Denver Post, coverage on Noticias Colorado and Televisa Univision Miami, and two recent webinars: one hosted by immigration data expert Austin Kocher and another with the American Friends Service Committee's Coloradans for Immigrant Rights. Jenni's research also fed into a forthcoming article, "Between Languages and Laws: The Challenges of Immigration Proceedings," in Semi-Structured: The Open Access Journal for Public Ethnography and a companion piece for Korbel Newsroom co-written with fellow research assistant Lety Madrigal Tapia.



Sport, Peace and the 2025-2026 Global Stage

With the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics and the FIFA World Cup both in the calendar year, Sié Fellow Fahad Al-Salam worked alongside Sié faculty member Timothy Sisk throughout the academic year to research the complex nexus between international sport and peace.

Their work explored two threads: how national-level sport organizations, such as National Olympic Committees, contributed to inclusive national narratives and social cohesion within societies divided along sectarian lines;; and the neuroscience underlying sport-based interventions in humanitarian contexts.

The research built toward a fuller understanding of the often-cited but little-understood relationship between sport and conflict resolution at the community and national levels. Their findings will appear in a forthcoming book project and monograph.



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Theory and Practice



Mapping Local Risk: Building Early-Warning Indicators for Political Violence

This year, two Korbel research assistants supported Visiting Scholar Dr. Roudabeh Kishi's research into how local context shapes the risk of political violence, helping identify and test practical ways to measure what makes a place susceptible to mobilization. Their work focused on factors such as the presence of active groups, prior protest activity, and key civic or symbolic landmarks, and on how these signals can help assess whether reports of potential future unrest are credible.

This research marks an important step toward turning broad ideas about local "activity landscapes" and early warning into concrete, usable measurement strategies — laying the groundwork for tools that can help policymakers, local officials and civil society better anticipate and respond to risks of mobilization and violence, while ensuring future data collection stays targeted and useful for real-world policy.

PI: Dr. Roudabeh Kishi

Student Research Assistants:

Pasang "Cara" Sherpa and Ellen Jensen

The Two-Nuclear-Peer Threat, Deterrence, and Competition in the Indo-Pacific

Funded by the Stanton Foundation's Nuclear Security Research Grant, Professor Das' research examines what is theoretically and empirically known about trilateral nuclear competition. For the first time in its history, the United States faces two nuclear-peer adversaries at once: China is building hundreds of new intercontinental ballistic missile silos, while Russia continues to modernize its nuclear delivery systems, all without any arms control agreements in place to constrain either country's forces.

The project explores how existing theories of nuclear deterrence explain — or fail to explain — how states manage competitive relationships with two near-peer nuclear rivals simultaneously, and how the deterrence dilemma facing the U.S. differs from anything it navigated during or after the Cold War. It also examines how building up arsenals and alliances to counter two peer rivals at once could carry downstream proliferation consequences of its own.

PI: Dr. Debak Das

Student Research Assistant: Dmytro Hryckowian

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY



The Sié Center's Cultural Diplomacy Initiative invites students and the wider Denver community to explore how the arts build connection across nations, cultures and generations. This year's series, run in partnership with the Robert & Judi Newman Center for the Performing Arts, brought internationally recognized artists to campus for public conversations on Hispanic dance and Afro Latin music and cumbia.

Carla Dirlikov Canales also returned this spring to teach the initiative's flagship course, an intensive eight-to-10-day class funded by a gift from the Bonfils Stanton Foundation. A former classical opera singer turned two-decade U.S. State Department arts envoy — including as senior advisor and envoy for cultural exchange at the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities — Canales built the course around three pillars: defining culture and cultural diplomacy in theory, studying historical and global case studies, and examining how forces like artificial intelligence are reshaping the field today. Students worked in small groups alongside local arts and cultural leaders to design a complete cultural diplomacy program for a real-world simulation, budget and implementation plan included.



Cumbia and Culture Across the Globe

April 27, 2026

Latin Grammy-nominated Colombian singer-songwriter and accordionist Gregorio Uribe joined the Newman's Center's Luke Wachter alongside Dr. Lydia Keff of DU's Department of Spanish Language, Literary and Cultural Studies for a conversation tracing cumbia's growth from a traditional Colombian music form into a cultural phenomenon across Latin America and the world.

