From the Chair

It’s been another productive and educative year for the department. To support their research, our faculty earned six grants. Our faculty continue as national leaders, editing journals and leading organizations. And our well-deserved reputation as a department full of outstanding teachers endures. Two new devoted teacher-scholars will join us in the fall, Sarah Vitale and Jen Rowland.

As usual, many of our students have received intensive individual instruction, including Melissa Hayes’ honors thesis on Conscientious Objection and Ben Roger’s independent study of Aesthetics. Many of our students attended the American Philosophical Association conference in Baltimore during winter break as part of our immersive learning program. And, some students presented their own original research at conferences, including Tracy Graves, “Phaedra as the Lust-Driven Woman,” at Miami University and Kevin Mager, “The Necessity of a Rawlsian Political Scheme for the Maximization of Utility” at San Diego State. Kevin’s paper will be published in Dialogue later this year. Making this student travel possible is you: This year saw the greatest increase in alumni giving that we can recall. Thank you all for supporting the students who are following in your footsteps!

Big Questions, Big Ideas

Which came first, the big question or the big idea? Whichever is the case, the two came together during the course of the 2013-2014 school year. Once a month one of our faculty gave a presentation at the Kennedy Branch of the Muncie Public Library in a speaker series we called "Big Questions, Big Ideas." Area residents joined students and faculty members to discuss interesting topics in Philosophy or Religious studies. The sessions were lively and well-attended.

The interactive presentations explored a wide variety of topics. Dr. Juli Thorson started the series by exploring the history of philosophy through artistic images from the David Owsley Museum of Art at Ball State. Next, Dr. Jeff Fry pondered the meaning of death, using a liberal dose of deadly humor. To cap off the fall portion of the series, Dr. Elizabeth Agnew addressed school prayer and the constitution. The conversation continued well after the program had formally ended. To launch the spring portion of the speaker series, Dr. Kevin Harrelson gave a thought-provoking presentation on the nature of history: Did Columbus discover America. Dr. Diane Segroves then explored the relationship between religion and spirituality. Instructor Adam Bowen followed with a timely examination of concussions in sport. Dr. David Concepcion concluded the series with an engaging and good-humored discussion on a very big question: “Did God Make Ethics?”

Given the success of the inaugural Big Questions Big Ideas series, and encouragement from the Muncie Public Library staff, we anticipate second season during the 2014-2015 academic year. The presentations are always free and open to the public. Notifications of presentations will be found at www.munciepubliclibrary.org.
Faculty Highlights

Elizabeth Agnew ([eagnew@bsu.edu]) is polishing two manuscripts regarding Jane Addams and pacifism including “Interpreting Peace: Jane Addams, Pacifism, and the Cathedral of Humanity.” In spring 2014, Elizabeth directed religious studies major Missy Hayes’ senior honors thesis: “The Evolution of Conscientious Objection.” Her new course “Religion, Morality, and Public Debate” has been well-received by our students.

Jeff Brackett ([jmbrackett@bsu.edu]) is evolving his highly popular new course, Religion and Pop Culture, into a Virginia Ball Center [VBC] for Creative Inquiry (http://cms.bsu.edu/academics/centersandinstitutes/virginiaballcenter). Immersive Learning course regarding religion in comics. Immersive Learning is the centerpiece of a Ball State Education, and the VBC is the flagship of immersive learning. He continues his work with the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. Rumor has it that Brackett is secretly a member of the X-Men.

As president of the American Association of Philosophy teachers, Dave Conception ([dwconcepcion@bsu.edu]) continues to lead workshops around the country regarding best teaching practices. He directed philosophy major Ashli Godfrey’s senior honors thesis: “Blame and Privileged Moral Failure.” Last fall students in his Environmental Ethics class again contributed more than 300 hours to the biotic health of east central Indiana in a service-learning project. Recent publications include: “Engaging Novices: Transparent Alignment, Flow, and Controlled Failure,” in Recognizing Teaching Excellence, Esch, Kraft and Hermberg (eds.).

