



Welcome

It's been a while since we reached out to you but not so long since we thought about you. In 2013, our department joined the rest of campus in program prioritization of WCU's majors and minors. We looked at all manner of data concerning our graduates. Be assured that your data was included!

The department is relieved that our Philosophy major – with Philosophy and Religion concentrations and both minors – does remain intact. Looks like our success in drawing and graduating good majors is working! However, we aren't satisfied with you being *data* only. We want to stay in contact with the people we taught and learned from at WCU.

Maybe we'll put together a newsletter a couple of times a year. In between times though, stop by or write. We want to keep up with you and keep you up with each other. We'd love to hear what you've been up to and have pictures from your adventures. Let us know!

CONTACT US!

Write in to be included / correct misinformation printed here about yourself:

You can contact any of our faculty, or write to departmental administrative support associate Amy McKenzie at amckenzie@wcu.edu (828-227-3852)



Department Head Hello

Greetings from the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Western Carolina University! I hope that life is treating all of you well, and that you have found a fulfilling vocation that is helping contribute to a meaningful life. We in the department recently decided to focus on maintaining better touch with our alumni, both in order to find out what all of you are up to, as well as to strengthen the connections between our current faculty (several of whom have joined the department the past five-10 years), students and those 130+ of you who have graduated from the program in the last 30 years. To that end, we'll be sending out this newsletter as an occasional publication to fill you in on what is currently going on in the program. We hope that you'll take the opportunity to send us any updates on your own personal or professional lives that you would like to share – you'll see an alumni updates section in this inaugural issue. And of course we'd welcome you to visit us any time you might happen to be around Cullowhee or WCU. We see the faculty and students in this department as a real community, and we hope all of you will continue to do so as well.

News of Recent Graduates

Michael O'Shea '09 is working in Chicago, Illinois, and producing music (and has released several albums).

Josh White '10 is in the philosophy PhD program at Purdue.

James Thomas '10 completed his master's of divinity degree at Emory.

Matt Kirby '10 is the Southwestern Community College liaison with Jackson County Early College.

Bethany Ketting '10 is the borrowing coordinator for Interlibrary Loan at WCU's Hunter Library.

Heather Cavalier '11 completed a master of arts degree at Duke.

Andrew Sexton '11 is an IT support analyst with MedWest and is currently applying to master's degree in social work programs (the alumni spotlight features Andrew...read on.)

Jason Beck '12 is assistant program director at the Barium Springs Group Home in Bryson City.

R. Anderson Miller '12 is a legislative aide for NC state representative Joe Sam Queen.

Emily (Elders) Edmonds '12 (Special Studies) is working in the WCU Public Policy Institute and just got married.

Daniel Shuskey '13 is attending the Carolina Graduate School of Divinity (interdenominational).

Meredith Gasaway '13 [English double] is enrolled in WCU's master's degree program in student affairs and working in the Office of Intercultural Affairs.

Of the 12 May 2013 Philosophy and Religion graduates, five planned to go to seminary. They include **Nate Wimberly** (Liberty), **Preston Beaver** (Southeastern Baptist), **Josh Cress** (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seminary in Columbia, S.C.), **Jimmy Evans** (Vanderbilt), and **David Styles**.

Clare Murray '13 [English double], plans to pursue master of arts programs in English in Texas and is working at a honeybee removal company.

Michael Branon '13 is going to apply to law school.

Philip Gibson '13 is coming back to WCU for engineering.

Kellee Eller '13 is pursuing a job in her first major (Hospitality and Tourism) where she can use the skills she is taking from our major, as well.

Alumni Spotlight



Andrew Sexton (Class of 2011)

I started at Western Carolina as an English major, but a liberal arts course or two later, I found myself a love of Philosophy. For a good while after, I was quite set on making something of it that would support me further on, but between grades, the need for more money, and other things I really wanted to pursue, I just couldn't find a way to make myself a career plan out of it. Luckily, though, the Philosophy staff at Western helped me keep perspective about what pursuits I really should take on and I started to see that I don't need to have the motivation of a paycheck to continue to study or build on my abilities in Philosophy. Since Philosophy's best work is often done outside the realm of academia, I decided that I would try and do the same.

I had already held a two-year spot in the Hardware Service Center, so I figured that computer work might turn out the most lucrative path for me. I found an eight-month employment with Geek Squad at Best Buy while I put together my final projects and wrapped up my time at WCU. Through some connections I'd maintained, I was able to secure a short internship at the Coulter Faculty Commons very shortly after graduation, but when my internship ended six months later, I still had no serious prospects and I dug into life savings to pay my student loans. The frustration of

all those bills while taking interviews without call-back took a serious toll on me, but I finally used a contact from Geek Squad to get an interview at Harris Hospital in Sylva.

