What incredible changes have occurred since our September newsletter last year.

Barack Obama became the nation’s first African-American president. He, of course, has inherited an extremely difficult situation. In the waning months of 2008 the United States (and the world) experienced a remarkable economic downturn. Financial markets became frozen. Many homeowners suffered foreclosures on their homes, as they were unable to make mortgage payments. Many workers lost their jobs. As the stock market plummeted, analysts were fond of figuring out the billions of dollars of wealth that had been lost in any given day. But these dollar amounts pale in comparison to the effects of the economic collapse on average Americans and poor Americans. The problems at the end of 2008 likely will get worse before they get better. President Obama and all political leaders have a tough job in front of them. But everyone must be prepared to do what they can, and sacrifices no doubt will be necessary — sacrifices for the economic well-being of all citizens, for the education of our children, for the environment, and more.

The world’s religious traditions, of course, have been vital resources in encouraging individual sacrifice for the common good. So too have philosophers and philosophical movements been concerned about thinking through clearly the relationship of the individual to the society. Today we might be in a very unique situation where the study of our religious and philosophical traditions is more important than ever.

Eric Bain-Selbo, Dept. Head Philosophy and Religion

The end of fall semester always brings the joy of congratulating our December graduates and the sorrow that we will no longer have the pleasure of their presence in our classes.

On the philosophy side, Alex J. Hargrove was our sole graduating major, with Edgar T. Mills and Benny G. White completing the requirements for the minor. On the religious studies side, the graduating majors were Lindsay K. Harned, Cole T. Puterbaugh, Jill C. Roseberry, Nathan M. Scarlett, Andrew G. Skaggs, and Christopher M. Taylor. The graduating minors were Erin G. Avery and Michelle J. Perry.

Congratulations and the best of luck to all of these fine students.
Scott Girdner to Join WKU Faculty as Professor of Islam

The Department of Philosophy and Religion is pleased to announce that Scott Girdner has agreed to join the Religious Studies faculty beginning in August 2009.

Mr. Girdner is completing his Ph.D. at Boston University in Islamic Studies. He already holds the M.A. degree in Philosophy of Religion from Boston University and a B.A. degree from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Though Mr. Girdner is just beginning his career, he already has substantial teaching experience—including work at Boston University, Northeastern University, and Hebrew College.

Mr. Girdner’s dissertation is entitled “Reasoning with Revelation: The Qur’ānic contextualization of philosophy in al-Ghazālī’s The Niche of Lights (Mishkāt al-Anwār).” As the title indicates, Mr. Girdner has a strong interest in Islamic philosophy. In addition to his course about the Islamic religious tradition, Mr. Girdner will be able to offer courses that will appeal to philosophy students as well as religious studies students.

In addition to his varied interests in the Islamic tradition, Mr. Girdner is interested in comparative scriptural hermeneutics (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) and the relationship between science and religion. To learn more about Mr. Girdner, go to people.bu.edu/girdner/index.html.

Welcome Scott Girdner!

WKU Students and Faculty Attend Annual SSSR Meeting

The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion held its 2008 annual meeting in Louisville. Five WKU religious studies students (see picture) and two faculty members (Drs. Eric Bain-Selbo and Lawrence Snyder) took advantage of the proximity of the meeting to spend a day in sessions, checking out the book exhibit, and talking with one another about a wide variety of issues in religion.

Taylor Hughey said “very enlightening experience. It was quite interesting to meet people from all over the world and have conversations with them about their ideas.” Kerry Markham and Sarah Howell were impressed by the “Religion Negotiating the Female” session. Andrew Skaggs, who is interested in going into the mental health field, was interested in particular in the “Religion and Mental Health” session. He added, “I think that all students should strive to attend a conference at some point in their academic career. It's intriguing to see what current researchers are working on in the field and get a grasp of religious studies beyond the classroom and our department.”
Dr. Trafton Receives SGA Award

Dr. Joseph Trafton, professor of Religious Studies, was named the 2008 recipient of the Student Government Association’s Professor of the Year Award for the Potter College of Arts & Letters. He received the award at a special SGA ceremony on December 2.

This is not the first award for Dr. Trafton. He has been a recipient twice of the Potter College award for excellence in teaching. He also is completing a term as a University Distinguished Professor.

Congratulations Dr. Trafton!

