

Letter from the Chair, Gail Weiss

Welcome to our newest GW alumni from the class of 2014! It is a beautiful spring day in Foggy Bottom and the campus is quiet after the hustle and bustle of GW's many graduation festivities. As I reflect on the events that have taken place in the department this last spring, the two that most stand out, not surprisingly, are the unexpected death in February of our esteemed colleague, **Professor William B. (Bill) Griffith** and the lovely Memorial Service and Reception we had in Bill's honor on May 2. Though the reason for the occasion was very sad, the Memorial Service itself was a wonderful way to commemorate Bill's 50 years of service to GW and to the Department of Philosophy. It was great to have so many of our alumni there and to hear from many of you who could not be there about the impact Bill's teaching and mentoring has had on your lives. The Tribute Book we have compiled in his memory contains extremely moving recollections from GW alumni, faculty, and staff and will be permanently available through our main department website:

<http://philosophy.columbian.gwu.edu>. Please read through it when you have a chance; I can guarantee that whether or not you had the opportunity to work with Bill, the comments will trigger fond memories of your own time at GW!

This was a very busy and productive spring for the department. The biggest news is that we are on the verge of getting final approval for a **new MA in Philosophy**. We hope to enroll our first students in this program in fall 2015. The new MA will complement our existing MA in Philosophy and Social Policy, the interdisciplinary graduate program Bill Griffith founded and directed for 24 years. Our director of graduate studies, Jeff Brand, will oversee both MA programs, and department faculty are excited about being able to offer new graduate courses that will be available not only to our MA students in both programs, but also to junior and senior majors who have done well in their other philosophy courses. Stay tuned for more information about the new program once we are officially launched!

» [Continue reading "Letter from the Chair, Gail Weiss"](#)

Spring 2014 Events

Thacher Lecture

Otávio Bueno, professor of philosophy and chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of Miami, delivered the annual Thacher Lecture on February 28, 2014. Dr. Bueno (pictured) is the author and editor of several books in addition to being the editor-in-chief of the contemporary philosophy journal *Synthese*. He publishes widely in the areas of philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of logic and epistemology. His lecture was entitled "What Does a Mathematical Proof Really Prove?"

The annual Thacher Lecture is made possible through a generous contribution from philosophy alumnus Michael Thacher, BA '70.



Griffith Lecture

The department's annual **Goutman Lecture** was renamed this spring in honor of the late Dr. Griffith, in accordance with the wishes of his former student and our generous donor, alumnus **Thomas Goutman**, BA '76. The first annual Griffith Lecture featured Mark Wrathall, professor of philosophy at the University of California, Riverside, who spoke on March 21, 2014. Author of *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language and History* and *How to Read Heidegger*, in addition to being the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*, Dr. Wrathall's lecture reflected his expertise on

Faculty News

Michèle Friend was quite busy this spring, teaching Introduction to Logic, Philosophy of the Environment and directing a reading group about the logical foundations for the geometry needed for special relativity. She also audited a class in the computer science department on software foundations. The latter was a means of learning more about Coq a language and program that can be used to make and check other programs or proofs, ensuring that they are well-founded. The European logicians have been very excited about it for many years now, and she thought she should use the opportunity to get up to speed. On the strength of her recent book, Dr. Friend has also been invited to give a talk in May at a workshop on the existence of sets at James Madison University in Virginia. Her summer plans are more modest than usual: to go to Hungary to give a presentation at the Computability in Europe conference, followed by an important workshop with the logical foundations of relativity group in Budapest. She has been in contact with the group for several years and has been looking at their work. A paper of hers will shortly come out called 'The Epistemological Significance of the Hungarian Project' in a volume on logic and relativity theory published by *Synthese*. After Budapest, there are a whole lot of logic conferences all in Vienna that Dr. Friend will visit, but not present any material. She is working on two other collaborative papers which should be finished soon. One is an entry for the internet encyclopedia of philosophy of George Boole and is co-written with Nimrod Bar-Am. The second paper is written in collaboration with Daniele Molinini and is on logical and mathematical explanations of whole theories in science. It uses the Hungarian work as the chief example of such an explanation. (*Photo: Professor Friend with her horse.*)

Jeff Brand has enjoyed his first year serving as director of graduate studies and working on a proposal to expand the graduate program. This year he was elected president of Phi Beta Kappa at the university (Alpha Chapter, Washington, D.C.). Since September, he has served on a university-level committee writing a new policy on conflicts of interest and commitment. This year, he also developed his second online course, Philosophy of Law (PHIL 3142W), which he will teach for the first time in the summer, along with his online course in Ethics (PHIL 2131). He is excited about continuing his philosophical research on the empirical debunking of moral intuitions.

