From the Department Head’s Desk

One of the more misleading terms in the academic world is “summer vacation.” While faculty, like most people, do vacation during the summer, much of their time between mid-May and mid-August is spent teaching summer courses, prepping for new courses for the upcoming academic year, and devoting undivided time to research projects. This summer was a great example of what the faculty generally accomplish during a summer.

On top of an array of WKU summer courses taught, the faculty in the department:

- Completed or brought to near completion six drafts of book-length manuscripts.
- Organized and ran a conference in China.
- Participated in a Summer Institute sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- Published four articles or book chapters.
- Finished drafting 11 journal articles or book chapters.
- Launched a new manuscript series with a major publisher.
- Finished a year-long sabbatical in Germany.

In short, a busy and productive summer. And now we can enjoy working with all the students again as we begin fall classes!

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

Welcome to Our New Faculty Member

The Department of Philosophy and Religion is delighted to welcome Dr. James Barker to the third floor of Cherry Hall. Dr. Barker is a New Testament scholar who will play a central role in the Biblical Studies area of our Religious Studies program.

Dr. Barker earned a B.A. from the University of Tennessee and a Masters of Theological Studies and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. Dr. Barker has several years of teaching experience (most recently at Rhodes College) and has an impressive scholarly record.

This year, Dr. Barker will be teaching the introductory course in New Testament, the year-long sequence in Biblical Greek, and in the spring a new course entitled “The Making of the Bible” (RELS 314).
Dr. Bain-Selbo Teaches in WKU-WHU Exchange

This past year was the fourth in the faculty exchange agreement between the Department and the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University in China. In the spring, Dr. Li Yong taught a second bi-term course on Chinese philosophy. And in June, Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head, went to Wuhan and taught a graduate course on John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*.

In addition to teaching, Dr. Bain-Selbo gave a public lecture entitled “Sacred Culture: The Religious Experience of the Secular”—with approximately 30-40 students and staff in attendance. He also found time to meet with several faculty members and Deans—enjoying Chinese cuisine and conversations about teaching, research, and future collaborations.

Dr. Fischer Spends Summer in China

This summer Paul Fischer organized an international conference entitled “治氣養心之術：中國早期的修身方法” (The arts of ordering the body and cultivating the mind: early Chinese self-cultivation methods). It was sponsored by the International Center for Studies of Chinese Civilization (复旦大学中□文明国□研究中心) and was held at Fudan University in Shanghai. This one-day conference brought together twelve young scholars from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Czech Republic, and America to discuss current research on what it meant, among the foundational authors of Chinese intellectual history, to cultivate oneself. Self-cultivation may be construed as an active enterprise to bring oneself into alignment with whatever it is that one conceives as “ultimate” within the cosmos. Dr. Fischer’s paper argued that the “empty” ontological status of the cosmic Dao can (and probably should) be read as a metaphor for human “open-mindedness,” a state of mind that that paradoxically can only be cultivated by not acting, which thereby qualifies it as a state of grace. WKU’s Research and Creative Activities Program provided generous support for Dr. Fischer’s work this summer.
Spring Schedule Specials!

Students to have some unique opportunities next semester

The Department of Philosophy and Religion already has an exciting curriculum with lots of interesting courses. But each semester also includes some rather unique options, and this coming spring is a great example. Here are just a few of the more unusual and exciting courses from which students can choose.

In the last year or so, the Religious Studies program developed RELS 200: World Religious Literature. The course also has been approved for the Literary Studies category of the Foundations column of the new Colonnade program. It is the only course other than ENG 200 that now satisfies that requirement. The catalog description reads: “Introductory study of multiple genres of religious literature or literature with strong religious themes. Texts come from various religions, cultures, and time periods.” In the spring, the course will be team-taught by Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo (pictured to the left) and Dr. Jeffrey Samuels (pictured to the right). The course will focus on ideals of human existence, utilizing literature that ranges from ancient India to modern Europe.