Professor Mukonyora Receives Summer Research Grant

Dr. Isabel Mukonyora has been awarded a $6,000 Summer Scholarship Research Grant from WKU to begin work on her next book, tentatively titled *Spiritual Ecology in Postcolonial Africa*.

Her new book will contribute to knowledge about religion and ecology from a perspective that draws attention to African religious responses to westernization through Christianity. The significance of this book is twofold—responding both to a global society now concerned about putting a stop to the destruction of the environment and recognizing that Christianity has become the most popular of world religions on the continent. As part of her research, Dr. Mukonyora will be having documents shipped to her from the Rhodes Library at the University of Oxford. These documents are from colonial administrators who, along with Christian missionaries, worked on land acquisition in Africa.

Dr. Mukonyora has been active on issues relating to ecology, including serving on the steering committee of the Religion and Ecology section of the American Academy of Religion as well as serving on the AAR’s Sustainability Task Force.

STUDENT AND ALUMNI NEWS

Corey Smith, senior philosophy major, presented two papers at undergraduate philosophy conferences during the fall. He presented “Causality and the Possibility of Science in Hume’s Inquiry” at the 19th Annual Philosophy and Religion Conference at Truman State University in Missouri in November. A week later he presented “Galileo and Lonergan on Appearance and Reality” at the Eighth Annual Steven Humphrey Student Philosophy Colloquium at the University of Louisville.

Daniel Greeson, philosophy and religion class of 2007, has been accepted to the Library Sciences M.A. program at Indiana University. He also is awaiting word on an application to the Art History M.A. program at IU. He would like to combine these in order to further his interest in Byzantine/Medieval Art Preservation and Research.

Joshua Smith, senior religious studies major, has received the Gilman Scholarship to continue his studies this spring semester at Yarmouk University in Jordan. He studied in Jordan during the fall semester as well. A brief description of his experience can be found in the September 2008 newsletter.

The Triangle Club

Under the leadership of Theodore Harden, senior philosophy and religious studies major, and with the assistance of Dr. Isabel Mukonyora, the Triangle Club held its first meeting in December. The purpose of the club is to bring students from both programs into conversations on common topics. In December, the topic was pirates! Check the departmental website for announcements about future meetings.

Please send any student or alumni news to eric.bain-selbo@wku.edu.
Other Faculty News

Dr. Cassandra Pinnick, professor of philosophy, has accepted an invitation to speak at the Conference on the Politicization of Science May 25 - 30, 2009 at Bielefeld University. She will speak in the conference section “Democracy and Science.” The tentative title for her paper is “Values in Science, Epistemology, and Justification.”

Dr. Jeffrey Samuels, associate professor of religion, presented two papers during the fall semester 2008. “The Sri Lankan Sangha in Malaysia: K. S. Dhammananda and the Creation of Tradition” was an invited lecture at the Religion and Culture in the Indian Ocean, 18th Century to the Present workshop at Cornell University. He also presented “Monastic Ordination as Going Forth in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Ambiguities, Tensions, and Resolutions” at the South Asia Studies Conference at the University of Wisconsin.

Dr. Adrian Switzer, assistant professor of philosophy, presented two papers during the fall semester 2008. “To read schizo-analytically, to risk immanence: Deleuze, Guattari, and the Kleistian War-Machine” was given at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Comparative Literature Association at Auburn University in September. In October, Dr. Switzer presented “Nietzsche and the French Academy, 1964-1972” at an interdisciplinary conference entitled 1968: A Global Perspective. The conference was held at the University of Texas.

Scott Aikin, adjunct instructor in philosophy, was invited to present “The Ethics and Politics of Belief” at the Epistemology of Liberal Democracy conference in Copenhagen, Denmark this November. He also presented “The Problem of Worship and an Overlooked Case for Atheism” as the keynote at Lipscomb University’s Interfaith Dialogue Series and “A Self-Defeat Problem for the Rhetorical Theory of Argument” at the Tennessee Philosophical Association in November. Dr. Aikin also has had a number of recent publications. “Perelmanian Universal Audience and the Epistemic Aspirations of Argument” recently appeared in Philosophy and Rhetoric, “The Dogma of Environmental Revelation” in Ethics and the Environment, “The Significance of Al Gore’s Purported Hypocrisy” in Environmental Ethics, and “Levinasian Otherism, Skepticism, and the Problem of Self-Refutation” in Philosophical Forum. Pragmatism: A Guide for the Perplexed, co-authored with Robert Talisse, was published in October by Continuum Press.