Cross-Fertilization of Afro Latin Music & Dance

Feb. 18, 2026

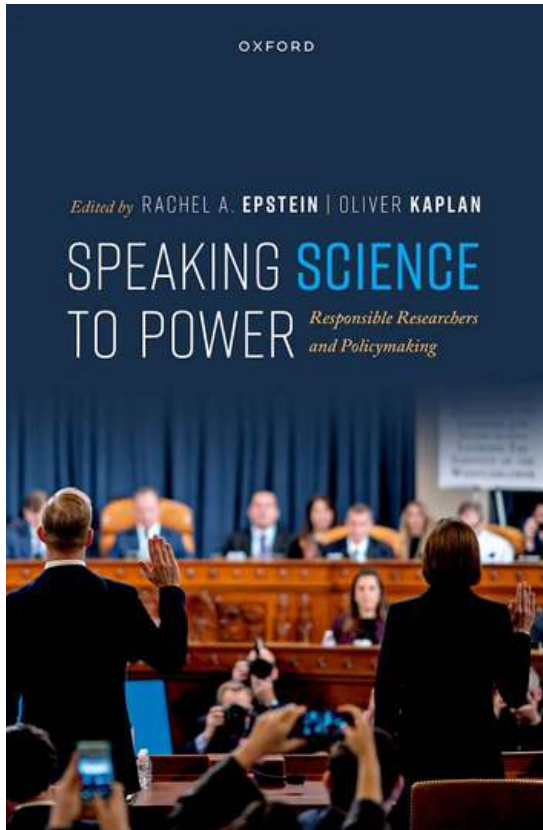
Choreographer Ephrat Asherie and pianist-composer Arturo O'Farrill, co-creators of Ephrat Asherie Dance's newest work, "Shadow Cities," joined the Sié Center and the Newman Center for a conversation on the relationship between African American vernacular dance and jazz, tracing connections between underground club and street dance, Afro Latin music traditions and modern jazz and exploring how art nurtures dialogue around culture and heritage.

Storytelling & Hispanic Culture Through Dance

Oct. 9, 2025

The Sié Center and the Newman Center for the Performing Arts welcomed Ballet Hispánico Artistic Director Eduardo Vilario for a conversation with Newman Center Executive Director Aisha Ahmad-Post on how dance unites cultures through storytelling, movement and exchange.

RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Principal investigators on the “Responsible Policy Engagement” project, funded by the Carnegie Foundation (formerly the Carnegie Corporation of New York) continued to explore the ways in which researchers engage in the policy world.

In the “Rethinking International Affairs” project, led by Korbel Dean Fritz Mayer, we held a series of meetings to explore how faculty at the professional schools of international affairs (APSIA) could restructure international relations training for the changing global landscape. We will be seeking student input on this project in fall of 2026, so keep an eye out for an upcoming opportunity to participate.

The project team’s collective volume, *Speaking Science to Power: Responsible Researchers and Policymaking*, was ranked #1 by International Affairs in its 2025 winter reading list. The Conflict Research Society also shortlisted the book for its 2026 best book prize. Congratulations to the contributors!

Navigating the Complexities of the Clean Energy Era

As part of the Responsible Public Engagement initiative, Sié Center faculty Profs. Deborah Avant and Linda Méndez-Barrientos hosted an international workshop in December, which examined the ethical dilemmas at the heart of the global clean energy transition. Scholars from the U.S., Colombia, Indonesia, Australia, Peru, and beyond presented research spanning the geopolitics of critical mineral extraction, the human costs borne by frontline communities, and the models shaping a more just energy transition.

The workshop also turned to how communities, democratic institutions and local strategies intersect with extractive industry. A closing session featuring Sié Center faculty Deborah Avant and Tricia Olsen along with Devin Finn of Lehigh University examined business's role in advancing human rights and the path forward for participatory, democratically accountable energy policy.

In April, lead researchers welcomed the DU community for a public-facing research talk on: 1) geopolitical dynamics, material requirements, and different visions of a sustainable future; 2) communities, strategies, and democracy around extractive industry expansion; and 3) opportunities and challenges moving forward.



