Fall semester 2007 was a busy and productive one in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. In addition to all the teaching and learning that is the focus of our work on the third floor of Cherry Hall, the faculty in the department continued to demonstrate significant achievement in their scholarly work. You can learn about much of that in the pages that follow, as well as some of the accomplishments of our students and alumni.

One task that preoccupied us during the fall was replacing some of our colleagues who have retired. The religious studies program is in the midst of a search for a specialist in East Asian religion. At the same time, the philosophy program is running a search to find a new colleague as well. Both of these new faculty members will begin their work at WKU in fall 2009.

The end of the fall semester also saw the end of the undergraduate academic careers for many of our students. With great pride and some degree of sadness, we congratulate and say goodbye to the December graduates of the Department of Philosophy and Religion.

On the philosophy side, the following majors graduated in December: Daniel Greeson, Brandon Johnson, and William Turner. The philosophy minor graduates were Michael DePersio, Brian Phillips, and Brandon Spurlock.

On the religion side, the following majors graduated: Joseph Ambs, William Aubrey, Aaron Davenport, Daniel Greeson, Andrew Hall, Hailey Hardin, Jonathan Harvey, Brandon Johnson, Lang Leichhardt, Jonathan Merkling, William Reed, and James Sweeny. The religion minor graduates were James Bruton, Jared Davila, Joshua Gilreath, Charla Majors, and Nikki Seat.

At the end of examination week in December, the department had the opportunity to celebrate the work of these students at a reception held in their honor. We wished them well, and hope that they will come back often to visit us at the “Top of the Hill.” We are thrilled to have them join the large contingent of excellent alumni of our department.

Eric Bain-Selbo  
Department Head  
Philosophy and Religion  
Western Kentucky University

Pictures from the departmental reception in December for graduating seniors. On the left, Dr. Arvin Vos (far left) talks with senior Brian Phillips (just behind Dr. Vos), Brian’s spouse Angela Jones, and Dr. Jeffrey Samuels. On the right, senior Daniel Greeson (center) chats with Dr. Judy Russell and Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo.
As Western Kentucky University embarks on its new capital campaign, please consider dedicating your contributions to the Department of Philosophy and Religion to further the study of philosophy and religious studies.

Seniors Brandon Johnson and Daniel Greeson presented papers at the 18th Annual Undergraduate Philosophy and Religion Conference at Truman State University in Missouri. The conference is sponsored by the Department of Philosophy and Religion at TSU.

Johnson’s paper explored the topic of human nature and evil in Confucian thought. It was entitled “Xun Zi: An Investigation of Xun Zi’s Doctrine of Human Nature.” Greeson’s paper focused on Sufism, a philosophical/mystical tradition in Islam. It was entitled “The Cosmological and Anthropological Framework of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Teaching of Union with God.”

Both Johnson and Greeson report that the conference was a great success. We thank them for representing so well WKU and our department.

The department is committed to encouraging, working with, and financially supporting our students who challenge themselves in this way.

Dr. Pinnick Plans Sabbatical Research

Dr. Cassandra L. Pinnick will be spending this spring semester on sabbatical leave in order to complete two major papers in the philosophy of science.

One paper is entitled “Feminist Approaches to the Philosophy of Science.” It is scheduled for publication this year as a chapter in the Routledge Companion for the Philosophy of Science. The chapter will explain the origins and development of feminist critiques of science from the 1970s to today. She argues that persons who consider themselves “feminists” should move beyond the radical feminist critiques of the 1980s and return to original concerns for fair play and a level playing field for women in science.

A second paper is entitled “An Anti-Realist Critique of Scientific Realism: Justification over Truth.” It also is scheduled for publication this year, and will appear in Studia Culturologica (Divinatio)—published by Sofia University Press in Bulgaria. Dr. Pinnick explains Scientific Realism, the prevailing theory in philosophy of science. She then offers a critique of this theory, which includes an argument for the epistemic notion of justification (rather than truth) to ground philosophy of science.

Dr. Pinnick will return to her teaching and advising at WKU in the fall.

Bulgarian Philosopher to Teach at WKU in Fall 2008

Dr. Dimitri Ginev of Bulgaria will be a visiting professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion this coming fall.

Dr. Ginev is an accomplished scholar who has published widely in the philosophy of science, hermeneutics, phenomenology, philosophy of culture, philosophy of art, and philosophical and cultural anthropology. Among his many published works are The Context of Constitution: Beyond the Edge of Justification (2006), Critique of Epistemological Reason (2000), and A Passage to a Hermeneutic Philosophy of Science (1997).

Dr. Ginev also has lectured widely, in locales throughout Europe, in Australia, as well as in the United States. Along with Dr. Cassandra L. Pinnick, he is a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh. It is through Dr. Pinnick’s initiative that WKU came to invite Dr. Ginev to our campus.

