From the Chair

One of the Chair’s jobs is to prepare a variety of reports. Recently, when crunching some numbers, I discovered that our department is in the top quintile of students taught per faculty member, the bottom quintile of cost per student taught, and that our teaching evaluations are well above the college average, even though 80% of our teaching is in courses that tend to have lower than average evaluations. It’s hard to quantify great teaching, but these numbers confirm that we are achieving our goal of providing an engaged, personal, and caring undergraduate education. We hope we helped you become the person you want to be. I really enjoy hearing from alumni. If you are so moved, send me an email about your time at Ball State or what you are doing now. dwconcepcion@bsu.edu.

Speaking of serving you well, we are founding an alumni council this year. David Feeney (’88 Philosophy, david.r.feeney@gmail.com), is leading a small group of volunteers – including Elizabeth Dernier (’06 Religious Studies and Philosophy), Kelsi Morrison-Atkins (’12 Religious Studies 2010), and Erin Walton (’08 Philosophy and Religious Studies) – to get us ready for an official election and inception. Please be on the lookout for further updates.

Most importantly, thank you once again for your continued support. Your giving continues to help us provide current students with exceptional learning experiences.

Stance Turns 10!

For ten years, our philosophy majors have led an international team in the production of the world’s highest quality undergraduate philosophy journal. Stance: An International Undergraduate Philosophy Journal aims to enrich student learning by providing an opportunity for undergraduate students to have their original scholarly work reviewed by, or published in, a peer-reviewed academic journal. Stance has received Ball State’s Immersive Learning Award, the American Scholastic Press Association’s “Most Outstanding University Journal” award and the American Philosophical Association “Prize for Excellence and Innovation.” Stance is edited and produced entirely by undergraduate students, and is the only journal of its kind of sufficient quality to be listed in The Philosopher’s Index.

Each year, Ball State students select approximately twenty-five undergraduates (from a pool of approximately eighty applications) from around the world to serve as External Reviewers or Assistant Editorial Board members. Ball State students train these external reviewers and together we evaluate approximately 140 manuscripts per year in multiple rounds of anonymous review according to a rigorous rubric. Ball State students write constructive comments for every manuscript author, of which approximately twenty are substantial “revise and resubmit” letters. Ball State students complete all editing and production tasks, working through multiple rounds of copy-editing, layout, and pre-production communications. All Stance students participate in all three of the major aspects of production, but philosophy majors lead with regard to content evaluation; English students lead with regard to copy-editing; and architecture/digital media students lead with regard to production.

By participating in Stance – by evaluating scores of manuscripts according to rigorous criteria – philosophy majors improve their reading, writing, and argumentation skills as well as their time management, leadership, and followership skills. Stance veterans often write to let us know how participation in Stance positively impacted their careers. Go to the supporter page to find a “Rick Roll” behind the heart, http://stancephilosophy.com. If you would like a print copy, just let us know.
Faculty Highlights

Elizabeth Agnew (eagnew@bsu.edu) wrapped up her work on a partnership between Ball State University and Quaid-i-Azam University [QiA] in Islamabad, Pakistan. Elizabeth helps QiA faculty develop courses in American Studies and teaches/mentors young Pakistani scholars. She is working with the Outreach Coordinator of the Muncie Islamic Center to establish community dialogues. Last fall she presented “A Deliberative Devotion: Jane Addams and Mohandas Gandhi” at the Peace History Society conference.

Jeff Brackett (imbrackett@bsu.edu) published “Religion and Comics” in Religion Compass, vol. 9. Jeff received a significant grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to re-envision the Religious Studies program. Jeff, Elizabeth, and Joe have spent many hours this summer working on programmatic innovations. As a leader in the American Academy of Religion Teaching Section, he organized a multi-day conference that brought many of the nation’s best scholars of teaching to share their expertise at Ball State.

Congratulations to Dave Concepción (dwconcepcion@bsu.edu) for receiving the American Association of Philosophy Teachers Award of Merit, which recognizes a lifetime of service to the advancement of the teaching of philosophy. He achieved a “Top 3% of all Researchers” recognition from Academia.edu for his new paper “The State of Teacher Training in Philosophy,” Teaching Philosophy. He encourages philosophy alumni to read another new paper because, really, it’s about them: https://www.academia.edu/22475211/Philosophical_Emergencies. Dave serves as a leader in Ball State’s New Faculty Academy, where he mentors faculty who are starting out at Ball State.

Rachel Fredericks (rfr Fredericks@bsu.edu) is using grant money she earned to support research travel. At the Northwestern University Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics, she commented on “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame.” She also presented an original paper on emotions about abstract objects (especially awe) at the European Philosophical Society for the Study of Emotions in Athens, Greece. In August, she will present a poster about moral responsibility for concepts at the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress.