» [Read more "Faculty News"](#)

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. William Byron Griffith

Dr. Griffith was born in Texas in 1936. He received his PhD in Philosophy from Yale University in 1963 and, after a year's service in the military, he began his 50-year career at GW in 1964. In the words of longtime colleague and friend Dr. **Paul Churchill**, Bill's "research interests and publications focused on the application of theories of distributive justice to environmental policy, welfare policy, tax policy, and the regulation of business. Bill served several terms as chair of the Department of Philosophy and was one of the longest-serving members of the Faculty Senate, where he occupied several different leadership positions, including chair of the Executive Committee, and chair of the Committee on Fiscal Planning and Budgeting. He also served as the redoubtable parliamentarian for Columbian College faculty meetings through the fall of 2013. The recipient of the Trachtenberg Award for Service in 1993, Bill gave himself completely to the department, the college and the university he loved and served so faithfully. It was under Bill's tenure that the Department of Philosophy attained its current level of excellence. Long an advocate of philosophy in the public interest, he was the principal architect and long-serving director of the MA Program in Philosophy and Public Policy, the first of its kind in the United States." Bill was awarded posthumous Emeritus status in Philosophy in February 2014 and his legacy continues to live on in the recently renamed Griffith Lecture Series (formerly the Goutman Lecture Series), as well as in the curriculum, programs, alumni and vision of the Department of Philosophy, GW Faculty Senate and university at large that he shaped and guided as his life's mission.

On February 11, 2014, the university lost Dr. Griffith to injuries sustained from a fall in mid-January. Bill had experienced medical hardships since the previous year and was hospitalized due to torn patella ligaments for the Spring 2013 semester. He was resilient, however, and worked diligently to regain his strength and health so that he could return to teach his Ethical Issues in Policy Arguments graduate seminar in Fall 2013. Days before his January fall, Bill had succeeded in working his way up from a walker to a cane, representing significant progress in his recovery. Sadly, the fall during the first week of spring 2014 classes in mid-January led to a number of medical complications that Bill was unable to defeat. The department has

since received an enormous inpouring of messages both from within and outside of the GW community expressing what a tremendous influence Bill had on the professional careers and personal lives of so many friends, former students, colleagues and administrators. In an effort to compile some of these thoughtful messages in one place, the department has created a tribute book, which can be accessed through our [website](#).

The department has established the **William B. Griffith Memorial Fund** in Bill's memory, which will be used to support graduate students in philosophy. Thanks to the generous donations of so many, the fund has already raised over \$73,000. [Click here](#) if you would like to contribute to the fund. Please indicate that your donation to the GW Philosophy Department should go to the "Philosophy Department-Griffith Memorial Fund." You may also write a check to the GW Philosophy Department with "Griffith Memorial Fund" written on the memo line and mail it to 801 22nd Street, Phillips Hall T-525, Washington, D.C. 20052.

The department held a memorial service and reception to honor Bill's 50 years of service to the department and university on Friday, May 2, 2014.

» [Continue reading "Faculty Spotlight: Dr. William Byron Griffith"](#)

Alumni News

Alejandra Barrio, BA '11, will be attending the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley.

Heather Fink, BA '03, is a full-time filmmaker based in New York City and sometimes Los Angeles. She works as a comedy writer/director with many short films under her belt, and will be shooting her first independent feature comedy film as writer/director in September 2014, in NYC. This film will be Fink's thesis for the NYU Graduate Film Program. It's called *Inside You* and is a comedy about a couple who switches bodies, and plays with gender identity and relationship themes. She is also a location sound mixer and boom operator in IATSE 52. Fink says her "education in philosophy from GW informs my writing and my life and I value it greatly."

Rachel Gabriel, ESIA BA '11, will be attending the London School of Economics and Political Science to study International Relations with a concentration in non-violent conflict resolution issues.

Bret Gifford, BA '84, is a staff attorney at the Supreme Court of New Hampshire. He fondly recalls studying with **Lorenzo DePaolis**, BA '86, **Tom Masters**, BA '86, and the other philosophy majors who comprised their unofficial Philosophy Club. He was saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Griffith. He reports that his best friend from the Peace Corps was a philosophy major, and that three of his closest friends from law school were philosophy majors. Although he mostly reads appellate briefs, he keeps a copy of Professor Lavine's *From Socrates to Sartre* on his bookshelf.

