



Embassy  
of the Czech Republic  
in Washington, D. C.



GEORGETOWN  
UNIVERSITY  
College of Arts & Sciences

Department of  
Performing Arts

## ESSAY COMPETITION

# The Meaning That Still Matters

**Deadline: October 31, 2026 | Main Prize: \$500**

***Open to all undergraduate students at Georgetown University***

In 2026, the Embassy of the Czech Republic, in collaboration with Georgetown University's Department of Performing Arts, commemorates the 90th anniversary of the birth of Václav Havel, playwright, dissident, moral philosopher, and the first President of the Czech Republic, with a special undergraduate essay competition.

This year's theme is inspired by Havel's reflection:

**"The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less."**

Tragédie moderního člověka není v tom, že ví čím dál méně o smyslu svého života, ale v tom, že mu to čím dál méně vadí.

~ Václav Havel, 1986, *Disturbing the Peace (Dálkový výslech)*

Georgetown University undergraduate students are invited to submit a **500–1,000 word essay**, concisely written, reflecting on the theme **The Meaning That Still Matters**.

Drawing inspiration from Havel's writings and public thought, students are encouraged to consider how questions of meaning, responsibility, and moral awareness resonate in today's world. Possible areas of reflection may include, though are not limited to: civic engagement, democratic responsibility, ethical leadership, social indifference, freedom of expression, technological change, global crises, or the role of the individual in shaping a humane society.

Essays should demonstrate critical thinking, originality, and clarity of argument. Interdisciplinary approaches are welcome.

*The award will be presented during an Embassy event at its discretion.*

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## Historical Background

Václav Havel (1936–2011) was a playwright, essayist, dissident, and political leader whose moral voice helped shape the democratic transformation of Central Europe. As a co-founder of Charter 77, he challenged the communist regime's failure to uphold human rights. Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Havel became the last President of Czechoslovakia and later the first President of the Czech Republic.

Havel's writings and speeches emphasized conscience, responsibility, and the ethical dimension of politics. In 1990, shortly after his election, he addressed a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress, articulating a vision of democracy rooted not only in institutions, but in human responsibility.

Georgetown University held special significance for Havel, who believed deeply in the role of students in shaping democratic change. In 2013, Václav Havel's Place was dedicated in Georgetown's Alumni Square as a living memorial for reflection and dialogue. A bust of Havel, dedicated in 2014, stands in the Freedom Foyer of the U.S. Capitol.



## ESSAY COMPETITION: The Meaning That Still Matters

Deadline: October 31, 2026

### **AWARD:**

The winning student will receive special recognition at a conference commemorating the 90th anniversary of the birth of Václav Havel, as well as a **\$500 cash prize**. The recipient will also be invited to read their essay during the event and participate in a moderated discussion reflecting on the ideas and themes explored in their work.

### **ELIGIBILITY AND VERIFICATION:**

Registered undergraduate students at Georgetown University may submit their essays to the competition. The selected winner will have to submit an official letter from the Registrar's Office on letterhead, verifying his or her enrollment as a student at Georgetown University before receiving the above stated award.

### **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

All participants to this competition must confirm that their submissions are of their own original work and are not generated by artificial intelligence (AI). The use of generative AI to write or produce any portion of the essay is not permitted.

### **WHAT THE READERS LOOK FOR:**

- Clear articulation.
- Thoroughly thought-out, tightly focused essay.
- Originality and imagination.
- Eloquence of writing style.
- Intensity and unity in the essay.
- Observation of rules for Standard English usage (grammar, punctuation, mechanics) in writing.

### **ESSAY FORMAT:**

- In 500–1,000 words.
- Essay must be the original, unpublished work of one student.
- Only one essay per student may be submitted.
- All essays must be written in English.
- Essay should be titled, typed in 12 point font, easily readable font (such as Times New Roman), double-spaced with 1" margins and numbered pages.

### **SUBMISSION OF MATERIALS:**

- Essays must be uploaded as a PDF file.
- Submissions will be judged by representatives from the Embassy of the Czech Republic. Please include your name and contact information in the body of your email when submitting your essay.
- Entries must be emailed to **czechembassypr@gmail.com** by the deadline of October 31, 2026, 11:59 PM, EST. Please put "Czech Essay Competition" in the subject line.
- Once submitted, you will not be able to edit your entry.
- Please note that due to the expected volume of entries, no materials will be critiqued or returned.
- No paper or hard copy submissions will be accepted.

### **JUDGING**

- The essays will be judged by representatives from the Embassy of the Czech Republic.

*The Embassy of the Czech Republic reserves the right to publish the winning essays, in whole or in part. Said essays may not be published elsewhere without written permission from the Czech Embassy. The Embassy of the Czech Republic is located at 3900 Spring of Freedom Street, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA.*