In addition to Ethics and Philosophy of Sport Jeff Fry (jfr@bsu.edu) taught “Happiness, Ethics, and your Brain” this past year. Recent presentations include “Sport and the Anxious Mind.” After presenting “Two Kinds of Brain Injury in Sport” at the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport in Cardiff, Wales he attended an international rugby match. Jeff continues coauthoring a book tentatively entitled “Say it Ain’t So: Sport and Naiveté” and coediting a special issue of the journal Sport, Ethics and Philosophy on sport and neuropsychology. Jeff continues on the editorial boards of Journal of the Philosophy of Sport and Sport, Ethics and Philosophy. He also continues to coordinate the department’s Big Questions, Big Ideas public lecture series at the Muncie Public Library.

Congratulations to Kevin Harrelson (kjharrelson@bsu.edu) on earning tenure, August 2015. Kevin led an honor’s student in an independent study on Narrative Identity. Recent publications include “Narrative Identity and Diachronic Self-Knowledge,” Journal of the American Philosophical Association and “Inferentialist Philosophy of Language and the Historiography of Philosophy,” British Journal of the History of Philosophy. He served as President of the Indiana Philosophical Association.

High School Outreach Program

In December 2015, we began a high school outreach program. We contacted almost 250 public and private high schools across Indiana to see if they would like to meet our students and faculty. About 40 schools responded positively. During spring 2016, Dr. Sarah Vitale and a group of philosophy majors and BSU Philosophy Club members visited five high schools that have philosophy clubs, including several schools in the greater Indianapolis area and Twin Lakes High School in Monticello, IN. The goal of the meetings is to give high school students and our students a valuable experience, but a nice side effect might be that we become the school of choice for Indiana students interested in philosophy.

In the meetings, Vitale leads discussions in the style of BSU’s philosophy club, on topics such as censorship and happiness. Then our BSU students field questions about their own experiences with philosophy and college in general.

Ball State students find it rewarding to share their philosophical expertise and love of philosophy with younger students. So many students wanted to travel to the last site visit of the semester that we had to get a van. We have all been very impressed with the level of curiosity and intellectual engagement displayed by the high school students.

In the coming year, Vitale and BSU students will make many more visits, including meetings at schools without existing clubs or philosophy classes, providing many students with their first formal encounter with philosophy. They also will return to the schools they have visited, whose students were very appreciative of the opportunity to engage in an extra-curricular conversation about philosophy with university students and faculty.

Check out Dr. Marchal’s New Book!

The People Beside Paul

This volume brings together an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars with a broad range of expertise and a common interest: Philippi in antiquity.

Each essay engages one set of contextual particularities for Paul and the ordinary people of the Philippian assembly, while simultaneously placing them in wider settings. The essays offer insight into standard questions about the letter’s hymn and audience, Paul’s “opponents,” and the sites of the community and of Paul’s imprisonment, as well as more marginalized topics and groups, including women, slaves, Jews, and members of localized cults. This “people’s history” uses both traditional and more cutting-edge methods to reconsider archaeology and architecture, economy and ethnicity, prisons and priestesses, slavery, syncretism, stereotypes of Jews, the colony of Philippi, and a range of communities – there and then and also here and now.
Introducing Matthew Hotham

Matthew Hotham joins our Ball State faculty in August 2016. Matt received a BA in Philosophy from Colgate University, an MFA (poetry) from Syracuse University, an MTS from Harvard Divinity School, and is finishing up a PhD in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Matt’s expertise is in Islamic Studies, especially mysticism, Persian poetry, animality, and gender. He will teach Intro. to Religion and Culture and courses in Islam.

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

Hotham: I hope majors will gain some of the insights that attracted me to the study of religion, such as: the beauty, complexity, diversity, and difficulty of studying Islamic traditions; the importance of interrogating our “common sense” understanding of religion in order to unpack contemporary political and social debates, from gay rights to refugee resettlement; and the thrill of watching a primary source text come alive through slow, careful reading. On a more practical level, I hope students who take my classes will learn to examine their presuppositions, make careful, thoughtful arguments, and learn to shape these arguments into delectable prose.

C: What research excites you?

Hotham: My research often involves hours poring over books in libraries, but it also takes me to far-flung locales where I get to meet and talk to people with diverse opinions on the topic of Islam and mysticism. Both the texts I read and the people I encounter use stories and parables to understand and situate themselves in the world. I get excited about collecting these stories and exploring how they transform through retelling. Currently, I am investigating animal parables in Persian poetry for their implications regarding medieval Islamic understandings of human/animal relations.

