From the Chair

We have had another fruitful and productive year, but one that is tempered by the loss of Dr. George Barker. I miss him deeply. Faculty earned six grants to support teaching and research. Our teaching excellence is once again reaffirmed in Dr. Jeff Brackett’s receipt of Ball State’s top teaching honor. We had a record year of scholarly productivity. And we are happy to welcome a new tenure-track faculty member to our family, Dr. Rachel Fredericks.

As usual, many of our students have received intensive individual instruction, including Christine Baker’s work in epistemology and feminism. While at the American Philosophical Association meeting in Philadelphia, our students found time to explore some American history. May 2014 philosophy graduate Kevin Mager’s paper “The Necessity of a Rawlsian Political Scheme for the Maximization of Utility” has been accepted in Dialogue: The Journal of Phi Sigma Tau (the international philosophy honor society). Students in Jeff Brackett’s immersive learning seminar on Religion in Comics created their own graphic novels infused with content regarding religion. Students in Jen Rowland’s Environmental Ethics course contributed over 300 hours of service to local sustainability organizations while learning about how invasive species can upset biotic health.

Most importantly, THANK YOU! Last year was a record for giving to the department from alumni, faculty, students, and friends. Thanks for helping us provide students with exceptional learning experiences that would not be possible without you.

Dr. George Barker - In Memorium

Dr. George Eldon Barker, 87, passed away peacefully at his winter home in New Orleans on April 7, 2015. He is survived by his wife of sixty-three years, Patricia Barker; their two children, Ellen, New Orleans, and Mark and his wife, Debra, Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and by his devoted dog, Sadie. He was interred with family in Louisville, KY in May 2015. Any memorial contributions may be made to ARF in Muncie or the First Presbyterian Church in Muncie.

Dr. Barker taught at Ball State University for 47.5 academic years, from January 1966 to July 2013. He greatly enjoyed teaching and working with students, who universally loved him. Known for never having an unkind word to say about anyone, he exemplified the role of servant leader. He showed how to put students first, not only with words, but also by example.

George was always ready to help anytime the department had a need. Indeed, even after his passing, his wife Pat donated many of George’s books to the department, a final and lasting gift. George’s academic books will begin a departmental library for our students, and most of the non-academic ones will be sold, with the proceeds supporting extra-curricular student activities. A kinder countenance one will not find.

bsu.edu/philosophy or bsu.edu/religiousstudies
Faculty Highlights

Last summer Elizabeth Agnew (eagnew@bsu.edu) spent time at the Dar al Islam Institute’s Workshop: “Understanding and Teaching about Islam.” She is in year three as a member of a State Department partnership between Ball State University and the University of Quaid-i-Azam [QIA] in Islamabad, Pakistan. Elizabeth helps QIA faculty develop courses in American Studies and teaches/mentors young Pakistani scholars in a summer seminar hosted by Ball State. Her latest work “Mary Ellen Richmond” is forthcoming in American National Biography.

Congratulations to Jeff Brackett (imbrackett@bsu.edu) for winning Ball State’s highest teaching honor, the Outstanding Teaching Award! Jeff spent the spring 2015 semester teaching one of Ball State’s flagship immersive learning courses at the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. Learn more here http://cms.bsu.edu/academics/centersandinstitutes/virginiaballcenter and here http://en.calameo.com/read/000014947c78d2127a722. Jeff has also developed a new version of RELS 390 to focus on Ramayana. Using a new research methodology, he has completed a translation of the Marathi novel Ananda Owari (https://twitter.com/Tukaram_Tweets). He continues as a leader in the American Academy of Religion’s Teaching Section.

Dave Concepción (dwconcepcion@bsu.edu) spent much of the last year traveling the country leading workshops to help philosophers improve their teaching. His recent work focuses on diversity and inclusive pedagogy. In recognition of his efforts, Dave received Ball State’s Outstanding Diversity Advocate award. He continues on the editorial boards of the journals Teaching Philosophy and College Teaching. He remains the faculty advisor for Stance, the philosophy program’s immersive learning project, which now has a new website: http://stancephilosophy.com.

Jeff Fry’s (jfry@bsu.edu) recent scholarship includes “Philosophical Approaches to Coaching,” in the Routledge Handbook to the Philosophy of Sport and “Sports and Naiveté” in the Journal of the Philosophy of Sport. He serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of the Philosophy of Sport and Sport, Ethics & Philosophy. During the spring of 2015 he enjoyed time at the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions as part of a well-earned sabbatical.

Kevin Harrelson (kharrelson@bsu.edu) spent his fall 2014 sabbatical doing research at the University of Pittsburgh. Last summer he directed Matthew Ryan’s honors thesis on American Cinema. Recent publications include: “Inferentialist Philosophy of Language and the Historiography of Philosophy” in the British Journal of the History of Philosophy and “The Priority of Epistemology in Early Neo-Kantianism” in History of Philosophy Quarterly. Recent presentations include “Composition and Inference: Hegel between Brandom and Fodor.” He serves as President of the Indiana Philosophical Association.

