Welcome from the Department Head

Welcome back to the Hill! We hope that everyone had a safe, healthy, and enjoyable summer and that your first weeks of classes are off to an exciting start. As you will see in the pages that follow, our department is actively engaging our students, our scholarship, and the world around us—through innovative pedagogies, numerous publications, and travel for both sharing our scholarship and conducting fieldwork and research.

Our department has undergone several changes in faculty. Last year, the previous department head, Eric Bain-Selbo, left for a job in Indiana and last year, both Grayson Hunt and Ben Lennertz left WKU as well. As we sadly said goodbye to these friends, we were also excited to welcome new faces to the 3rd floor of Cherry Hall. Last year Sophia Arjana joined our faculty as our new Islamic Studies scholar. As someone with a focus on Southeast Asia and Indonesia—the largest Muslim country in the world—Dr. Arjana brings with her new strengths to the department, which culminated last year in the introduction of several new courses, such as Islam and Pilgrimage and Islam in America. In addition, last year Judy Russel joined our department and will be here again this year teaching a wide array of Philosophy courses as Audrey Anton is away on research leave.

This year we welcome two new faculty. Elizabeth Gish joins our department from the Honors College. She taught a course in our department last year on Sexuality, Gender and the Bible and she is currently team teaching a course on World Religious Literature.

Please look out for more courses from Dr. Gish in the years to come. In addition, we welcome Jannai Shields as Dr. Lennertz’s replacement; he will be offering a wide range of courses this year in our Philosophy program, including Truth and Relativism, Philosophy of Mind, and Philosophy of Science.

Last year we were busy making changes to our Philosophy and Religion majors and minors, transforming them into more vibrant and exciting programs that are more accessible to students. In addition to creating a number of new courses, we have also expanded our reach in WKU’s Colonnade program, with several new courses on religion and ecology, gender and religion, pilgrimage, and Islam in America. Perhaps more importantly for those who are, unlike myself, not stuck in the 19th century, our department has also been developing its social media presence with the creation of a department Twitter account and a revamped Facebook page and website. Finally, students who are members of WKU’s chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa, the national honors society for religion and theology, have created a religious studies club and are planning many great events throughout the year.

Please follow us on Twitter @WKUPhilReligion and at our Facebook page to learn more about our department, the courses we are offering in the spring, and the many exciting events that we have planned this year. The 3rd floor of Cherry Hall is an amazing place to be!

Wishing you success, well-being, and health,
Jeffrey Samuels
Interim Department Head

New Faculty

Dr. Elizabeth Gish joins us from the Honors College and teaches courses on religion, public life, gender, and sexuality. We are thrilled to have the addition of another tenured faculty member in our department and are especially excited about the many ways in which Dr. Gish’s areas of expertise will strengthen our programs.

Jannai Shields comes to us from University of Rochester, where he will defend his dissertation “I’ll Level with You—Emergent Levels Are the Only True Levels” this Fall. His areas of specialty include Metaphysics, Philosophy of Science, and Philosophy of Mind. One of his favorite things about Philosophy is that it allows people to learn about other subjects, such as science, religion, and history.

Follow us on Twitter! @WKUPHILRELIGION
WKU students are what makes our department great. In this section, we profile three remarkable individuals.

My name is Maggie, and I am a recent ARC (Asian Religions and Cultures) and IA (International Affairs) graduate. During my senior year at WKU, I was accepted into a graduate program at American University in International Peace and Conflict Resolution. My university focuses on training young people dedicated to the idea of service and of serving our country, but more importantly our world—by “waging peace.” I was immediately drawn to the goal of serving my greater community. At AU, I am a research assistant, where I work with a professor on doing research for his book on populism in Israel. Within my degree program, my current concentrations are in peacebuilding and international negotiation, and after graduation I hope to work abroad in the non-profit sector before returning to school for my doctorate. I am only one week into my program, and I already feel well prepared by my undergraduate studies at WKU and am extremely excited about all the new knowledge I am gaining.

