From the Department Head’s Desk

So, what can I do with a degree in . . .

Over the years, I have talked with hundreds of students and their parents about majoring in Religious Studies, Philosophy, or Asian Religions and Cultures (ARC). These conversations have been in my office, in the hallway, or at any number of recruitment events. During these conversations, one very standard question tends to arise: What am I going to do with a degree in Religious Studies? Or Philosophy? Or ARC? It is a very reasonable question.

For years I have talked about how a major in our department helps students develop analytical tools for reading texts and solving problems, writing and speaking skills to communicate effectively, and a broader horizon within which to live and thrive. I note that these are important skills, tools, and capacities that can help them be successful in whatever career they pursue. Indeed, employers in annual surveys confirm what I tell students.

Recently, we requested a list of professions from the Alumni Office—professions in which our graduates currently are engaged. It is an amazing list: reporter, pharmacist, songwriter, accountant, radiologist, law clerk, college professor, attorney, chef, physician, realtor, artist, and so much more. In short, we learned exactly what we had been telling students and parents for years—our students are intellectually curious, smart, and amazing people. They are prepared to go off to further training (if necessary) and myriad careers. We are delighted to play a part in their preparation for all those challenges and opportunities.

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

Congratulations to Our December 2014 Graduates

The joy of the holiday season is heightened by the graduation of many of our philosophy and religious studies students. Of course, that joy is tempered by the thought that they also will no longer be in our classrooms and visiting our offices (but they always can come visit!). Congratulations to all of the following students.

Asian Religions and Cultures major: Thomas Adams and Dillon Rogers.

Philosophy major: Amber Phillips.

MA in Religious Studies: Daniel Shouse and Jonathan Spence.

Religious Studies major: Timothy Bishop, Jacob Booher, Mason Bramer, Jonathon Bruner, Maura Carson, Joel Extine, Jennifer Hail, Matthew Musselwhite, Dillon Rogers, and Cody Sneed.

Philosophy minor: James Townsend and Avery Wilder.

Professor Alan Anderson Honored for Civil Rights Work

On October 16, 2014, Dr. Alan Anderson, former Department Head of Philosophy and Religion and now professor emeritus, was inducted into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame.

Dr. Anderson has a long history of work in the civil rights movement, including working directly with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In his academic career, much of his teaching, research, and writing was focused on issues of racial justice. He co-authored the book Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago—a book that was nominated for the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in history.

From all his admiring colleagues and students, we offer our hearty congratulations.

Dr. Alan Anderson (seated) and friends celebrate his induction into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame.

Dr. James Barker to Join Faculty in Fall

The Department of Philosophy and Religion is pleased to announce that Dr. James Barker will be joining the faculty in Fall 2015. Dr. Barker earned his doctorate at Vanderbilt University in New Testament and Early Christianity. His dissertation was entitled John’s Use of Matthew. He joins the faculty with several years of teaching experience, including Luther College (Iowa) and Rhodes College (Tennessee).

Dr. Barker will be teaching New Testament and other Biblical Studies courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This coming fall he will teach RELS 100 (New Testament) and RELS 154 (Introductory Biblical Greek), which he also will continue into spring semester.

Join us for this great event later in the month. For more information, contact Dr. Bella Mukonyora at bella.mukonyora@wku.edu.
The power of philosophy can go far beyond the walls of classrooms in Cherry Hall. The Philosophy program, in fact, has a number of initiatives in local and regional correctional facilities. Here is a brief description of these innovative efforts:

This semester Dr. Anton is teaching PHIL 211: Why Are Bad People Bad? inside the Lois M. DeBerry Special Needs Facility, a men's maximum security prison in Nashville. The class is comprised of both students from WKU and incarcerated men. The class focuses on issues concerning moral motivation, reasons for action, theories of human nature, the effects of external social pressures, habit, free will, deadly sins, prejudice, and hate with the other half of the class.

Dr. Grace Hunt is teaching at a separate Nashville facility as part of a Tennessee Higher Education Initiative—allowing incarcerated students to earn credits towards a college degree from the Nashville State Community College. Dr. Hunt teaches the course “Philosophy and Public Space,” a version of which she has taught before in New York State prisons and at the New School for Social Research in New York City, and which she is currently teaching at WKU. The course examines the relationship between structures and personhood, and asks whether philosophy would be possible without the “being together of strangers” that city life provides.

Finally, a group of philosophy students in the fall went in pairs to teach at the Warren County Regional Juvenile Detention Center. They worked with detainees on a number of areas of philosophy, including Ancient Greek philosophy, epistemology and philosophy of science. Many of the kids expressed interest and said that they had often asked themselves these sorts of questions, but didn’t know there existed a field dedicated to considering them in a rigorous fashion. It was incredibly successful and the students will be continuing the initiative in the spring.

JUMP Program Off to Impressive Start

Last year the Religious Studies program launched a new initiative—the Joint Undergraduate-Masters Program in Religious Studies. The program allows undergraduate students to begin taking graduate level courses during their last year as an undergraduate. By “double counting” the graduate courses for both undergraduate and graduate credit, students then can move into the MA program in Religious Studies and complete it in just one additional year.

Five students participated in JUMP this year, and two already have received their Bachelors degrees and entered the MA program. If you are interested in JUMP, please contact Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo at eric.bain-selbo@wku.edu. In addition, information and applications can be picked up in Cherry Hall, Room 300.
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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