Election years sometimes can be disheartening times. More precisely, political campaigns can be disheartening. The silly sniping about inconsequential issues, the back-and-forth pouncing on gaffes, the reduction of complex political or economic issues to 10-second sound bites—all of this and more can frustrate citizens and encourage apathy. Indeed, every election year pundits mourn about the state of our democracy and where we may be headed.

There certainly are legitimate areas of concern, but also sources of hope. Many of those sources of hope are right here on the third floor of Cherry Hall. Students in Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Asian Religions and Cultures are being pushed to think critically, to assess evidence, to construct reasonable arguments, and to expand their horizons in order to hear and understand the very different perspectives of others. In short, they are learning the kind of skills that are necessary for good citizenship.

In the recent Kentucky Civic Health Index published by the WKU Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (in cooperation with the National Council on Citizenship), we learn that college graduates are more engaged in their communities and more politically active. When I think of our students in this regard, I remain hopeful for our democracy. And by the way, don’t forget to vote.

Eric Bain-Selbo, Department Head
Welcome to Our New Faculty

Dr. Nahed Zehr is the newest scholar to join the faculty in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. Her research is on Islam in the modern world as well as religious ethics (particularly just war theory).

Dr. Zehr has a B.A. and M.A. in Religious Studies from the University of Iowa. Last year she completed her dissertation at Florida State University. Her dissertation was entitled “Responding to the Call: Just War and Jihad in the War against al-Qaeda.” Before coming to WKU, Dr. Zehr was a Minerva Research Chair at the United States Naval War College in Rhode Island.

Dr. Zehr certainly will contribute greatly to our students and the intellectual life of our department.

Two New Books from Religious Studies Faculty

It was a particularly productive summer for two Religious Studies faculty. Both Dr. Ingrid Lilly and Dr. Paul Fischer published important works in their fields.

Dr. Lilly’s Two Books of Ezekiel: Papyrus 967 and the Masoretic Text as Variant Literary Editions (VTSup 150; Brill, 2012) brings an under-studied Greek manuscript of the biblical book of Ezekiel to light. Papyrus 967 is the oldest copy of Ezekiel in any language, and sheds enormous light on how the book of Ezekiel came into its final shape. By comparing Hebrew and Greek variants, the study shows that two literary editions of Ezekiel circulated in antiquity, one significantly shorter than the other. The longer, later edition (the one reflected in modern Bibles) edited Ezekiel’s prophecies to strengthen themes like purity, enemy death, interpretation of prophecy, and the underworld.

Dr. Fischer published Shizi: China's First Syncretist. By blending multiple strands of thought into one ideology, Chinese Syncretists of the pre-imperial period created an essential guide to contemporary ideas about self, society, and government. Merging traditions such as Ruism, Mohism, Daoism, Legalism, and Yin-Yang naturalism into their work, Syncretists created an integrated intellectual approach that contrasts with other, more specific philosophies. Presenting the first full English translation of the earliest example of a Syncretist text, this volume introduces Western scholars to both the brilliance of the syncretic method and a critical work of Chinese leadership.
Research Summer in Singapore for Dr. Samuels

Dr. Samuels spent three months this summer at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. While there, he conducted research and worked on a book-length manuscript on Buddhism in Malaysia. After having done extensive research and published widely (including his 2010 book *Attracting the Heart: Social Relations and the Aesthetics of Emotion in Sri Lankan Monastic Culture*) on Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Malaysia presents Dr. Samuels with a new range of questions and issues.

While in Singapore, Dr. Samuels also presented a paper on Buddhism and the Formation of a Transnational Identity in Malaysia, a seminar (with Dr. Liang Yongjia) on Ethnographic Fieldwork and Qualitative Research, and a chapter of his manuscript to the Religion and Globalization Research Cluster. Dr. Samuels’s research was supported by a Visiting Senior Research Fellowship from the Asia Research Institute, and an individual research grant from the American Academy of Religion.

Dr. Fischer Teaches at Wuhan University

Dr. Paul Fischer went to Wuhan University in late May as part of a new faculty-exchange program. He taught "Excavated Texts from Early China: Self and Cosmos", an intensive four-week course that was attended by 26 sophomores enrolled in the Chinese Intellectual History program.

In the past few decades several dozen texts dating from the 2nd-4th centuries BCE have been recovered from ancient tombs in China. These manuscripts are currently being analyzed by scholars to reveal how they influence our understanding of the received textual tradition. Early Chinese intellectual history presents us with several ways of relating to the universe that are quite different from those derived from the scriptures of the West Asian religions that pervade American culture. Rather than looking to a deity or a book, human society (Confucianism), Nature (Daoism), and existence itself (Zen) have all been put forward by traditional China as the proper source of our morality.