-Maggie Mercer, Class of 2018

I am currently a seminarian for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. I am also a First Philosophy student at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology located in St. Meinrad, Indiana. St. Meinrad Archabbey is the Benedictine monastery that graciously hosts and runs the seminarian formation programs. Basically, what this means is that the Archdiocese of Louisville is sponsoring me to study at St. Meinrad Seminary for priesthood studies. Seminary consists of two graduate degree programs: a two-year Master of Arts program in Catholic Philosophical Studies (also known as Pre-Theology) and a four-year Master of Divinity program in Catholic Theological Studies. Currently, I am in the First year of the Philosophy program and am just beginning. However, I can already tell that I would not have gotten this far in my studies if it were not for the faculty and staff of the Philosophy and Religion Department at WKU. The faculty were some of the first to help prepare me for the educational rigor found at seminary. Their tutelage, support, and encouragement in the academic discipline allowed me to achieve my BA (2017) and MA (2018) in Religious Studies. The staff in the department also pushed me and enabled me to persevere in my degrees, especially when it came time to writing and defending my MA Thesis. I will never forget the help and support that WKU’s Department of Philosophy and Religion Faculty and Staff has given me, nor will I forget the impact they have made on my life.

-Kenneth Nauert, Class of 2018
Student Profiles

Lillian Nellans is another student our department is very proud of. A 2018 graduate, Lillian double majored in Self Designed Studies (Honors) and Philosophy. She won the top honor in the university as the Ogden Foundation Scholar. Ms. Nellans was also awarded the Rotary Foundation Global Grant Scholarship, which carries with it a $45,000 fund for graduate study. She is using it to study International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In addition to these awards, Nellans was a finalist for the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, an award that another one of our students, Asian Religions and Cultures major, Andi Dahmer, won.

While a student at WKU, Ms. Nellans was an active member of the WKU Forensics Team and in 2017, she was a national champion at the American Forensics Association competition. A committed member of the larger Bowling Green community, Lillian taught philosophy at a juvenile detention center in a program run by our very own Dr. Anton. She volunteered with refugee and immigrant children, and also worked on justice issues affecting the LGBTQ community. Lillian’s academic work and community involvement demonstrates a profound commitment to issues affecting the underprivileged. She is especially concerned with grievous human rights abuses and is focusing her graduate work on the study of genocide. In an interview with the Bowling Green Daily News, she described her dream job in the following words, “To be a researcher for Human Rights Watch. Researchers spend time on the ground investigating human rights abuses, speaking with victims, reporting on their findings and persuading the international community to take action. This job combines my passion for travel, human rights and activism.”

Department Clubs

The Philosophy Club is a group of students that meets on a weekly basis. During the weekly gatherings students have a chance to meet other philosophy students, share their interests in philosophy, and discuss philosophical issues. Aside from the weekly meetings, students involved in the club also have taken trips to Nashville for film screenings and lectures. The Philosophy Club welcomes students from any philosophical background or interest, and also welcomes new ideas and activities in which the Philosophy Club can participate. For more information, contact Robert Allen (robert.allen763@topper.wku.edu) or Visiting Instructor of Philosophy Jannai Shields (jannai.shields@wku.edu).

The Religious Studies Club is a group of students that meets bi-monthly. This club discusses religious topics, watches films, and participates in a variety of activities that involve religious traditions and their rituals, cultural expressions, and languages. One of the activities planned for this year is a visit to the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, KY. The Religious Studies Club welcomes students with interests in religion, ritual, art and architecture, and film. For more information, contact student co-founders Victoria Hans (victoriahans138@topper.wku.edu) and Joseph Jacobs (joseph.jacobs069@topper.wku.edu) or Dr. Sophia Arjana (sophia.arjana@wku.edu).
2018 Faculty Publications

In August, Dr. Anton’s edited volume, The Bright and the Good: The Connection between Intellectual and Moral Virtues was published, which includes her contribution, “The Virtues of Justice and Mercy: On Knowing the Difference.” In addition, her paper, “Willing, Unwilling and Binding Addiction,” was published in An Anthology of Philosophical Studies: Proceedings of the International Philosophical Conference, Vol. 12.

Dr. Sophia Arjana published three book reviews in 2018, on Matthew Pierce’s Twelve Infallible Men: The Imams and the Making of Shi’ism, Sarah Eltantawi’s Shari’ah on Trial: Northern Nigeria’s Islamic Revolution, and Faegheh Shirazi’s Brand Islam: The Marketing and Commodification of Piety. She also published the article “Islam in the Public Square: Resistances and Counter-Resistances” in Islamic Perspective: The Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities.