Jeff Fry ([jfry@bsu.edu]) introduced some of what he learned at the 2013 University of Pennsylvania’s “Neuroscience Boot Camp” in his course “Minds, Brains, and the Problem of the Soul.” Recent publications include “Citius, Altius, Fortius, Virtuous” in The Olympics & Philosophy.” Recent presentations include “Sports and Naivete,” “Underdogs, Upsets, and Overachievers,” and Sports, Brains, and Ethics.” He continues to serve on the Editorial Boards of the Journal of the Philosophy of Sport and Ethic, Philosophy.

Senior Mitch Peak’s investigation of Heidegger was one of two independent studies Kevin Harrelson ([kjharrelson@bsu.edu]) led this year. Kevin was one of three team-teachers in a special class integrating computer science, math, and logic. He also introduced an intercollegiate conference experience into his History of Modern Philosophy course. Recent publications include: “Logic and Ontology in Hegel’s Theory of Predication,” European Journal of Philosophy” and “Idealist Ontological Arguments in Royce, Collingwood, and Others,” Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society. Recent presentations include “Royce on Historiography and Identity.” He serves as the secretary/treasurer of the Indiana Philosophical Association.

Kalumba’s ([kkalumba@bsu.edu]) recent presentations include: “A Critique of Kwasi Wiredu’s No-party Democracy for African Countries” and “African Reactions to Western Conventionalism.” Kalumba continues as editor-in-Chief of Philosophia Africana, where he employed BSU philosophy major Tracy Graves as an assistant.

Undergraduate Conference

On November 21, 2013, students in Dr. Harrelson’s History of Ancient Philosophy course hosted a conference on Plato’s Republic. Students and faculty from three area partners (Earlham College, Wabash College, and Indiana University Southeast) attended, and presented original research on the Republic and its reception. Ball State students gave oral commentaries on the presentations by our guests, with all twenty-six students in the class participating in some way. The first stage of work required each Ball State student to read a paper in advance. They were then graded on a written analysis of the guest’s work. Our students were invited to give the oral commentaries in exchange for exemption from a different assignment; in many cases they presented the commentaries in tandem.

Our students learned to read and criticize work by both peers and professors, which in many cases required them to do further independent research. The students also learned to develop nuanced interpretations of difficult texts in tandem with their classmates. Finally, they learned to communicate complex ideas to otherwise unfamiliar guests. In addition to honing their skills in interpretation and communication, our students were exposed to diverse methods and styles of philosophy. Many of them remarked afterwards that they learned most about how specific their curriculum had been by contrast with that of the other colleges. Some of them even began continuing relationships with students from our partner colleges.

The event was such a success that our guests have decided to continue the tradition, with a second conference planned at Wabash College in the coming academic year.

An appreciation from a May 2013 Graduate:

“I’ve been [at the Navy’s Officer Candidate School] for three weeks now… I’ve taken a bit of time to explain Ethics to the people around me, and I often talk about topics that came up in all of my classes. I’ve spoken about Stoicism, Sentimentalism, Deontology, Epistemology, Feminism, etc. The members of my class seem genuinely interested in many of the things I speak of…

Mostly, I want to thank you for helping me develop the integrity to make it through a harsh program like this… I figured out who I was in college, and where my strengths and weaknesses are. I’m seeking improvement by cultivating strong leadership skills now. I’m going to make a difference in the lives of all the sailors I work with, and I owe the Ball State Philosophy Department to thank for that. You can pass that on to everyone if you’d like. Keep on helping students find who they are and who they want to be.”

- Devon Chapman
Dr. Sarah Vitale joins our Ball State faculty in August 2014 as a Tenure-Track Assistant Professor of Philosophy. Sarah received her BA in Philosophy and English from Le Moyne College and her PhD in Philosophy from Villanova University. Prior to graduate study, Sarah worked as an International Programs Officer for ProLiteracy Worldwide, and her commitment to social justice informs her academic work. Her research is in Social and Political Philosophy, specifically Karl Marx, post-Marxist philosophy, and contemporary feminist philosophy. Sarah is “delighted to join the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department” and is excited about opportunities to teach immersive learning classes. She looks forward to learning from and with Ball State students and faculty.