Dr. Fischer also met once a week with graduate students to discuss ongoing research. When the school term ended, and the temples of Wuhan no longer sang their siren song, Dr. Fischer left, first for Shanghai and then to Beijing. There he met with scholars, bought new books (unavailable in America), read, and pondered his next move in his bid for perfect apprehension of cosmic consciousness in small fish.
Dr. Audrey Anton, assistant professor of philosophy, was elected vice president of the Kentucky Philosophical Association, and has been asked to host the 2014 meeting at WKU. In May, Dr. Anton participated in the Capacity-Character Project, an international workshop on moral responsibility and psychopathy held at Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. Shortly thereafter, she presented her paper, “Mean and Stupid: what it’s like to be vicious according to Aristotle,” at the Contemporary Aristotelian Studies annual conference at the University of Nottingham. She co-presented a co-authored paper with WKU undergraduate student, Adam Grant Johnson. Their paper, “Luxury and Leisure,” was presented at the International Society of McIntyrean Enquiry, also held at the University of Nottingham.

Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, department head, presented his paper “The Paradox of Sports and Secularization: From Religion to the Profane to the Sacred Secular” at the 4th Annual Sport & Society Meeting at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. The conference was July 23-25. Before arriving in England, Dr. Bain-Selbo continued his research on civil religion by observing the July 14 (Bastille Day) celebration in Paris.

Dr. Bella Mukonyora, associate professor of religion, attended a meeting of members of the WKU Upper Green River Biological Preserve Project during the summer. She convened meetings on teaching initiatives on environmental studies that involve uses of the Upper Green River Biological Preserve. On July 15, Dr. Mukonyora led a discussion on how Christians who live in today’s world face challenges that come with knowing about the history of other religions and cultures. Her topic was, “Disputed Questions for Christianity Today.” In early August, Dr. Mukonyora attended the 5th International Conference for the Study of Religion and Nature held at the Pepperdine University. She presented a paper based on material from her book project tracing ways of making the conversation on spiritual ecology more global and inter-religious. Dr. Mukonyora now features in the 2012/2013 the Speakers Bureau of the Kentucky Humanities Council, Inc. with two public lectures called, “Ancient and Modern Religious Stories about Earth,” and “The Changing Face of Christianity in Today’s World.”

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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FUSE Grant Students

Faculty-Undergraduate Student Engagement grants are awarded by the university to facilitate research conducted by a faculty member/student team. These competitive grants fund research activities as well as travel associated with presenting that research as professional conferences. If you are interested in these opportunities, please talk with your adviser or with Department Head Eric Bain-Selbo.

ARC Student Studies
Ancient Texts

Joseph Southworth, senior in Asian Religions and Cultures, is working with Dr. Paul Fischer in a study of the works of Duan Chengshi.

Duan Chengshi lived around 800 AD in the Tang Dynasty of China. His father was a well-respected minister and had several positions that took him around the country. This was after the An Lushan Rebellion and the empire was in constant turmoil till 910. Chengshi generally accompanied his father and was interested in tidbits of knowledge and curious things like ghost stories. He put together an eclectic work called Miscellaneous Morsels From Youyang. The complexity of the work has posed a special challenge for interpreters and continues to merit scholarly attention.

Philosophers Head to England

Dr. Audrey Anton and senior philosophy major Grant Johnson prepare to present their work at a conference at the University of Nottingham in England. The work they presented was a draft of their co-authored article. The conference served as an important opportunity to develop further the argument of the paper.

ARC Major Conducts Summer Research in Asia

Daniel Shouse, senior in Asian Religions and Cultures, traveled to the island nation of Singapore to conduct ethnographic research among the Hindu Tamil population. His goal was to gain a degree of understanding about how members of this significant minority identify themselves both within the group and in the wider population. He spent the largest portion of his time in Little India, meeting and speaking with many wonderful people as he visited the various Hindu temples and spent time at local hotspots like the shopping mall and Western Union. He also was fortunate enough to participate in a wide range of ceremonies, including pujas, chariot processions and even a wedding. Mr. Shouse is working with Dr. Jeffrey Samuels on this project. He also just learned that a paper related to this work was accepted for the 2013 Annual Conference of the Association for Asian Studies to be held in San Diego, CA.
During the Winter Term, Dr. Joseph Trafton and his wife, Paula Trafton, will be leading a Study Away program to New York City. The theme will be “Religion and Broadway.” Participants will attend seven Broadway and off-Broadway shows (the tentative list includes *Wicked, Newsies, Once, The Lion King, Scandalous: The Life and Trials of Aimee Semple McPherson, A Jew Grows in Brooklyn*, and *Miracle on South Division Street*) and will have opportunities to meet Broadway actors and actresses. Tentative dates are January 7-15, 2013. Students, alumni, and other friends of WKU are welcome. For more information, contact Dr. Trafton (joseph.trafton@wku.edu).

Isn’t it time you visited New York City?