This past summer, Dr. James Barker published a co-edited volume with Purdue University Press entitled Found in Translation: Essays on Jewish Biblical Translation in Honor of Leonard J. Greenspoon. The collection includes Dr. Barker’s essay, “The Equivalence of Kaige and Quinta in the Dodekapropheton” (pp. 127–52). This Fall he also published “Teaching the Bible as a Supernatural Book: Textual Criticism of Matthew’s Parable of the Two Sons” in Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching (vol. 25, no. 2).


Jannai Shields co-authored the article “Asymmetry in the Unification Theory of Causal Explanation” in the journal Synthese.

Commitment to Diversity

The Department has a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion that continues to be a major focus seen in both curriculum and research. Dr. Mukonyora has three new Colonnade courses in 2018, including Women and Religion (RELS 333) and Religion and the Environment (RELS 341). These are great additions to Dr. Mukonyora’s already impressive repertoire of classes that include emphases such as African religions, gender, and ecology. Dr. Arjana has two new courses that represent diverse populations. This fall she is teaching Pilgrimage and Islam, a new Colonnade course that examines pilgrimage traditions in Africa, Asia, North America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. This spring Dr. Arjana will offer a new Colonnade course, Islam in America, which examines the history, traditions, and rituals of immigrant and African-American Muslim communities in North America. Special emphases will be placed on the local Bosnian community in Bowling Green and on important Black Muslims like Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X.

Coming Up This Year

The Department of Philosophy and Religion will be hosting several great events this year. Our students are starting a Religious Studies Club, which will host dinners, workshops, cultural activities, and films. We encourage all Hilltoppers to come by Cherry Hall 300 to check out our spring courses, attend one of our pizza socials or donut study breaks, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WKUPhilReligion.

Note: This newsletter is featured on our website and linked to our Twitter feed instead of exiting in printed form. We believe strongly in recycling and conserving our natural resources!
Over the summer, Dr. Anton participated in the Fourth Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Heritage of Western Greece in Siracusa, Italy, where she presented her paper, “The Harmony of To Kalon and the Dissonance of To Kakon in Aristotle’s Ethics.” After her work in Italy, Dr. Anton spent two weeks researching for her upcoming book, *Aristotle’s Vice*, at the American School for Classical Studies in Athens, Greece. More recently, she took up a year residency in Durham, North Carolina as the Philip L. Quinn fellow at the National Humanities Center in Durham, NC.

Dr. Anton also has a Junior Thyssen fellowship at Central European University in Budapest, which is being deferred until spring 2020.

Dr. Sophia Arjana spent the summer conducting fieldwork in Indonesia on the islands of Java, Lombok, and Bali for her book project titled *The Mosque with the Thatched Roof: Embodiment, Material Religion, and Gender in Indonesia*. This book is under contract with Oxford University Press. She also spent the summer working on her current book manuscript, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Mysticism in the Modern World*, which will be published by Oneworld in 2019.

Dr. Barker wrote the essay on “Historical-Critical Methods” for the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*. Dr. Barker has also been researching medieval harmonies of the four Gospels; thus far he has sorted forty manuscripts written in Latin, German, and Dutch and dating from the sixth to fifteenth centuries.

Dr. Mukonyora participated in a research workshop at the University of Berlin on the *Historiography of World Christianity*. She also worked on a forthcoming article titled “Religion and Ecology: Bowling Green, Kentucky,” which will be published in 2019 in *Grounding Education in the Environmental Humanities: Exploring Place-Based Pedagogies in the South*.

In Memoriam

Dr. Alan Anderson passed away this Fall after a long illness. Dr. Anderson was part of our department for many years, serving as both a professor of religion and department head. Much of his work focused on social ethics, and while a lauded scholar, he was also a civil rights activist who was honored for his work in the public sphere. This work included his role in organizing the visit by Dr. Martin Luther King to Chicago in 1965 to protest segregation, and researching social and racial issues with his students in Greensboro, North Carolina. His co-authored book, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won a Choice Award for academic book of the year as well as the 1986 Myers Award from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in the United States. He will be remembered as someone whose scholarship and life was focused on opening the minds and hearts of students and citizens.