From the Department Head’s Desk

The Importance of Knowledge

The current presidential campaign has included some extensive conversations about Islam and the immigration of Muslims (particularly those from Syria) to the United States. I am not about to wade into that political battle here. Needless to say, all Americans have legitimate concerns about the security of the country, and all I can say here is that I hope we can reach a point where we can have rational discourse about these matters.

But the very idea of rational discourse leads me to the brief point I would like to make. Regardless of the political options available to us, any choice about options must begin with facts—and, in this case, facts about Islam, its teachings, the practices of its adherents, and the very real challenges that Muslims face not only in the Middle East but also in those countries to which they have immigrated. Without such knowledge, our conversations become simply exchanges of uninformed (and poorly formed) opinions.

It is this need for such knowledge that makes me so proud to be a part of the Religious Studies program here at WKU. Committed faculty help students and the broader community gain a real understanding of Islam and all of the world’s religious traditions. In this way, we play an important role in helping to educate tomorrow’s citizens and leaders—citizens and leaders who, I hope, can make informed and wise decisions.

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

Department to Revive Theta Alpha Kappa

Theta Alpha Kappa is the national honors society for Religious Studies and Theology students. In past years, the WKU chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa (TAK) has been quite active, though less so recently.

This year, the Department of Philosophy and Religion and some of its energetic students are reviving the rich tradition of TAK. A variety of events are in the works and recruitment of new members is under way. To be eligible for membership, students must have a 3.5 or higher grade point average in the Religious Studies major and a 3.0 or higher overall GPA.

Interested students should contact the department at philosophy-religion@wku.edu.

To learn more about TAK, go to http://www.thetaalphakappa.net/. And to learn more about the Religious Studies major and minor, go to http://www.wku.edu/philosophy-religion/religious_studies.php.
New Books from Department Faculty

**Understanding Sport as a Religious Phenomenon: An Introduction** (Bloomsbury, 2016)
Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo (with co-author, Dr. D. Gregory Sapp, Stetson University)

Readers are introduced to a range of theoretical and methodological approaches used to understand religion – including sociology, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology – and how they can be used to understand sport as a religious phenomenon. Topics include the formation of powerful communities among fans and the religious experience of the fan, myth, symbols and rituals and the sacrality of sport, and sport and secularization. Case studies are taken from around the world and include the Olympics (ancient and modern), football in the UK, the All Blacks and New Zealand national identity, college football in the American South, and gymnastics.

Ideal for classroom use, *Understanding Sport as a Religious Phenomenon* illuminates the nature of religion through sports phenomena and is a much-needed contribution to the field of religion and popular culture.

**Figures of Buddhist Modernity in Asia** (University of Hawaii Press, 2016)
Edited by Dr. Jeffrey Samuels (with co-editors Justin Thomas McDaniel and Mark Michael Rowe)

This book introduces contemporary Buddhists from across Asia and from various walks of life. Eschewing traditional hagiographies, the editors have collected sixty-six profiles of individuals who would be excluded from most Buddhist histories and ethnographies. In addition to monks and nuns, readers will encounter artists, psychologists, social workers, part-time priests, healers, and librarians as well as charlatans, hucksters, profiteers, and rabble-rousers—all whose lives reflect changes in modern Buddhism even as they themselves shape the course of these changes.

The editors and contributors are fundamentally concerned with how individual Buddhists make meaning and display this understanding to others. Some practitioners profiled look to the past, lamenting the transformations Buddhism has undergone in recent times, while others embrace these. Some have adopted a “new asceticism,” while others are eager to explore different religious traditions as they think about their own ways of being Buddhist. Arranging the profiles according to these themes—looking backward, forward, inward, and outward—reveals the value of studying individual Buddhists and their idiosyncratic religious backgrounds and attitudes, thus highlighting the diversity of approaches to the practice and study of Buddhism in Asia today. Students and teachers will welcome sections on further readings and additional tables of contents that organize the profiles thematically, as well as by tradition (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana), region, and country.

Join the Department of Philosophy and Religion to celebrate these two important publications!
Friday, September 23, 3 pm, Cherry Hall, Room 316
Dr. Anton’s Summer Adventures in Greece

This year was the 2400th anniversary of the birth of Aristotle, and Dr. Audrey Anton (pictured next to a statue of Aristotle) was in the middle of the celebration.

In May, Dr. Audrey Anton spent a week in northern Greece attending the World Congress at the University of Thessaloniki (a.k.a. “Aristotle University”), where she presented her paper “Wicked Misery According to Aristotle: How We Can Be Unhappy and Not Know It.” While there she also visited the site at Mieza, where Aristotle taught a young Alexander the Great.

After a short respite back in the United States, Dr. Anton returned to Greece in July to present her paper “Aristotle on Moral Motivation and the Importance of Politics” at two other conferences. In Athens she presented at the World Congress of Philosophy. She also was granted access to the materials at the Blegen Library at the American School of Classical Studies, which is one of the world’s best libraries for Classical Studies. The holdings range from Classical antiquities in the process of being catalogued for museums to books so old and fragile that one oughtn’t touch them with bare fingers. The library also houses shelves upon shelves of works on Aristotle across the ages (including contemporary works) in multiple languages. The Blegen Library issued Dr. Anton a three-year visitor pass, which she hopes to make good use of in the future. After Athens, Dr. Anton presented at the Olympic Center for Philosophy and Culture at the site of the original Olympics. En route to Olympia, Dr. Anton also visited Ancient Corinth, Medieval Napflio, and the islands of Spetses and Hydra, which are merely four among dozens of worthwhile stops one can make across the Peloponese.

Dr. Anton’s research and experiences in Greece undoubtedly benefit her scholarship, but they also will enhance the educational experiences of our students in the classroom and through the relatively new Classical Studies minor in the department.

Dr. Hunt Participates in NYC Summer Seminar

Dr. Grayson Hunt (pictured, on the left) received a WKU grant to study with renowned philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler (on the right) in New York City. From June 12-18, Dr. Hunt participated in the 2016 Institute for Critical Social Inquiry (ICSI) Summer Seminar, “Freud to Klein: Death Drive, Pleasure, Ethics,” with Professor Butler alongside 20 other scholars, psychoanalysts, and artists from around the world. The seminar took place at Dr. Hunt’s alma mater, The New School for Social Research in Manhattan.

Judith Butler is an American philosopher who was born in Ohio and began reading philosophy as a child. She is now a distinguished professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Program of Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Hunt teaches Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble in his PHIL 212: Philosophy and Gender Theory course.
Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, professor of philosophy and religion, participated in the 92nd Fellows Meeting of the Society for Values in Higher Education. As Executive Director of SVHE, Dr. Bain-Selbo plays a critical role in organizing the meeting. He also helped convene one of the Morning Group Seminars, entitled “Theorizing Culture.”

Dr. Grayson Hunt, assistant professor of philosophy, attended the first Trans* Experience and Philosophy conference at the University of Oregon.

Dr. Ben Lennertz, assistant professor of philosophy, received the American Philosophical Association’s 2016 Routledge, Taylor & Francis Prize for one of the two best philosophy articles published in 2015 by a limited-term faculty member.

Dr. Bella Mukonyora, professor of religious studies, the fourth research workshop on Place Based Pedagogies for Religion and Ecology in the southern bioregion of the American Academy of Religion.

Professor Mukonyora also consulted for Oxford University Press on the forthcoming Third Edition of the textbook, *Invitation to World Religions* by Jeffrey Brodd et. al.

In May, Dr. Mukonyora delivered a keynote speech to celebrate the Grand Opening of the first Islamic Cultural Center in Bowling Green.

In August, Dr. Mukonyora was interviewed on WKCT Drive Time in order to promote the department’s Community Religious Literacy Project and an interfaith meeting on World Religions and Peace. The meeting was hosted by the Warren County Public Library in Bowling Green.

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*Are you thinking about making a contribution to Western Kentucky University. If so, please remember that you can designate your gift to the Philosophy and Religion Department. Your contributions are critical to the life of the department and its students.*

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**PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION NEWS**

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