For many years, the Department of Philosophy and Religion has had a highly successful undergraduate program in Religious Studies. From the sheer number of students to their high quality to the teaching and scholarly excellence of the faculty, the program has stood out not only in the region but in the country. In the fall, the program will extend its mission into graduate education with the new M.A. in Religious Studies.

The M.A. in Religious Studies (MARS for short) has been almost four years in the making. It is an ambitious effort to further the comparative study of religion at WKU and in the state of Kentucky. Students take a number of required courses that ground them in key theories and methods in the study of religion, but also have significant flexibility to pursue their research interests.

The new program will provide graduate students with excellent preparation for continued study in some of the top doctoral programs in the country. We have had success at placing many undergraduate students into such graduate programs, and are confident that our graduate students will be even more successful. It also could supplement student work or careers in many other areas.

In addition to MARS, we also have created the Graduate Certificate in Religious Studies. This four-course program is perfect for students who just want an initial taste of graduate work before deciding whether to commit to a full program. It also is perfect for anyone (especially non-traditional students) who just wants to learn more about religion. Check out the new program on page 3!

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

Congratulations to Our December 2010 Graduates

The joy of the holiday season is heightened by the graduation of many of our philosophy and religious studies students. Of course, that joy is tempered by the thought that they also will no longer be in our classrooms and visiting our offices (but they always can come visit!). Congratulations to all of the following students.

**Philosophy majors:** Matthew A. Sheffield, William D. Simpson, Leigh-Anne St. Charles.

**Religious Studies majors:** Kelsey Barber, Emily Fox, Keeley Holton, Anne R. Miller, Brent R. Phillips, Matthew A. Sheffield, William D. Simpson, Collin Steiner.

**Philosophy minors:** Rachel Rigdon.

**Religious Studies minors:** Andrew Hays, Sarah E. James.
From the recent establishment of the Confucius Institute to the Chinese Language Flagship program to the new major in Asian Religions and Cultures, there certainly has been a “buzz” about China around the Western Kentucky University campus. On a recent trip to China, Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head and Associate Professor, visited several cities in an effort to develop or strengthen relationships with the Chinese government and universities. These relationships promise to provide wonderful opportunities in the future for teaching and learning among WKU faculty and students—particularly in the Department of Philosophy and Religion.

Left: The ancient city wall of Xi’an, one of China’s most culturally significant cities. It is home to Shaanxi Normal University. This year, Dr. Lei Longqian from SNU has been a visiting scholar in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. Dr. Bain-Selbo delivered a lecture at the university during his visit. We hope that we can continue our relationship with SNU.

Dr. Bain-Selbo in front of the gate to the Forbidden City in Beijing. Dr. Bain-Selbo was in Beijing to attend the yearly meeting of Confucius Institute directors. The new Confucius Institute at WKU will be an important campus partner as the department builds the new Asian Religions and Cultures major.

Dr. Bain-Selbo with officials from the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University in front of a statue of Confucius. The School of Philosophy and the Department of Philosophy and Religion came to a preliminary agreement for a faculty exchange program. Tentatively scheduled to begin in spring 2012, the program will bring a faculty member from China each spring to teach philosophy or religion in our department.
Students Visit Islamic Center

Dr. Bella Mukonyora wants her students not only to learn about other religions through books and lectures, she wants them to experience other religions. Like many of the faculty members in religious studies, she requires students to visit local churches, organizations, or sites to enrich their educational experience.

One of the great resources for our faculty and students is the Islamic Center of Bowling Green, KY. For many years the Islamic Center has opened its doors to our students—providing them with insights into the tradition that they otherwise would not have. Both our faculty and our students appreciate the hospitality of everyone at the Islamic Center. Their outreach to the community certainly has done a lot to promote interreligious understanding and tolerance in our community.

The Program for the New MA in Religious Studies

The M.A. program in Religious Studies requires a minimum of 35 graduate credit hours. No more than 12 hours may be in 400G courses. Students may take up to six hours in graduate courses in other departments. Students must complete a thesis or a culminating project. Students considering further doctoral study in religious studies are encouraged to take the thesis option.

**Required Courses:** All students must complete RELS 500 (Theory and Method in the Study of Religion, four credit hours), two offerings of RELS 601 (Graduate Seminar in Religious Studies, four credit hours), RELS 602 (Thesis and Project Development Seminar, one credit hour), and RELS 603 (Thesis and Project Colloquium, one credit hour). These required courses total 14 credit hours.