Kalumba’s (kkalumba@bsu.edu) recent publications include: “Consensus and Federalism in Contemporary African Political Philosophy” forthcoming in Philosophical Papers. Kalumba continues as the advisor of the African Student Association and as editor-in-Chief of Philosophia Africana.

Joseph Marchal (jamarchal@bsu.edu) revised RELS 450 to help students integrate previous course work. He was remarkably productive as Kingdon Fellow in Judeo-Christian Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin. He has penned a new monograph, Philippians: Historical Problems.
Introducing Dr. Rachel Fredericks

Dr. Rachel Fredericks joins our Ball State faculty in August 2015 as a Tenure-Track Assistant Professor of Philosophy. Rachel received a BA in Philosophy from Reed College and a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Washington. She is an ethicist with expertise in Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory, especially moral emotions such as jealousy.

Rachel will be teaching Environmental Ethics and Bioethics among other courses. Rachel is an award-winning teacher who notes, "philosophy gives us tools to think critically about our world, to imagine different, better worlds, and then to bring those better worlds into being through our activities. Trying to do that is what piqued my interest in working at Ball State."

Dr. Concepción: What do you hope philosophy majors will learn from you?

Dr. Fredericks: I hope they learn that studying philosophy is one of the best ways to avoid being bored! There is always something new going on in the world that we can react to as philosophers, some old problem to approach from a new direction or some familiar view to challenge with our critical thinking.

C: What research excites you?

F: I am having lots of fun working on a cluster of papers about moral responsibility for things other than actions, including beliefs, desires, emotions, and character traits ... In the future, I’m going to be thinking less about individual moral responsibility and more about collective moral responsibility.

C: What excites you about teaching?

F: I’m looking forward to figuring out how Ball State students are like and unlike the students I’ve worked with at other schools so that I can tailor my teaching to their needs and interests. I am particularly excited about reworking my existing environmental ethics course ... In the longer term, I’m considering developing courses about food ethics, moral emotions, civil disobedience, collective responsibility, or some other cool subject (depending on what interests my students).

Dr. Brackett wins Outstanding Teaching Award!

In August 2014 Dr. Jeff Brackett received Ball State University’s highest teaching honor, the Outstanding Teaching Award. The award recognizes a faculty member who employs exemplary pedagogy, creatively innovates, leads distinctively in teaching, has a long-term impact on students and the field, and who publishes regarding teaching. The letters of support for Jeff from national leaders in the teaching of religious studies were phenomenal: “As a teacher, he inspires me; as a leader in the field he has challenged me to think more carefully.” Former students chimed in as well: “I could not have asked for a better teacher and mentor.”

Dr. Brackett Makes Three

Only 13 faculty at BSU have received the Outstanding Teaching Award, and three of them are in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Put another way, one-third of our tenure-track faculty have earned BSU’s top teaching award.

Faculty Highlights


Undergraduate honors research fellow Christine Baker worked for Juli (Eflin) Thorson (jthorson@bsu.edu) as they studied epistemology and feminism. Juli continues as a mentor in Ball State’s “Interactive Learning Space” initiative, helping other faculty improve their pedagogy. She also mentors many first year faculty. Her most recent paper “Thick, Thin, and Becoming a Virtuous Arguer,” is forthcoming in Topoi. She continues to review for the journals Science Education and Teaching Philosophy.

Sarah Vitale had a wonderful first year. Her latest article, “Castoriadis, Marx, and the Critique of Productivism,” will appear in Telos. She leads the philosophy club, guiding students through exciting experiences (see opposite page). Students say of Sarah: “The best professor I’ve had,” “A perfect example of what a prof. should be. She loves her work, cares for her students and their success,” and “passionate, organized, clear, and helpful.”

Teaching Faculty

Adam Bowen, Daniel “D” Cole, Jen Rowland, and Peg Shaffer continue teaching for the department. “D” is reducing his load to one course per semester because he is entering the PhD program at the University of Kentucky. Adam will take over fulltime as the teacher of our online philosophy courses. Peg Shaffer teaches fulltime online in Religious Studies, and Jen Rowland will teach fulltime on campus. Students say of Jen: “Prof. Rowland is an awesome instructor! I would take the class over again 10 times just to be in her class. Fabulous, passionate, interesting.”

Dr. Concepción wins Outstanding Diversity Advocate Award!

Dr. Concepción is Ball State University’s 2014 Outstanding Diversity Advocate. The award is in recognition of at least five years of demonstrated excellence in championing the cause of diversity by a member of the Ball State community.

Outstanding Faculty award ceremony. Front left is Dr. Jeff Brackett. Front right is Dr. David Concepción. Back right is BSU President Paul Ferguson.
Make a Gift

Now is a critical time for funding in the humanities. For the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies to continue to offer the very best in undergraduate education, it is essential that we are able to support innovative teaching, research, and special events. In short, we need your help. Please consider a gift to the Ball State Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies.

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