» [Read more "Alumni News"](#)

Student News

Derek Lee, the department's logic tutor, will be participating in the Koch Internship Program this summer, interning at the Franklin Institute for Government Accountability and Ethics. His job will primarily be to work in the Communications Department, researching and writing op-eds on various issues in public policy. Derek will also be working with the PR Department on image and public information dissemination.

Maggie Taylor is working with Dr. DeGrazia on a thesis about socially normalizing surgeries performed on children. These surgeries have no medically-indicated purpose, but instead attempt to promote the psychosocial development of patients by making their bodies adhere to social norms of appearance (such as by lengthening the limbs of children with dwarfism or removing facial birthmarks). She will explore whether such surgeries promote the best interests of children and attempt to identify instances when these procedures are morally permissible. She anticipates completing work on the paper this fall.

Riad Alarian, a May 2014 graduate, was recently accepted to the MSc International Political Theory one-year programme at the University of Edinburgh.

Banaa Sudanese Scholarship Program Update

Amanda Shaver, a major in international affairs of the **Banaa Sudanese Scholarship Program**, would like to give an update on the current situation plaguing Sudan and South Sudan and the status of the scholarship program: "We are happy to announce that a new scholar has been chosen to attend the University of Rochester (U of R) this year. The student will be the first female Banaa scholar we have had to date. We are so excited to begin our journey with her. Each year, GW and U of R work to provide four-year scholarship funding for a potential Sudanese or South Sudanese student. This funding has allowed for outstanding students to achieve an education so that they can help promote peace in these war torn nations. This May, Mohamed "Mo" Ahmed, will graduate from U of R with a degree in financial economics and political science. We are thrilled and proud for all of his hard work through these past few years and are supportive of any path he takes after graduation. For our current scholars, Jacob Mator, Salva Barjok and Sameer Kafur, we are glad to share that each continues to prosper and strive at both GW and U of R, despite the struggles that are occurring in South Sudan and continuing in Sudan.

» [Continue reading "Banaa Sudanese Scholarship Program Update"](#)

Department News

Recent Graduates

The department would like to congratulate the following individuals who graduated in 2014:

MA Graduates

Sultan Alamer
Jason Bond
Alyssa Casey
Olwen Jaffe
Nickalus Pettet
Cydney Washington
Tiangiu Zhou

Veronique Cadet
Lawrence Caldwell II
Susan Charlop
Shilei Chen
Miriam Cleeman
Shannon Delaney
Jeffrey Eisenbud
Ryan Fletcher
Troy Gibb
Rebecca Groom
Rachel Grossbaum
Devin Henry
Alexandra Inman
Devon Kenger
Trevor Marsden

Erin McNamara
Chelsea Murtha
Justin Nabors
Evan Noble
Andrew Nye
Charles O'Connor IV
Jewrisha Ransome
Aparna Sajja
Kelly Singleton
Georgios Skandalidis
Kody Sparks
Noah Spielvogel
Salem Srour
Alex Yudelson

BA Graduates

Riad Alarian
Devin Bageac
Walter Preston Bell
Madalina Bortes
Brian Browne

Photos: (left) MA in Philosophy and Social Policy students on commencement day; (middle) Kody Sparks, Dr. Weiss, Rachel Grossbaum, Kelly Singleton and Preston Bell; (right) Olwen Jaffe with her proud parents

A Year of Brown Bags

The department hosted six brown bag lectures this year. All presenters are affiliated with the university unless otherwise noted. For more information, or to read the available papers, please visit our [website](#).

- October 18, 2013: **Christopher Venner** presented "Isolation and Otherness in Wenders' *Wings of Desire*."
- November 8, 2013: **Dimiter Kirilov** presented "Representation by the Bootstraps."
- November 22, 2013: **Cameron Bassiri** presented "Temporality and Alterity in Descartes' *Meditations*."
- January 17, 2014: **Frederick Kellogg** presented "The Social Dimensions of Legal Uncertainty: Reconciling Law and Science in the Formative Years of Pragmatism."
- March 7, 2014: **Brandon Hogan**, assistant professor of philosophy at Howard University, presented "Hegelian Constitutivism and the Schmagency Objection."
- April 4, 2014: **Andrea Pedferri** presented "Is it Original Only Once?"

Thank You for Your Support!

The Philosophy Department would like to gratefully acknowledge the following generous donors who made a gift to the program from July 1, 2013 May 31, 2014.