C: What excites you about teaching?

Hotham: I enjoy working with students to explore the diversity and complexity of religious traditions in such a way that they leave the class without a stable definition of a religion. I hope they gain the ability to identify and examine implicit definitions of religion they encounter in daily life: from the evening news to yoga class. What I enjoy most about teaching is the “eureka” moment when a student begins to see the world as a tapestry of implicit assumptions about religion and religiosity. Dr. Kathryn Lofton has said “I have a disease. I see religion everywhere.” I long ago caught Lofton’s illness, and get excited when students start showing symptoms.

Faculty Highlights

Kalumba (kkalumba@bsu.edu) continues as Editor-in-Chief of the international journal Philosophia Africana, where he puts his expertise in Social & Political and African philosophy to good use. Recent presentations include “Promoting Peace in Multi-ethnic African Countries by Reducing Ethnic Marginalization” Benjamin V. Cohen Conference on Peace in Troubled Times. He reviewed for the South African Journal of Philosophy and serves as an external examiner of a student’s PhD thesis at the Univ. of South Africa.

Joseph Marchal (jamarchal@bsu.edu) has edited and contributed to a new book The People beside Paul. Other recent papers include: "Trans* and Intersex Studies: Variations in Gender, Embodiment, and Religions in Embodied Religion" ed. Brintnall) and “Bio-Necro-Biblio-Politics?” in Culture and Religion. Recent presentations include “Alternative Futures from the Corinthian Women’s Past” and “Appa(u)lling Bodies: Queerly Reconfiguring Paul’s Letters.” Joe continues on the editorial board of Bible and Critical Theory and as a reviewer for many academic journals.

Juli (Eflin) Thorson (th thorson@bsu.edu) advised philosophy and Spanish major Lauren Fosnight’s honor’s thesis entitled “Chicana, World Traveling, and the Construction of Multiplicitious Selves. She continues innovating with technology and inclusive pedagogy in her classes, and is working on a paper on Inclusive Pedagogy. She continues reviewing for many journals including Science Education, Teaching Philosophy, and Hypatia.

Sarah Vitale can’t believe she has been at Ball State for two years. She loves getting to know students and working on creative ways to engage them. As a co-advisor to the BSU Philosophy Club, she spearheaded a philosophy outreach program, where Ball State philosophy students visit high schools throughout Indiana. Sarah has developed and taught a new course, Society, Discipline, and Control, where students examine some of the institutions in their lives, such as prisons and the media. She presented “Utopian in Walter Benjamin” at the Rome Critical Theory Conference. She also continues as Co-Editor of the Radical Philosophy Review, journal of the Radical Philosophy Assoc.

Teaching Faculty

Adam Bowen, Jen Rowland, and Peg Shaffer continue as full-time teachers for the department, and they all continue to get glowing teaching evaluations. Adam has a new article forthcoming: “Combating an Argument Against Extensionalism,” Chronos: Proceedings of the Philosophy of Time Society. Jen is spending the summer working on her dissertation on global justice, energy policy, and climate change. Peg continues as the Asst. Director of BSU’s Freshman Connections program. Replacing “D” Cole is Dr. Christopher M. Davidson. Christopher earned his PhD at Villanova University. He is a multiple award-winning teacher who comes to us with impressive experience teaching online. Dedicated to his craft, during the summer of 2016 he participated in a week-long Pedagogical Residency.

News Bites

Ann Marie Adams is in her seventh year as our Administrative Coordinator. She is invaluable to us. It’s likely that if you contact us, you will say “Hi” to her.

During the 2016-2017 academic year we plan to roll out an Ethics Certificate. Any Ball State student may take four of our ethics courses and add a mark of distinction to their resume.

If you live near Muncie, please consider joining us at our Big Questions, Big Ideas public lecture series at the Kennedy Library, once a month from October to April. Contact Ann Adams, aeadams@bsu.edu, for dates. We host our second Student Conference on ancient philosophy this fall. Students from Wabash, Earlham, and Antioch Colleges, as well IPFW will participate. Contact Dr. Harrelson, kjharrelson@bsu.edu, for more info.

Congratulations to Gina Schouten, 2006 BSU Philosophy graduate, on her appointment as Asst. Professor at Harvard University and to Kevin Mager, 2014 BSU Philosophy graduate, on his publication: “The ethical implications of the Daoist world view,” Asian Philosophy, 2016.

Please join us in building our Alumni Council. Contact David Feeney for more info., d rfeeney@gmail.com.
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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