Finally, I saw something different from my typical interview processes: most everyone else going into these interviews had some sort of strict computer education or no post-high-school education at all, but because of my applied experience in the industry as well as my education in formulaic thought and action, I could speak with greater precision and problem-solve with greater ability. So, in each interview question, I found ways to emphasize my Philosophy-built understandings: for computers, I spent a while discussing my ability to step outside merely seeking a solution and critically analyze problems themselves to ensure the solution we find is the right one. They must have really liked that – the next day I was invited back into the office to sign some paperwork and a year and half later, I'm still there.

It's unfortunate that it's so difficult to find steady and/or high-paying work specifically in our field, but it's not a terrible thing. Wittgenstein told plenty of Ph.D.-track students to stop and become medical doctors instead, and in most cases, I'll wholeheartedly agree with that. When framed correctly, anything can benefit from Philosophy, and Philosophy without application is useless anyway – the world needs more philosopher-doctors and philosopher-engineers and philosopher-politicians to bring logic to life and development and debate. Just as any philosophy can be advantageous or destructive depending on your approach, Philosophy itself can be the same. If you're interested in sitting around and thinking for a living, I'm sorry to say that those positions are pretty much all taken for the foreseeable future. But, when applied to other skills, things that you can pursue on your own or as part of your other studies (a double major never hurt anyone's chances at a good job) it can be a huge advantage in securing a position you're looking toward – just keep in mind it will likely take a good bit of networking and a little extra applied work to balance out.

Faculty News

Dr. David Henderson: I joined the department in the fall of 2008, and I primarily teach ethics and environmental philosophy. My unusual combination of graduate degrees (doctorate in philosophy and master of science in wildlife) are both from Texas A&M University, and my bachelor of arts is in liberal arts from Bryan College. I have also been contributing to the interdisciplinary environmental science program here at Western. I like to get the students off campus: to the sites of environmental destruction, to public policy hearings and even to rallies in the U.S. Capitol. When I'm not doing ecology or philosophy, I'm hanging out with my three kids, hiking or training for American Ninja Warrior.

Dr. Christopher Hoyt spent last summer working on his new house in Waynesville and teaching his popular course, "The Philosophy of Love and Sex" online for the first time. He is working on several overlapping philosophical projects that aim to bring Wittgenstein's thought to bear on current issues in politics, education and the arts. Two summers ago, Hoyt spoke about Wittgenstein and education at a conference in Odense, Denmark, and work-shopped a new essay about Wittgenstein and politics at a meeting of specialists in West Virginia. You will be glad to know that the house looks terrific.

Dr. Jim McLachlan: I have taken the title from my Grandpa John McLachlan, who died when I was

two years old, of "Grandpa Snazzy." (He used to live with turkeys in the house with him but was a better dancer than I will ever be.)

Dr. Kevin Schilbrack stepped down as department head in 2013 and completed his book, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions*, published in February 2014. In May, he left WCU for a new position as Department Head at Appalachian State University. We expect that he will continue to create and teach courses connecting philosophy and religion to current world events, including "Ethics in an Age of Terrorism" and "Religion and Law in America." Schilbrack will also continue to be a busy scholar. His parting words in this newsletter are: "...as a student of metaphysics, he continues to believe in reality."

Dr. John Whitmire took over as department head in January 2013 and has been trying to figure out how to balance that with life with a two-year-old daughter and a second daughter, born in June. He continues to teach a number of interdisciplinary courses, including one class on the good life, another on C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, and a third (a service-learning class) on how various philosophical and religious traditions and classic works of literature help us make sense of and respond to suffering. He presented an essay at a seminar on Faith, Film and Philosophy at Gonzaga University in October 2013.

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Daryl Hale still teaches courses in Ancient Greek Thought, Late Antiquity & Early Christianity, Early Modern Thought, Religion and Science, and Global Justice. In August 2013, he married a friend from his days at Calvin College, showing the Stoics were right that a philosopher should love another person who loves the good, and that scholarly love flourishes on 'the tail of the dog'. He also explored international scholarship, reading papers in Lund, Sweden, and in Regensburg, Germany, it being coincidental that his wife joined him for these conferences, though he now searches for more coincidences next year, taking scholarly leave in Germany for the Fall 2014 semester. And finally, he remains highly engaged as a professional mastercraftsman in the greater Sylva area, exemplifying Stoic wisdom: there seems a **logos** that permeates all things, even if much **pathos** is embraced along our 'long and winding road'.



Wedding Day, Dr. Daryl Hale & Camilla Hoitenga, August 2013