INCLUSIVE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

Nurturing the Ecosystem for Thriving Global Feminist Leadership

IGLI's "Feminist Wins in a World on Fire" webinar series brought together frontline organizers to share stories of feminist power amid rising authoritarianism and backlash. A March webinar marking International Women's Day welcomed Cathi Choi, Ruth Mumbi, Catalina Martínez Coral, Julia Zulver and Marie Berry, who discussed organizing wins from Kenya, Korea and across Latin America. IGLI followed up in June with a virtual event on stories of power from Brazil, Jordan and South Sudan, featuring Aluel Atem, Banan Suad Abu Zain Eddin and Danielle Assis. Together, the series reached global audiences with concrete examples of how feminist organizers are winning, even as backlash intensifies.

IGLI also continued to grow the Women's Rights After War (WRAW) Project's reach with a special issue of Security Dialogue, "Caring and Creative Resistance to Violence," co-edited by Marie Berry and Milli Lake. This interdisciplinary collection explored how communities creatively resist violence and rebuild after conflict. In addition, building on the Feminist Peace Playbook's 2025 debut, IGLI and the Feminist Peace Initiative released a Spanish-language edition, the Guía Estratégica to serve Spanish-speaking feminist peace movements across the Americas.

Read more about [IGLI's work](#):

www.theinclusivegloballeadershipinitiative.org/



Photo Credit: Ruthie Brownfield

IVLP: HOSTING GLOBAL LEADERS

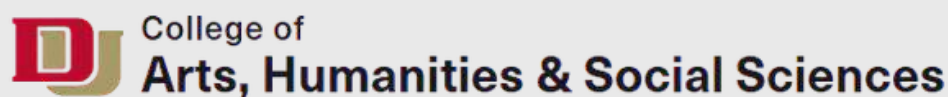
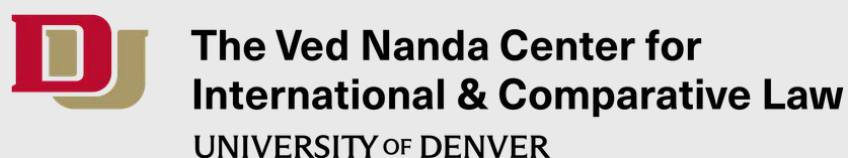
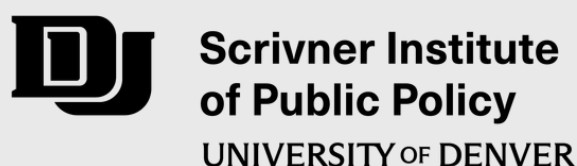
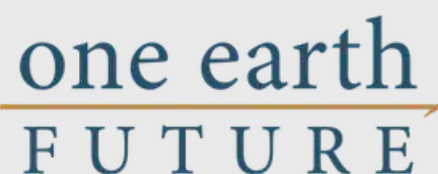
In partnership with World Denver, the Sié Chéou-Kang Center continued our partnership with the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the U.S.'s flagship professional exchange program connecting emerging foreign leaders with American counterparts to advance mutual understanding and U.S. foreign policy goals.

In September, the Center partnered with World Denver to host visitors from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, discussing academic freedom and curricular development amid Russian censorship. Then in February, faculty Rachel Epstein and Martin Rhodes welcomed 18 professionals from across Eurasia to explore U.S.–Europe relations, covering NATO's shifting role, international financial systems, the war in Ukraine, and the influence of small states like those in the Western Balkans.

Both visits reflect the Center's role as a hub for international dialogue on the security and policy questions shaping Europe and Eurasia today.

OUR PARTNERS

The Sié Chéou-Kang Center is grateful to the universities, foundations, organizations, and government agencies that partner with us to fund and conduct our research and programs, as well as to the research centers across the Korbel School and the University of Denver whose collaboration drives our cross-cutting projects and initiatives. Thank you for helping advance our shared mission.



THANK YOU

We are deeply grateful to everyone who supported the Sié Center's community and activities throughout the 2025–2026 academic year, from our faculty, students, and staff to our alumni, partners, and friends.

Together, you make this work possible.



CONTACT US



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