Dr. James Barker (see welcome on page 1) is wasting no time in expanding the Biblical Studies offerings in the department. In the spring he is offering the new course RELS 314: The Making of the Bible. The course is “An investigation into the material, historical, and political processes behind the making of the Jewish and Christian Bibles in antiquity. The course engages the Scriptures excluded from the canon as well as early synagogue and church leaders’ arguments concerning canonicity.” Students who have taken any of our lower-level courses in the Bible (RELS 100/101) should be particularly interested in this new course, but there are no prerequisites for it. Anyone can and should sign up!

Dr. Audrey Anton is headed back to prison—to teach that is. Following up on the popularity of the course that she taught at the DeBerry Correctional Facility in Tennessee last spring, Dr. Anton again will be taking a group of students to the facility to join incarcerated students in PHIL/RELS 323: Social Ethics. If you are interested in this unique educational experience, contact Dr. Anton at Audrey.anton@wku.edu.

Dr. Paul Fischer will be teaching Confucianism (RELS 317) in the spring, but this time with a special guest. Dr. Zheng Zemian from Wuhan University will be joining him in the latter half of the semester to team-teach the course. Dr. Zheng will be joining the Department as part of the faculty exchange program with the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University. In addition to helping with the Confucianism course, Dr. Zheng will be giving a special public lecture in the spring.
Dr. Audrey Anton, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, presented her paper, “Aristotle on Moral Motivation and the Importance of Politics,” at the 10th Annual Marquette Summer Seminar on Aristotle and the Aristotelian Tradition, “Political and Ethical Philosophy in the Aristotelian Traditions,” in Milwaukee, WI, June 24-26, 2015. She also presented it at the Kentucky Philosophical Association Summer Workshop at Centre College, July 23-24, 2015.

Dr. James Barker, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, participated in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute at the University of Iowa during June and July. The topic was the Materiality of Medieval Manuscripts: Interpretation through Production. One of Dr. Barker’s projects replicated all three extant endings to the Gospel of Mark as they appear in a noteworthy thirteenth-century parchment codex of the Gospels, namely Greek New Testament miniscule 579. In August, Dr. Barker presented a paper entitled “Fulfillment and Glorification in John 12” at the annual meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association in New Orleans.

Dr. Grace Hunt, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, wrote and published two blog posts concerning feminist critiques of self-defense training for a feminist blog, “Fit is a Feminist Issue.” Together, the blog posts suggest that when the success of self-defense is measured by the prevention of sexual assault, we lose sight of the larger goal of self-defense, namely to provide the opportunity to develop empowering corporeal habits. Click here to access Part I and here to access Part II.

Ryan Korstange, Instructor of Religious Studies, presented his paper “Pedagogical Collaboration: An Analysis of the Claims to the Value of Students and Information in the Way we Choose to Teach” at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Values in Higher Education. This year the meeting was held at Western Kentucky University in July.

Dr. Jeffrey Samuels, Professor of Religious Studies, participated in a workshop on Anthropology of Buddhism at the University of Toronto/McMaster University. At the workshop—sponsored by the Yehan Numata Program—Dr. Samuels discussed his ethnographic research in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, particularly his use of photographs to elicit responses to interview questions.

Dr. Nahed Zehr, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, participated in a working group of just war theorists and international law attorneys at John Carroll University. She also published two articles in the academic journal, Soundings: “Thomas Aquinas and Muhammad al-Shaybani on War, Law, and Statecraft: An Experiment of Theory and Method in Religious Ethics” and “Confessional Just War Thinking and International Politics.” Lastly, she presented a paper (by proxy) at the International Studies Association national meeting titled, “Moral Sovereignty and Legitimate Authority in a Global War.”

Contributions made to WKU and dedicated to the Department of Philosophy and Religion help us to provide important learning opportunities for our students. For example, last year we provided thousands of dollars to support student travel to conferences and to participate in study abroad programs. Please consider making a gift to benefit our young scholars. Click on “Make a Gift” on our webpage for further information.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION NEWS

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