From the Department Head’s Desk

On Buttons and Slogans

One strangely significant event from the last semester was the purchasing of a button maker. The idea was to make and distribute buttons so that we could spread the word (evangelize if you like) the good work happening up here on the third floor of Cherry Hall.

Once we had the button maker, we had to figure out what to put on the buttons. We quickly produced a batch with the word “THINK” on them—promoting our philosophy program (see above). These have made their way around campus. This sparked an objection from the religious studies folks, who insisted that they “think” as well (of course they do) and that their courses, just like those in philosophy, help students to develop their cranial organ. But was there a comparable term that would fit even better for religious studies. “Believe” seemed inappropriate, and “contemplate” or “reflect” seemed too tame. One colleague suggested “exegesis,” since we spend a good amount of time interpreting and elucidating texts.

The easy alternative would be to add “& Religion” to the “THINK” button. But that seems too easy. Do you have any suggestions? The very identity of the department and its programs are at stake. Just let me know at eric.bainselbo@wku.edu.

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

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Exciting interfaith conference scheduled for Bowling Green in February

Dr. Arvin Vos returns to China to deliver lectures on Aquinas

Dr. Tripp York publishes new book on Christian anarchism

Congratulations to Our December Graduates

This December saw another topnotch group of students graduate from our programs. Good luck to all our graduates, and please keep in touch with us here at the the Top of the Hill.

Philosophy majors: Matthew D. Hume, Shauna L. Landsberg, and Corey A. Smith.


Many thanks to all of these students. Your participation in our classes and in our programs has added greatly to our work.
CRLP to Co-Sponsor Religion and Ecology Conference

The Community Religious Literacy Project, an outreach program of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, is co-sponsoring Interfaith Dialogue on Earth Care, an ecumenical conference on the relationship of religion to ecology—with particular attention to questions of sustainability.

Nationally acclaimed speaker, Dr. Matthew Sleeth, Executive Director of Blessed Earth, will speak on Christianity and Earth Care on Friday, February 19th at 7 p.m. in Mass Media & Technology Hall on WKU’s campus. It is free and open to the public. The conference the next day will take place from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church in Bowling Green. The cost is $20. Discussion will focus on the worldviews of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism in the search for common ground on ecological issues. Many faculty members from the Department of Philosophy and Religion will be featured speakers and respondents.

For more information and a registration form, visit:
http://www.wku.edu/bggreen/event2.php

The Interfaith Dialogue on Earth Care is a joint venture of several WKU departments and religious organizations throughout the area.

Professor Vos Returns to China

During the last half of October, Dr. Arvin Vos lectured at Wuhan University in China. Vos was invited by Prof. Duan De-Zhi to give five seminars on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Prof. Duan is the leading scholar in Thomist studies in China. He is directing a team that is translating the entire Summa theologiae—a massive undertaking as the work is more than 4000 pages in English translation. The seminars were attended by both graduate and upper-level undergraduate students. Vos focused on Aquinas’s philosophy of mind, primarily as expounded in the Summa.

On the days when there was no seminar, Vos gave public lectures. Two of the public lectures were at Wuhan University and one lecture at each of three other local universities—Wuhan Technical University, Zhong Nan University of Economics and Law, and Hua Zhong University of Science and Technology.

The Department of Philosophy and Religion currently is in talks with Wuhan University concerning a possible faculty and student exchange program between the two institutions.
New Asian Religions and Cultures Major Awaiting Final Approval

The University Senate approved the creation of a new major in Asian Religions and Cultures (ARCS) at its January meeting. The new program now only awaits approval by the WKU Board of Regents at its April meeting. ARCS is an interdisciplinary major that will be housed in the Department of Philosophy and Religion.

The continent of Asia is home to some of the most ancient and formative civilizations in history. All of the world’s largest religious traditions have their origins on the continent, and Asian peoples have shaped and reshaped how humanity understands the world and itself for centuries. The Asian Religions and Cultures major facilitates the understanding of the continent and its peoples, allowing students not only to understand the Asian past but to put current issues and problems into a broader historical, religious, and cultural context.

The major in Asian Religions and Cultures requires 33 credit hours. Students must take courses in Religion (9 credit hours), Language (6 credit hours), History and Politics (6 credit hours), Electives (9 credit hours), and complete the Senior Project (3 credit hours). Students must take courses from at least four different departments. At least 17 hours must be at

New Book Looks at Christian Anarchists


Jesus promised his followers neither safety nor affluence, but rather that those who come after him should expect persecution. Christian discipleship and tribal nationalism, however, continue to be co-opted into the nation-state project of prosperity and security. This co-option has made it difficult for the church to recognize its task to be a prophetic witness both for and against the state. That only a small pocket of Christians bear witness against such an accommodation of Christian practice is disconcerting; and yet, it breeds hope.

Dr. York examines a few twentieth century Christians who lived such a witness, including the Berrigan brothers, Dorothy Day, and Eberhard Arnold. These witnesses can be viewed as anarchical in the sense that their loyalty to Christ undermines the pseudo-soteriological myth employed by the state. These Christians are seekers of the peace of the city whose chief desire is for those belonging to the temporal cities to be able to participate in the eternal city—the city of God. By examining their ideas and their actions, this book will attempt to understand how the politics of the church—an apocalyptic politic—is necessary for the church to understand its mission as bearer of the gospel.
Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, associate professor and department head, organized and presided over a panel on sports, religion, and film at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion. This year’s meeting was in Montreal in early November. Dr. Bain-Selbo also responded to a paper in another session that focused on the concept of anteriority (i.e., the idea of a “time before” or “beginning of time”).

Dr. Adrian Switzer, assistant professor of philosophy, participated in two conferences during the fall 2009 term. In October, he presented a paper on Foucault’s writings on the 1968 Paris protests and 1978 Iranian Revolution at the annual meeting of the Western Society for French Studies. The paper has been nominated for the Millstone Prize for best interdisciplinary paper at the conference. Also in October, Dr. Switzer participated in a panel discussion of the political significance of Kant’s idea of teleology in the Critique of Judgment at the annual meeting of the Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. He spent the winter break in Berlin writing and researching a forthcoming article on Nietzsche’s The Gay Science; the article will appear as a book chapter from Mellen Press in 2010. Dr. Switzer’s research this coming summer is being supported by a Faculty Summer Scholarship from WKU.

Dr. Jeffrey Samuels, associate professor of religion, has received a Faculty Summer Scholarship from WKU. The grant will provide funding for his continuing research on a social history of Buddhism in Malaysia. In the fall semester, he presented “The Sinhalese Sangha in Malaysia: Rationalization, Religious Ecumenism, and the Creation of a Theravada Buddhist Identity” at the South Asia Studies Conference. He also published a review of Mahinda Deegalle’s Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka. It can be found in Buddhist Studies Review, 26(1), 111-113, 2009.

Dr. Tripp York, adjunct instructor, published two articles in Christian Ethics Today, “A Prayer to the All-Powerful, All Benevolent Deity Who Really Likes Sports (But Not the Orioles and Some South Asians)” as well as “The Subtle Atheism of Being Pro-Life.”

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.