Dr. Concepción: What do you hope philosophy majors will learn from you?
Dr. Vitale: Philosophy is about refusing to be satisfied with the first answer that you formulate. College is a great time for examining the positions and beliefs we have always held and determining why we hold them and whether we will continue to hold them.
C: What research excites you?
V: I am looking forward to pursuing diverse projects while at Ball State, especially those that engage with the social sciences. These include investigations of post-industrial urban spaces and community life; mass incarceration and the disciplinary state; and possible dialogues between ecofeminism and Marxism.
C: What excites you about teaching?
V: Teaching philosophy is an exercise in encouraging students to explore what they love, and, perhaps just as importantly, what they do not love. A successful classroom is one in which students feel empowered to speak freely. I try to act as a facilitator most of the time. I also love talking about philosophical texts with first-time readers.

Congratulations 2014 Graduates!

Small but mighty! Only three of our many majors were able to attend graduation this year. Congratulations to (left to right): Mitchell Peaks, Melissa “Missy” Hayes, (Dr. Concepción), and Kevin Mager.

Faculty Highlights

Madison, Wisconsin has been Joseph Marchal’s (jamarchal@bsu.edu) home during sabbatical this year. He worked on his next book and several articles as a Kingdon Fellow in Judeo-Christian Religious Studies in the University of Wisconsin’s Institute for the Humanities. He also gave lectures in the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies at the University of South Africa and the Ujamma Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Upcoming works include The People Besides Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below and various articles such as “Who Are You Calling a Eunuch?: Staging Conversations between Feminist and Queer Biblical Studies and Intersex Advocacy,” and “Slaves as Wo/men and Unmen: Reflecting upon Euodia, Syntyche, and Epaphroditus in Philippi.” Joe continues on a number of steering committees and editorial boards, including for the journal Bible and Critical Theory.

Juli (Eflin) Thorson (ithorsn@bsu.edu) led Philosophy major Ben Rogers in a year-long (double) independent study on aesthetics, which helped the Stance staff in their interview of Elizabeth Grosz. She is currently working on a paper regarding virtuous epistemic communities and another on maverick perception. She continues to review for the journal Science Education, and is frequently called upon by university administration to assist with special projects.

Teaching Faculty

Adam Bowen, Daniel Cole, and Peg Shaffer continue teaching predominantly online: Introduction to Philosophy, Ethics, and Religion in Culture. As their outstanding teaching evaluations attest, they design intensive learning experiences.

New arrival Jen Rowland comes to us from University of North Texas where she is finishing a dissertation on Global Justice and Energy Policy. With expertise in Environmental Philosophy and Ethics, she will teach Ethics and Environmental Ethics.

Student Recognition Day

This year’s Student Recognition Day was again enriching. Among the presentations were: Mitch Peaks, “Deriving Succession from Primordial Time in Heidegger,” Andrew Defrees and Nick Nelson, “Becoming an Ethnographer,” Tracy Graves, “Some Stuff I Learned from Philosophy,” and Waleed Ma’arouf, “Why: A Look at Philosophy in a College Setting.”

2014 Award Recipients

Outstanding Seniors
Philosophy – Tracy Graves
Religious Studies – Melissa Hayes

Essay Prize Recipients
Philosophy – Ben Rogers
“Manual Work: An Account of Diogenes the Cynic”
Religious Studies – Melissa Hayes
“The Evolution of Conscientious Objection.”

Phi Sigma Tau Inductees
(Philosophy Honor Society)
Christine Baker, Jordan Boone, Rachel Crawley
Lauren Fosnight, Zach Roach, Dylan Rupchock, Richard Storey

Tracy Graves (and Lynny, the kitten)
Outstanding Senior Philosophy, 2014
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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6501 - Philosophy and Religious Studies General Fund. Donations to this account allow us the greatest flexibility to meet the diverse needs of the department.
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