From the Department Head’s Desk

The Changing Face of the Department

The 2009/10 academic year promises to be an exciting one in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. We begin this year with three new tenure-track colleagues. Pia Antolic-Piper joins our philosophy faculty, while Scott Girdner and Ingrid Lilly join the ranks of our religious studies faculty. All three are excellent scholars and promise to be superb teachers to our students.

With our new colleagues also will come some new initiatives and programmatic changes. Over the summer the religious studies faculty launched the Community Religious Literacy Project to make its expertise available to the broader community. The philosophy program, having already introduced three new introductory courses, will be finishing off a dramatic revision of the philosophy program—one that promises to excite students and be the most innovative program in the Commonwealth. The religious studies program also is considering some new programs that will solidify its place as the best religious studies program in Kentucky.

Despite the tough budgetary time, the Department of Philosophy and Religion is moving forward in a way that will benefit Western Kentucky University for years to come. We’ll keep you posted!

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

Announcing the Community Religious Literacy Project

Western Kentucky University’s Community Religious Literacy Project is designed to provide community organizations in the WKU region the opportunity to tap into the expertise of the Religious Studies faculty. Members of the faculty will provide lectures, lead discussions, or provide consulting services to community organizations.

The new program was approved by the Religious Studies faculty in the spring, and more than 200 churches and community organizations have received literature about its work.

To inquire about the availability of faculty for a specific topic, please contact Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head of Philosophy and Religion, at (270) 745-3136 or by e-mail at eric.bain-selbo@wku.edu.

The project has received attention in the news media. The local paper ran a story over the summer and Dr. Bain-Selbo appeared on the WNKY-TV morning show to talk about the project.
Dr. Bain-Selbo Publishes *Game Day and God*

*Game Day and God: Football, Faith, and Politics in the American South* takes seriously the often-stated assertion that college football in the South is a religion. To this end, Eric Bain-Selbo draws upon a wide range of theoretical approaches in religious studies and cultural criticism. He also relies upon field research on several campuses in the Southeastern Conference where he interviewed fans and experienced “game day.” Consequently, the author is able to make the case that college football does function religiously for many people in the South. In addition, the author introduces key concepts and theories of religion and culture to a general audience.

*Game Day and God* also recounts the role that college football has played in Southern history and culture. Going back as far as the Civil War, the work explains the cultural meaning of college football in the South, delivering a much-needed critical perspective to the subject.

Scholars of religion will find the work a compelling extension of key concepts and theories to an otherwise “secular” activity. Scholars of American culture and sports will find the work to be an interesting case study, one that—unlike much work in the area—focuses our attention on the religious dimension of the phenomenon of sport in American culture. General readers will find that college football or any sport can be much more than they imagined as well as discover important theories with which to make sense of the complexity of our daily lives.

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Dr. Samuels Begins Work in Malaysia

During the summer, Dr. Samuels completed work on a manuscript entitled *Attracting the Heart: Social Relations and the Aesthetics of Emotion in Sri Lankan Monastic Culture*. This important work will be published by the University of Hawaii Press and is scheduled to be released in early 2010.

Dr. Samuels began his research on the social history of Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia, spending approximately nine weeks in that country. Dr. Samuels was awarded research funding by WKU to begin the project. These funds allowed him to spend two months in Malaysia conducting interviews and gathering materials for his project.

While in Malaysia, Dr. Samuels also gave a number of lectures, sharing his expertise through talks at a number of Buddhist temples, religious organizations, and a publishing house.

Students at the Sentul Sunday School in Malaysia listen to a dharma talk in front of a large meditating Buddha statue.
Professor Mukonyora Visits South Africa

This summer Dr. Bella Mukonyora was invited to participate in a unique opportunity in South Africa. She spent two weeks in June attending a “Public Theology Seminar: The South African Experience,” a group of meetings held in the city of Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa. The seminar was planned by Bob and Alice Evans, Directors of the Plowshares Institute, and sponsored by the Nagel Institute. In addition, Dr. Mukonyora’s involvement received funding from the WKU Instructional Development Fund and the Office of International Programs’ Targeted International Initiatives.

While in South Africa, Dr. Mukonyora joined a team of 20 American, Canadian, and African scholars including theologians, philosophers, historians, political scientists and a psychologist. The group held a series of meetings with authors of the new constitution of South Africa, leaders of the court system, political party leaders, intellectuals, and church leaders confronting problems of refugees, poverty and the AIDS pandemic. As part of her participation, Dr. Mukonyora has agreed to include lessons from the seminar in her teaching of RELS 324 (Christianity in Africa) and RELS 403 (Postcolonial Christianity Seminar); and publish a paper connecting environmental theology to problems of poverty and urbanization in post-apartheid South Africa.

Dr. Trafton Scouts Study Abroad Opportunity in Greece

In June Dr. Joseph Trafton and his wife Paula, an Instructor in University Experience and History, spent a week in Greece laying the groundwork for a future study abroad program that they will co-lead in Greece. The program, tentatively set for 18 days in late May and early June of 2010, will focus on ancient Greek religions and history from the beginnings down through the arrival of Christianity. Sites to be visited will include Athens, Sparta, Olympia, Delphi, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Berea, Mycenae, Epidaurus, Thermopylae, Marathon, Pella, and Mount Olympus, just to name a few, as well as several Greek Orthodox churches and monasteries. While space will be limited and the target audience is current students, a few places will be made available for alumni and other friends of WKU. For more information, contact Dr. Trafton at Joseph.Trafton@wku.edu, Dr. Trafton also was in Rome attending a professional meeting this summer, and he may be developing a study abroad opportunity there for summer 2011.
Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, associate professor and department head, attended a number of professional meetings this summer. In May he attended a meeting at the International Partnership Institute at Portland State University in Oregon. The meeting focused on how colleges and universities can partner with local community organizations to create educational opportunities for students. In June, Dr. Bain-Selbo headed to Baltimore with a large WKU contingent to attend the American Democracy Project meeting. The ADP is a set of initiatives run by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Dr. Bain-Selbo’s involvement with WKU’s Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility is a consequence of his participation last year in an ADP initiative. In July, Dr. Bain-Selbo attended the annual meeting of the Society for Values in Higher Education. This year’s meeting was at Elmhurst College in Illinois. Dr. Bain-Selbo was co-chair of the program committee and continues to serve as a member of the Board of Directors.

Dr. Adrian Switzer, assistant professor of philosophy, presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Théorie et culture existentialistes et phénoménologiques at Carleton University in Ottawa, ON in May 2009. The paper, entitled “Anxiety and the Voice of Unreason: Reading Freud with Foucault” will be published in the Fall 2010 issue of the journal PhaenEx. Dr. Switzer spent the summer in Atlanta, at Emory University, continuing his research on a book project on the French reception of Nietzsche during the 1960s and 1970s; while in Atlanta, he also participated in a writing/research workshop with faculty and graduate students in the Department of Philosophy and Comparative Literature at Emory. Several chapters of the manuscript, tentatively entitled Nietzsche and the French Academy: 1964-1972, will be published this fall in the journals Comparatist and PhaenEx.


Ms. Ingrid Lilly, instructor of religion, published “Foundational Texts, Interpretation, and Playing the Game: The Religious Underpinnings of the Sotomayor Hearings” in the July 30 edition of Sightings, a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago. The article can be accessed at http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/.

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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