From the Department Head’s Desk . . .

In just a few weeks the nation returns to the voting booth to cast ballots in one of the most historic elections in our history. And rarely if ever has the study of philosophy and religion been more imperative.

Changes in our religious demography combined with the increasingly global and multireligious community in which we live means that we need to have the kind of virtues and intellectual capabilities that allow us to understand the religious lives of people around the world and next door. Unfortunately, our greater contact with people of different religious viewpoints has not always led to greater tolerance, but has sprouted fear, defensiveness, and animosity. At various points in the campaign there have been misleading and derogatory remarks about a wide range of religious traditions associated (correctly or not) with numerous candidates, including the African American church(es), Pentecostalism, Islam, and Mormonism. Knowledge, as is so often the case, is a cure for prejudice and intolerance. The sober and careful study of religion is critical in these times.

So too is the study of philosophy critical. In any election year there is manipulation of evidence and the forwarding of specious arguments. The philosophically trained mind is one that is less susceptible to these and other forms of deception. The study of ethics also is important. Moral posturing is increasingly a standard technique in political campaigns, and we need careful reflection and analysis to discern what is truly of moral import and what is just a bunch of hot air.

Of course, the study of philosophy and religion always are worthy areas of inquiry. But it is at times like these that I feel a special urgency to what we do in our department. And it is with this urgency that we begin another academic year. New students have arrived and we welcome back our returning students. We also hope our many alumni and friends will come to see us this year. Our new website features an “Events” link. Be sure to check it out and come join us for these events.

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

Pictures from the departmental reception in May for graduating seniors. On the left, Dr. Joseph Trafton with several religious studies graduates. On the right, Dr. Michael Seidler talks with graduate Rachel Cook (and that’s Dr. Jan Garrett and graduate Noah Kapley in the background).
Dr. Samuels Promoted to Associate Professor

The Department of Philosophy and Religion is pleased to announce that Dr. Jeffrey Samuels has been granted tenure by Western Kentucky University and promoted to associate professor.

Dr. Samuels is an accomplished teacher, having been a recipient of the Potter College of Art & Letters (PCAL) Teaching Award. His primary area of specialization is South Asian Buddhism, and he has done significant fieldwork in Sri Lanka. He regularly teaches an introductory course on Asian religions, upper-division courses on Hinduism and Buddhism, and other advanced courses on special topics in these areas.

Dr. Samuels is an accomplished scholar, having published many articles and presented numerous papers. In recognition of his scholarship, he was a recipient of the PCAL Award for Excellence in Scholarship and subsequently won the University Award for Excellence in Scholarship.

He is a great asset to the department and the university. Congratulations Dr. Samuels!

Dr. Pinnick Returns from Sabbatical Leave

Dr. Cassandra L. Pinnick has returned to her teaching and working with students after taking a sabbatical leave for spring semester 2008.

During her sabbatical, Dr. Pinnick completed and worked on a number of projects in philosophy of science—an area in which she is an internationally-recognized expert. She completed a chapter entitled “The Feminist Approach to Philosophy of Science” for The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Science (2008). This volume, by a leading academic publisher, is certain to become a standard in the field. She also completed her duties as guest editor and contributor for a special issue of the prominent journal Science and Education (Springer). In addition to her introduction, she contributed the essay “Science Education for Women: Situated Cognition, Feminist Standpoint Theory, and the Status of Women in Science.” In addition to bringing these projects to fruition, she continued work on a manuscript on anti-Scientific Realism.

Finally, Dr. Pinnick was busy on the lecture circuit. She gave an invited lecture at the University of Hawaii (Manoa) entitled “The Continental Origins of Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.” She also spoke on the issue of Hawaiian sovereignty at the ‘Iolani Palace in Honolulu.

Welcome back Dr. Pinnick.

Dr. Dimitri Ginev to Deliver Public Lecture at WKU

Dr. Dimitri Ginev, an internationally recognized scholar from the University of Sofia, has joined the department as a Visiting Scholar in Philosophy for the fall semester. He 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, Australia, and 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.

This semester, Dr. Ginev will be teaching Introduction to Philosophy, a course on Science, Religion and Contemporary Life, and an advanced seminar entitled The Context of Constitution in the Philosophy of Science.

Dr. Ginev will deliver a public lecture entitled “Cognitive Existentialism” on Thursday, October 16, at 4 p.m. It will be in the Garrett Auditorium (Room 103) and is open to the public. A reception in the Garrett lobby will follow the lecture.
Faculty members in the department will be busy this year making three critical hirings in support of the philosophy and religious studies programs.

An international search will be conducted for a philosopher with an area of specialization in ancient or medieval philosophy. This hire will reflect the program’s commitment to having expertise across the breadth of the history of philosophy. The program’s expectation also is that the new faculty member will have teaching and research competence in some other important areas, such as philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, or applied ethics.

Continuing our commitment to the teaching of Biblical scripture and Hebrew language, the program will be conducting an international search for a scholar in Hebrew scripture/Old Testament. The new hire also will be teaching the program’s Judaism course and other courses in that area.

The religious studies program also will be conducting an international search to fill a position in Islam or East Asian religions. Applications will be accepted from specialists in both areas, with the program hiring the best candidate from those applicant pools. This hire reflects the department’s and the university’s continuing commitment to internationalizing our curriculum and preparing our students for productive and rewarding lives in the global community.

Three Faculty Searches Slated for 2008/9

Senior Joshua Smith will be spending the fall semester studying in Jordan. Before he left, he provided us with this description of what he will be doing:

My name is Joshua Smith and I am studying International Relations and Religious Studies with a focus on the Middle East. This fall, I am traveling to Yarmouk University in the city of Irbid. There, I will study in the Arabic as a Foreign Language program in hopes of achieving greater fluency in the language of Arabic. I will be studying four hours a day, five days a week, working on reading, writing, and speaking. It is the perfect environment to study Arabic as the Jordanian dialect closely resembles Modern Standard Arabic, the form taught at WKU. I am very excited at the chance to study during the day and to practice with the locals at night. I visited Jordan for a month during the summer and found the people to be incredibly hospitable and patient with struggling Arabic-speakers, so I am ecstatic at the opportunity to return and live there for four months. My hope is that, upon graduation, I will find a career as an Arabic translator in Chicago or Washington, DC.

All the best to Mr. Smith. We look forward to hearing about his experiences when he returns.

Religious Studies Student Headed to Jordan to Study
Noah Kapley, a graduate of the philosophy program in 2008, has started a graduate program in engineering at the University of Wisconsin this fall. He also received a graduate teaching assistantship.

Crystal Harrison, senior philosophy major, has been named the recipient of the Jonathan Andrew Evans Merit Scholarship for 2008/9. This scholarship was established by Dr. Eugene Evans, a former faculty member in the Gordon Ford College of Business. The scholarship was established in honor of his son, who was a WKU graduate in philosophy.

The Philosophy Club invites all interested students to join them at their regular meetings on Thursdays, 8 p.m., at Spencer’s Coffeehouse (915 College Street). For more information, contact Eric Isbell at eric.isbell@wku.edu.


Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, department head, has been featured in several newspaper articles and interviewed on a couple of radio stations about his forthcoming book Game Day and God: Football, Faith, and Politics in the American South. The book should be available in spring 2009. In addition, his essay “Ecstasy, Joy, and Sorrow: The Religious Experience of Southern College Football” will be available soon in the online Journal of Religion and Popular Culture.

As Western Kentucky University pursues 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 in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.