Culturally, “Washington” is becoming a four-letter word in our society. Public opinion polls reveal a genuine disdain for Congress and only tepid support (if that) for the President. A general suspicion of government in general, if not downright animosity, seems to be pervading much of our society.

But in our more sober moments we know that most public officials are not crooks and that most in fact are working with the best of intentions. They really can be labeled public servants.

I often find myself encouraging students to think about government and public service. I do this for two reasons. First, there are some things that we really do need government to do. Second, I believe strongly that we are preparing our students well for public service.

Our students leave the department with strong critical thinking skills as well as an ability to communicate clearly and effectively. And regardless of their major, our students spend a fair amount of time thinking about the lives of others—whether it be ancient philosophers, adherents of other religions, or even their very different classmate sitting next to them. These experiences expand their understanding of the alternative worldviews and the common good. As such, I think they subsequently are well prepared to work not just for a paycheck, but also for others. As a citizen, I would like to see many of them as my public servants.

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head

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**Fall 2014 Film and Lecture Series**

Each semester the Department of Philosophy and Religion schedules a number of lectures and film screening to supplement and enhance our curricular efforts. These events are always free and open to the public. This semester we invite you to join us at the following:

**September 11: Sita Sings the Blues.** The film will be shown at 6:30 pm at the Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility. Dr. Jeffrey Samuels will lead the discussion after the film.

**September 16: Dr. Jeffrey Dippmann, Central Washington University, “Daoism and Environmental Preservation.”** The lecture will be at 4 pm in Helm 100.

**October 17: I [heart] Huckabees.** The film will be shown at 7 pm in Cherry Hall 302. Dr. Grace Hunt will lead the discussion.

**November 21: Gasland.** The film will be shown at 7 pm in Cherry Hall 302. Dr. Audrey Anton will lead the discussion.
Welcome to Our New Faculty Member

The Department of Philosophy and Religion welcomes Dr. Grace Hunt to the faculty. Dr. Hunt will be teaching in the Philosophy program. She specializes in Continental Philosophy (including feminist thought), and her interests and expertise will lead her to interesting connections across campus.

Dr. Hunt recently completed her doctoral work in Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Her dissertation is entitled *Affirmative Reactions: In Defense of Resentment*. Her dissertation adviser was Dr. Richard Bernstein, a leading philosophical figure. Dr. Hunt also holds a BA in Philosophy from York University (Toronto) and an MA in Philosophy from the University of Alberta.

Before coming to WKU, Dr. Hunt was a member of the teaching faculty in the Bard College Prison Initiative, sharing her love of philosophy with some of the most marginalized people in our society. She plans on continuing her work in prisons in the greater Bowling Green region as well.

In the spring, Dr. Hunt will be teaching PHIL 101 (Truth and Relativism) and PHIL 212 (Philosophy and Gender Theory).

Mukonyora Spends Summer Around the Globe

Faculty in the Department of Philosophy and Religion often go great distances as they pursue their research—research that results in important contributions to scholarly literature and to enhanced learning in our classrooms. This summer was no exception—especially in the case of Dr. Bella Mukonyora.

In late June, Dr. Mukonyora attended a Research Day Meeting at the University of Oxford, England. She then spent a week doing archival research in Rhodes House at the Bodleian Library where she found useful information on European missionary ways of thinking about God, nature and human cultures during the first half of the 20th century. The two weeks of research were critical to Dr. Mukonyora’s continuing investigation in two areas: religion and colonialism as well as the intersection of religion and ecology. Both areas also happen to be teaching interests, and students have benefited greatly from her upper-division courses in Postcolonial Christianity (RELS 403) and Religion and Ecology (RELS 408).

Later in the summer, Dr. Mukonyora traveled to the city of Accra, Ghana, in West Africa. The Templeton Foundation invited a group of scholars and religious leaders from different countries in Africa to meet with the representatives of the Foundation and American scholars who are interested in supporting research initiatives on current trends in Christianity in Africa. This experience was valuable both in terms of Dr. Mukonyora’s scholarship and her teaching. She regularly teaches a course on Christianity in Africa (RELS 324) for our students.
Chinese Roundtable Coming to WKU

The 17th Annual Southeast Early China Roundtable (SEECR) will be hosted at WKU from November 1-3, 2013.

On Friday, November 1st, there will be a public lecture by Scott Cook of Grinnell College entitled “Excavated Bamboo Manuscripts and Their Impact on the Study of Early Chinese Texts.” This lecture will be held in Cherry Hall 125 from 5-6pm. Philosophical and religious manuscripts excavated in recent decades from tombs dating to well over two millennia ago have shed new light on early China’s flourishing intellectual history. Dr. Cook’s talk will describe how some of these finds contain interesting variations from the received versions that imply later editorial concerns.

Over the next two days there will be a conference of fifteen early China scholars from around the country to discuss current scholarship on a wide range of topics from early Chinese culture. These scholars come from a variety of academic fields, including Archeology, Art History, East Asian Studies, History, Linguistics, Paleography, Philosophy, and Religion. Organized by Flagship Academic Director Jianjun He and Religious Studies/Asian Religions and Cultures Assistant Professor Paul Fischer, this event will for the first time bring a group of scholars who focus on traditional Chinese culture to our WKU campus.

Department Reaches New Enrollment Heights

The Department of Philosophy and Religion hit a high water mark this fall with more than 150 majors (including graduate students) in its programs. If minors are included, the department has well over 200 students completing one of its six programs.

The recent success of the department has been the result of several factors—including the development of the Asian Religions and Cultures major and the MA in Religious Studies. Department faculty members also have enhanced their outreach to prospective students, work that clearly is paying dividends with the largest entering group of first-year students in recent memory. Most students who come to the department, however, are coming the same way they have for many years—they take one of our courses, are challenged and stimulated by the material, inspired by the faculty member, and keep coming back for more.

Faculty, staff, and students from the department regularly participate in recruitment events either sponsored by the department, Potter College of Arts & Letters, or the university. The department also has made a more concerted effort to market its programs across campus and the region. Students and alumni are encouraged to help too. We have free buttons in the office in Cherry Hall. You also can show your support by purchasing (and wearing proudly) one of our department t-shirts. At only $7, they are the best deal on campus!
Other Faculty News

Dr. Audrey Anton, assistant professor of philosophy, presented a talk entitled “Second-hand Discrimination: how student-teacher romantic relationships affect women in Philosophy” at the Diversity in Philosophy Conference at the University of Dayton. Later in July, she presented her paper, “Aristotle’s Voluntary Pathé,” at the Kentucky Philosophical Association Summer Workshop. In late May, Dr. Anton gave an interview with a reporter from The Globe and Mail, a newspaper based out of Toronto, concerning her expertise in the moral psychology of psychopaths and sociopaths. In addition, Dr. Anton published an entry on “Causality” for the SAGE publication, Encyclopedia of Criminal Justice Ethics, and began reviewing submissions for her edited collection, The Bright and the Good: Exploring the Connection Between Intellectual and Moral Virtues. The remainder of her summer was spent researching the topic, “Why are bad people bad?”, for her Enduring Questions Grant, awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities this past April.

Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, department head, helped to organize and participated in the 89th Annual Meeting of the Society for Values in Higher Education. The meeting was at the University of Denver in July.

Dr. Jeffrey Samuels, associate professor of religion, published three articles over the summer. The first one, “Families Matter: Ambiguous Attitudes Toward Child Ordination in Contemporary Sri Lanka” was published in a volume titled Family in Buddhism: Buddhist Vows and Family Ties. Edited by Liz Wilson, 89-115. New York: State University of New York Press, 2013. The second article was published in a Festschrift to a Buddhist Monk, Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda. The article is focuses on Dr. Samuels's recent research in Sri Lanka and is titled “A Brief History of the Theravada Tradition.” An earlier article of Dr. Samuels was also republished (with revisions) in The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of Mahayana and is titled “The Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravada Theory and Practice.”

Dr. Ian Schnee, assistant professor of philosophy, has been instrumental in the Bowling Green chess scene. The Department of Philosophy and Religion teamed up with the WKU Chess Club this summer to promote chess in local schools, WKU, and greater community. The department helped sponsor the 5th Annual WKU Open chess tournament, held in the Knicely Center in May. This tournament is the premier scholastic chess tournament in the region, drawing 150 student chess players from grades K-12. The high school section of the event doubles as a competition for three WKU chess scholarships, one of which is a four-year full ride scholarship won by Sean Vibbert of Indiana. The event also draws significant talent for the open division, which was won by Grandmaster Maxim Dlugy, former World Junior Chess Champion and President of the United States Chess Federation. Dr. Schnee was one of the tournament directors of the event. He also coached scholastic chess players from around the WKU service region at the WKU summer chess camp, a weeklong camp held on the WKU campus in June.

Dr. Joseph Trafton, professor of religion, was invited to present a paper at the First International Conference on the Psalms of Solomon. The conference, which attracted the leading Psalms of Solomon scholars in the world, was held June 17-18 at the University of Strasbourg in Strasbourg, France. Dr. Trafton’s paper was entitled, “What Would David Do? Messianic Expectation and Surprise in Psalm of Solomon 17.” The conference papers will be published by the Society of Biblical Literature in its Early Judaism and Its Literature series. A second conference has been tentatively scheduled for June of 2015.


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 nearly $4,000 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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