In the fall, Dr. Ginev will be teaching one section of Introduction to Philosophy and two upper-division courses.
Religion Faculty Attend AAR/SBL Meeting

A large contingent of religion faculty attended the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature in November in San Diego. The group included Professor Joseph Trafton, Associate Professors John Long and Eric Bain-Selbo, and Assistant Professors Bella Mukonyora, Jeffrey Samuels, and Oliver Scharbrodt.

In addition to attending sessions and meeting with professional contacts, several faculty members participated in the program. Dr. Samuels organized a panel on “Rethinking the Forest-Village Dichotomy in South Asian Buddhism.” At the panel he presented his work “In Awe of the Forest? Ambivalent Attitudes Toward the Forest Monastics in Contemporary Sri Lanka.” Dr. Mukonyora delivered a paper entitled “Living with Death: Masowe Concept of Healing.” She also chaired a session of the the Religion and Ecology section and began her duties as a member of the AAR task force on sustainability. Finally, Dr. Bain-Selbo organized a panel sponsored by Mercer University Press on Sports and Religion. Several authors in the MUP series on Sports and Religion shared their perspectives on the religious dimensions of American football. Dr. Bain-Selbo’s book, Game Day and God: Football, Faith, and Politics in the American South, is due out this year.

Several members of the WKU group also had a lunch meeting with former WKU religion students who now have embarked on their own careers in the field.

Students Experience Jewish Celebration of Sukkot

Shannon Shaffer, a member of the religion faculty, has been an energetic and innovative teacher in her short time at WKU. The campus saw a visible example of this during the Jewish celebration of Sukkot.

Sukkot (also known as the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles) is a traditional Jewish festival that marks the autumnal harvest and gives thanks for the abundance that God provides. It also is associated with the Jewish exodus from Egypt. In this regard, the temporary huts built during the festival are a remembrance of the shelters that the ancient Israelites lived in after they gained their freedom from the Egyptians.

Sponsored by the Jewish Student Organization and Ms. Shaffer’s Judaic Religious Traditions class, students helped to construct a sukkah or temporary dwelling next to Grise Hall as a way of learning more about the tradition as well as educating the campus community about it. During the ceremony, students read traditional Jewish blessings (in Hebrew) and explained the significance of the festival.

The temporary structure was up for the seven days of the festival. In addition to its construction, the ceremony, and a selection of traditional foods, there also was an evening showing of the Israeli film Ushpizin—a delightful portrayal of contemporary Jewish life and the special lessons that can be learned during the festival.
We're on the Web!
See us at:
www.wku.edu/Dept/Academic/AHSS/Philosophy/

Other Faculty, Student, and Alumni News

Alumni

Howell Williams, a 2002 graduate of the WKU Religion Program and adjunct instructor for Spring 2008, successfully defended her dissertation at Florida State University. Her dissertation is entitled "Negotiating the Choppy Waters of the Ecclesiastical sees: Que(e)rying Catholic Religious Reform Movements."

Students

Erin Avery, a senior religion major, is headed to Japan for the spring semester. She will be studying at Kansai Gaidai University where she will be taking classes in Japanese religion, art, and language, and visiting the temples and museums of Kyoto, Nara, and Tokyo. In addition to WKU's World Topper scholarship, Ms. Avery received the Gilman scholarship. This scholarship is available to students eligible for the Pell Grant and the Bridging scholarship for studying in Japan.

The Philosophy Club invites all interested students to join them at their regular meetings on Wednesdays, 5 p.m., in CH 302. For more information, contact Eric Isbell at eric.isbell@wku.edu.

Faculty

Dr. Michael Seidler, professor of philosophy, has just published "The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" in European Political Thought, 1450 to 1700: Religion, Law, and Philosophy. The chapter was co-authored with Robert von Friedeberg (Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam). The book is published by Yale University Press and includes chapters on national political traditions written by scholars from around the world, including England, Scotland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Hungary, Denmark, and the U.S.

Dr. Jan Garrett, professor of philosophy, presented a paper, "The Doubtful Descent of Human Rights from Stoicism," June 5, 2007, at the Second International Philosophy Conference sponsored by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER) and held at the University of Athens, in Athens, Greece.

Dr. Jeffrey Samuels, assistant professor of religion, presented a paper titled "Luring the Heart: Monastic Recruitment in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Sri Lanka" at the South Asian Studies Conference in Madison, Wisconsin in October.

Dr. John Long, associate professor of religion, and Dr. Oliver Scharbrodt, assistant professor of religion, attended the fall meeting of the Southeast Regional Middle East and Islamic Studies Seminar (SERMEISS) in Valle Crucis, North Carolina, October 12-14. SERMEISS is a professional society for faculty from various fields whose common connection is the study or teaching of some aspect of the Middle East and Islamic World. The organization was founded in 1977 to provide scholars in the southeastern United States with an opportunity to meet regularly with colleagues to share research findings and teaching concerns. SERMEISS sponsors two meetings annually, fall and spring. The spring meeting will be held in Columbia, South Carolina, March 28-30 2008.