**Thesis:** Students on the thesis track may take up to six credit hours of Thesis Writing (RELS 599). Students completing an alternative project will take additional coursework in lieu of RELS 599. Students must petition to not complete a thesis, and provide a proposal for the alternative project by the end of their second semester.

**Electives:** The student’s remaining credit hours may be taken in further RELS 601 courses, other RELS graduate courses, RELS 400G courses, independent studies, or graduate courses in other departments (with consent of adviser).

**Research Tool:** Appropriate language work in the student’s area of emphasis is recommended (e.g., Hebrew for students doing work in Jewish scripture). Graduate level language courses may count for as many as six credits toward completing the degree. If not completing the research tool requirement in any other way, students must pass a reading examination in either French or German.
Other Faculty News

Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, associate professor of philosophy and religion, served on a panel at the American Academy of Religion meeting in Atlanta in November. The panel was part of an annual Sports and Religion Forum and focused on sport in the American South. He also presented a paper in January at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in San Francisco. His paper was entitled “Winning the Values Debate and the Future of Higher Education.”

Scott Girdner, assistant professor of religion, contributed a paper to a panel considering the place of rationality in history at the American Historical Association in Boston in January. He also gave a talk at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bowling Green entitled “Striving To Do Good” examining the nuances of the term jihad and the resources for tolerance and pluralism in Islamic traditions. In February he will participate, along with Dr. Morsi of the Islamic Center of Bowling Green, in a series of talks promoting public awareness of Islamic traditions and Muslims in Franklin, KY.

Dr. Ingrid Lilly, assistant professor of religion, presented two papers at two different sessions of the annual meeting for the Society of Biblical Literature that took place in Atlanta, GA in November: “Trajectories of the Scribes in Ezekiel: MT and Targum Ezekiel in Light of Ezekiel’s Textual Tradition” and “How to Use the Manuscript Finds from the Judean Desert to Shed Light on the Variant Literary Editions of Ezekiel.” She also led a public discussion of the movie “Dirt” with Bowling Green’s Interfaith Coalition on Earth Care last fall.

Dr. Monique Moultrie, visiting assistant professor of religion, presented a paper entitled “Passionate and the Pious: A Womanist and Cultural Analysis of Black Women’s Sexual Decision-Making” at the American Academy of Religion meeting in Atlanta in November. In addition to presenting, she presided over a panel and is the new co-chair for the Religion and Sexuality Consultation. Also in November, she gave a public university lecture for the African American Studies program at WKU. In February, Dr. Moultrie attended the Creating Change Conference on LGBT Equality in Minneapolis, MN. She gathered oral histories of gay and lesbian religious leaders and participated in a panel discussion on the intersection of religion, race and power.

Dr. bella Mukonyora, associate professor of religion, attended the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta in November. She presented a paper on “Geertz, Ritual Meaning and Conflict Resolution in African Religions” and took part in a day workshop on teaching run by the American Academy of Religion’s Task Force on Sustainability. Since the Interfaith Dialogue on Earth Care, a regional conference which took place in February last year, Dr. Mukonyora has continued to help the City of Bowling Green’s Interfaith Coalition on Earth Care plan other public events.

Dr. Jeffrey Samuels, associate professor of religion, completed a research paper titled “Buddhist Temple Networks Across the Indian Ocean: Capital, Resources, and Minority Identity Formation” for which he received funding to present at the Inter-Asian Connections II conference in Singapore. He also organized a panel for the upcoming International Association of Buddhist Studies conference that will be held in Taiwan in June. Finally, Dr. Samuels completed an article on the Sri Lankan diaspora community in Malaysia that was just published in South Asian Diaspora.

Dr. Adrian Switzer, assistant professor of philosophy, was a panelist in a session called “The Space of Community in the Work of Georges Bataille” at the 2010 annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), which was held in November in Montreal (co-sponsored by McGill University and the University of Montreal). He also published an article entitled “Anxiety and the Voice of Unreason” in PhaenEx, Volume 5, Number 2 (2010). In October Dr. Switzer led a Philosophy Club/film series trip to Nashville for a program called, “A Night of Experimental Film”; and in January he organized a trip to Nashville on Martin Luther King Day to participate in the “freedom march.”

As you consider your contribution to the New Century of Spirit campaign for Western Kentucky University, 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.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION NEWS

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