Chevron Matching Gift Program

Green Wheel Book, LLC

Sarah A. Binder**

Donald A. Boselovic**

Jeffrey C. Brand*

Nancy A. Breslin, RESD '87

Jackson R. Bryer*

Peter J. Caws**

Robert Paul Churchill**

Miriam B. Cleeman+

Mimi Conway*

David D. Degrazia*

Lloyd Eby**

Carl Bradley Fields, BA '04, JD '08

Milton Bruce Friedman, BA '72

Christopher C. Fritz, BA '12

Brad Garner*

Joseph Lewis Gastwirth**

Thomas M. Goutman, BA '76

William B. Griffith**

June Hargrove*

Robert Earle Knowlton**

Elizabeth St. J. Loker, BA '69

Gregory Ludlow**

Forrest A. Maltzman**

David W. McAleavey**

Barbara M. Nelson*

Marjorie Odle*

Laura Papish**

Andrea Pedeferra**

Janice Peverly*

Judith Ann Abrams Plotz**

Mark A. Ralkowski**

Jewrisha D. Ransome+

Bryan U. Savant, MA '81

Richard B. Sher, BA '70

Susan Shreve*

Mary Beth Stein**

Allyson C. Stokes*

Linda J. Terry*

Michael W. Thacher, BA '70

Ben Vinson, III**

George R. Washington*

Gail D. Weiss**

Kara N. Williams, BA '08

* Friend

** Faculty/Staff

+ Student

Keep Us Posted!

Have news that you would like to share with GW philosophy faculty, students, and alumni? Have it published in our Fall 2014 newsletter! Just send your submission via e-mail to Amanda McLaughlin at philosop@gwu.edu.

Support the Department of Philosophy

Gifts to the Department of Philosophy allow us to provide support for faculty and student research and travel, graduate student fellowships, and academic enrichment activities including guest speakers, visiting faculty, and symposia. Each gift, no matter how large or small, makes a positive impact on our educational mission and furthers our standing as one of the nation's preeminent liberal arts colleges at one of the world's preeminent universities. Below are a number of ways you can make your gift to the Department.

In addition, if you would like to designate your gift to the "Philosophy Department Sophia Lecture" or the "Philosophy Department Griffith Memorial Fund", please indicate that as well.

- Securely online at www.gwu.edu/give2gw. Just choose "other" under designation and type in the name of the department.
- By mailing your check, made out to The George Washington University and with the name of the department in the memo line, to:
The George Washington University
2100 M Street NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20052
- By phone by calling the GW Annual Fund at [1-800-789-2611](tel:1-800-789-2611).

Thank you & Congratulations

Thank you to student assistants **David Gelsomino**, **Kathryn Ball** and **Meredith Thomas** for their help this spring!

Kathryn and Dave graduated this spring (see photo). We wish them the best of luck as Kathryn attends law school at Boston University in the fall, and Dave settles into a new job at Politico, which he began at the end of May!

Congratulations to the 2013-2014 Gauss Prize winners, **Andrew Hori** and **Chelsea Murtha**, as well as the 2013-2014 Award for Excellence in Service to the Department of Philosophy and/or the Community winner, **Troy Gibb**!

Professor Weiss presenting the Excellence in Service to the Department of Philosophy and/or the Community Award to Troy Gibb

Professor Ralkowski awarding the Gauss Prize to Andrew Hori

Professor Zawidzki awarding the Gauss Prize to Chelsea Murtha

Credits

This issue of the GW Department of Philosophy Newsletter was edited by our executive aide, **Amanda McLaughlin**, with assistance from **Professor Weiss**, **Professor Pedefferri** and **David Gelsomino**. **Troy Gibb**, **Amanda Shaver** and **Maha Hasen** contributed to the content. **Professor Brand** donated his photography skills for the majority of the photos in this newsletter, as well.

Photo: Amanda McLaughlin and Professor Weiss taking a break to enjoy the cherry blossoms

Alumni Stay Connected

Alumni Weekend 2014 #GAW14

Save the date: September 18 to 21

Every year during Alumni Weekend, campus comes alive as thousands of alumni, friends and families return to GW. During the four days of activities all Colonials and their families are invited to choose from 60+ events.

Information regarding the weekend schedule, hotel deals, and registration information **will be posted soon**.

LinkedIn Virtual Networking Hours

Join fellow GWAA LinkedIn group members for this unique opportunity to share your experiences, exchange career tips and build your professional network! Online networking enables you to speed-network from wherever you are: home, office, or on the road. Come build real relationships and connections in a purposeful, exciting way!

Join us on **July 15** for our next virtual networking hour!

GW Alumni Travel Program

Experience it. Learning is a lifelong adventure and the GW Alumni Travel Program makes it a global event. As a GW graduate, you have access to this world-class program that specializes in cultural immersion and educational experiences. Your diploma is your passport to a lifetime of discovery.

Learn more about the **GW Alumni Travel Program** and see where your next journey may take you.

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC