Welcome to the inaugural issue of the GWU Department of Philosophy Newsletter!

The Department of Philosophy continues to be an active place on campus. One recent—and very important—development was a major improvement in our web presence, an effort led by our colleague Jeff Brand-Ballard. Also of recent interest: an exceptionally successful conference organized by the undergraduate GW Philosophy Club last spring. There were talks by four student speakers—one each from Brown and Johns Hopkins, and two of our own—as well as a Keynote Lecture by Prof. Peter Carruthers of the University of Maryland. And towards the end of term we received the happy news that Jeff Brand-Ballard and Tad Zawidzki were being promoted and awarded tenure. Special congratulations to both of them (and to us for having them securely on the team)!

This semester continues apace with our research, teaching, and service contributions. Following an external review by three distinguished philosophers—Colin Allen and Marcia Baron of Indiana University and John Stuhr of Emory—we feel both gratified by the favorable feedback we received and energized to seek improvements. We seem to be doing an effective job in our undergraduate teaching and with the M.A. program in Philosophy and Social Policy; meanwhile, our scholarly achievements are bringing increasing recognition to the university. Among the forward-looking ideas are (1) keeping in better contact with alumni (hence the newsletter you are reading), (2) implementing a more structured system of advising undergraduates, (3) developing a system for assessing how much our students are learning, and (4) making changes to our course offerings and philosophy major requirements.

One change that is definitely coming down the pike is a new face in the Chair’s office after my term ends on June 30th. Earlier this semester, Gail Weiss was elected with overwhelming support to be the next Chair!

As you peruse this first issue of our newsletter, I am sure you will take pleasure and pride in the accomplishments of the faculty, our current students, and alumni. We plan to publish two issues a year, sharing what we’re up to along with your news. Please keep in touch and let us know how you’re doing. You are valued members of the GWU philosophy community.

Thanks for your interest and support.

Yours sincerely,
David DeGrazia
New Website
The Department is excited to announce the re-design of our website. Information about our faculty, undergraduate and graduate programs of study, events, and departmental history are now easily accessible. Along with the re-design came a new and streamlined process for maintaining the site, ensuring that the information, news, and events will always be up-to-date!

Gauss Prize Winner
The department is pleased to announce that Max Utzschneider ’09 has won the 2009 Gauss Prize for Excellence in Philosophy. Honorable Mention went to Ashley Bohrer, Robert Platt, and Ian Tully (all ’09).

The Gauss Prize for Excellence in Philosophy is offered, at most annually, to an undergraduate who has impressed the faculty with her or his commitment to, and understanding of, the discipline of philosophy.

New Faculty Member
The department welcomes George Wrisley (Professorial Lecturer). George holds an M.A. in Philosophy from Georgia State University, where he worked extensively on Wittgenstein. He spent a semester of that time at Bielefeld University in Germany working on Wittgenstein with Joachim Schulte and Eike von Savigny. Afterward, he went to the University of Iowa to complete a Ph.D. in Philosophy, where he worked extensively on issues in metaphysics and the philosophy of language. In his dissertation he critically evaluates Hilary Putnam’s arguments in defense of conceptual relativity; arguments which are meant to show the untenability of metaphysical realism. While at Iowa, he was invited by Stewart Candlish to co-author his “Private Language” entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. For the 2008 edition, he added two new sections and made minor revisions throughout.

After receiving his Ph.D., George moved to Texas, where he taught at Texas State University, Texas Lutheran University, and Northwest Vista College. He will present a paper, “Truth, Nonsense, and the Meaningfulness of Ostensive Gestures,” at the North American Wittgenstein Society conference taking place with the Pacific Division meeting of the APA. His current projects include a paper arguing that the notion of representation dependence at work in metaphysical/alethic realism/antirealism debates is empty and a book on how to go about thinking through a number of existential issues concerning, God, death, and suffering’s relationship to happiness and the good life.

2009 Thacher-Reynolds Fellow
Chris Avellaneda ’10 (Philosophy, Political Science) is this year’s Thacher-Reynolds Memorial Fellow. His proposal is titled “Democratic Governance in a Time of Crisis: An Inquiry into the Role of Government in Preserving Economic Stability.” In this project, he is examining the relationship between liberal conceptions of freedom and government intervention in markets, in particular, whether democratic governments have an obligation, due to their promise of ensuring political equality, to maintain economic stability. Instrumental to his research is the question of whether there is a necessary link between economic equality of opportunity and political equality. Additionally, the impact of class structure and globalization on the traditional social-democratic arguments for intervention will be closely scrutinized and challenged.

Chris recently returned from a year abroad studying Politics, Philosophy and Economics at St. Peter’s College, University of Oxford. He serves as President of GW-UNICEF. His current research interests include Ancient Greek philosophy, Classical and
Contemporary Political Theory, and European Integration.

The Thacher-Reynolds Memorial Fellowship is an annual fellowship of $2,000 awarded to support the research activities of an outstanding senior philosophy major. Funding for the fellowship is provided by the Thacher endowment, which is the gift of Michael Thacher, an alumnus of the department with a keen interest in seeing it flourish. Inaugurated in 2003-04, the fellowship continues to honor Matthew Reynolds, a former student whose life was tragically cut short while pursuing graduate studies.

New Course
This semester, the department offered an exciting new course, PHIL 721: Mind Brain and Evolution, cross-listed with the Speech and Hearing and Anthropology departments. The course addresses the following questions: What is the nature of the human mind? How did such a thing evolve? Certainly human minds are not the only minds in the animal kingdom, but not all minds are the same. What underlies such differences? How did cognitive and behavioral differences come about? How did they shape the brain and the architecture of the mind? The course approaches these questions in a unique and aggressively interdisciplinary fashion, and includes perspectives from psychology, anthropology and neuroscience, as well as from philosophy. It is team-taught by the department’s own Tad Zawidzki (Associate Professor), who specializes in philosophy of psychology, together with two colleagues from other departments: comparative and developmental psychologist Francys Subiaul, of Speech and Hearing, and comparative neuroanatomist and physical anthropologist Chet Sherwood, of Anthropology. Specific topics include the nature of evolutionary change, the architecture of the human mind and brain, and the case of animal minds. The course concludes with an exploration of the question of human uniqueness.

This past summer, Paul Ghayad ’10 (Philosophy, Economics) worked two internships: one with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and one with the Libertarian National Committee. Paul writes, “The stark ideological contrasts between the two allowed me to question several aspects of American government that I rarely, if ever, considered earlier in my life. As the economy was (and still is) suffering from the recession, such questions revolved primarily around the role of government in regulating the free markets and private enterprises. Ultimately, I have found that ambivalence between governmental intervention and laissez-faire capitalism can serve the economy well when the timing of the intervention is appropriate.”

Paul is now applying to law school. He writes “I would love to go to GW Law, but if it doesn’t happen, it’s okay. I’m applying to many schools because you never know which dean of admissions will like you on a particular day. As a philosophy major, I’m happy with this rationale because despite the fact that a plenitude of factors go into ‘perfecting’ the selection process, there are, nevertheless, human beings at the helm of such a process who are capable of exposing ‘irrational’ tendencies. At least, I hope so!”
Recent Event: 2009 Fall Party

At the beginning of each academic year, the Chair hosts a reception to welcome back the department’s returning faculty and graduate students and provide an opportunity to get to know new people. This year the reception was held at the home of David DeGrazia and Kathleen Smith on Saturday, September 19. As the photographs document, a good time was had by all.
Recent Event: SIFP Annual Meeting

On October 28, the department co-hosted (with American University’s Department of Philosophy and Religion and GW’s Gelman Library) the annual meeting of the Society for Interdisciplinary Feminist Phenomenology (SIFP). Professor Linda Martín Alcoff (Philosophy, Hunter College) gave the keynote address, “Sotomayor’s Reasoning,” followed by a Roundtable on “Forging Interdisciplinary Connections,” and a reception. Gail Weiss (Professor) served as Organizer for this meeting.

Recent Graduates

The department would like to congratulate the following individuals who graduated in Spring and Summer of 2009:

Paul Amy, B.A.
Ashley Bohrer, B.A.
Katharine Braha, B.A.
Frank Buda, B.A.
Steven Erikson, M.A.
Evan Faber, B.A.
Jennifer Fairbrother, M.A.
Kaitlyn Funk, B.A.
Mona Floyd, M.A.
David Heller, M.A.
Benjamin Litchfield, B.A.
Andrew Menditch, B.A.
Amelia Niemi, B.A.
Ndidiamaka Nwaneri, M.A.
Lauren O’Donoghue, B.A.
Sarah Owens, B.A.
Robert Platt, B.A.
Sydney Prochazka, M.A.
Abigail Rupp, M.A.
Marcus Scribner, B.A.
Mona Tehrani, B.A.
Ian Tully, B.A.
Max Utzschneider, B.A.
GiaVonni Virella, B.A.
Zhiyuan Wang, M.A.

Student Spotlight

Chelsea Allinger M.A. ’09 was hired in April 2009 as a summer intern at the Governors’ Institute on Community Design, a part of the Smart Growth Leadership Institute founded by former Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening. She was subsequently promoted to a fellowship position through the end of 2009. The Governors’ Institute on Community Design advises governors and state leaders as they seek to guide growth and development in their states. The Institute brings together leading practitioners and academicians in the fields of government, design, development, and regional economics to help each state’s executive team make informed choices as they shape the future of their states. As a fellow, Chelsea conducts policy research and provides coordination assistance for Institute workshops.

Faculty News

Jeff Brand-Ballard (Associate Professor) writes, “I’m working with David DeGrazia on the 7th edition of Mappes and DeGrazia’s best-selling anthology, Biomedical Ethics, which David has kindly invited me to co-edit. I’ve been learning a lot about this rapidly-changing field in the process.” Jeff is also making final corrections to his first book manuscript, Limits of Legality: The Ethics of Lawless Judging, scheduled for release in April 2010. In October, he will present a new paper at the Northwest Philosophy Conference in Oregon. Of this paper he writes, “It’s about the possibility of discrediting some of our moral beliefs by offering empirical explanations of why we have them. This subject has fascinated me for a long time, but I’ve never looked at the literature until now. I’m finding I have a lot to learn about empirical moral psychology.”

Peter Caws (University Professor) has edited, in collaboration with his former Human Sciences doctoral student Stefani Jones, a book titled Religious Upbringing and the Costs of Freedom: Personal and Philosophical Essays, which has just gone into production at the Pennsylvania State University Press for publication in Spring 2010. The book is a series of accounts by working philosophers of their indoctrination in various sects and their ways of escaping from it.

Paul Churchill (Professor) is completing a chapter on the justification of human rights for an anthology on global ethics to be published by Westview in 2010. This fall he will present papers at SUNY Cortland and the University of Dayton on whether vicious persons can be happy. These papers on virtue ethics are related to research for his book, Consuming Desires: Greed, Exploitation, and Oppression.

David DeGrazia (Professor) is in his third year as Department Chair. He has recently published “Moral Vegetarianism From a Very Broad Basis” in the Journal of Moral Philosophy and “Moral Status as a Matter of Degree?” in the Southern Journal of Philosophy,
Thanassis Samaras (Adjunct Professor) recently co-authored “Is Ancient Democracy Quasi-Liberal?” in Revue internationale des droits de l’antiquite (with Kevin Olbrys). He also has a forthcoming publication, “Family in the Laws,” in the Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Laws.

Michael Sigrist (Lecturer) will give a paper at the upcoming Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy conference, under the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, titled “Scientific Realism and the Social Sciences.”

Gail Weiss (Professor) published a book and an edited volume this past year: Refiguring the Ordinary (Indiana University Press, 2008) and Intertwinings: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty (SUNY Press, 2008). She is a Guest Co-Editor (with Debra Bergoffen) for a forthcoming issue of Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, on the theme, “Ethics of Embodiment.” She is currently working on two monographs: a book on Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophy, literature, and feminist theory, and a book that focuses on how bodies are (and fail to be) normalized.

This summer, Tad Zawidzki (Associate Professor) was awarded a Dilthey Fellowship in support of his main project, a book under contract with MIT Press called Mind Shaping. He also has a forthcoming commentary, titled “Adaptive Self-directed Misbeliefs: More than Just a Rarefied Phenomenon?” in Behavioral and Brain Sciences on McKay and Dennett’s target article, “The Evolution of Misbelief.” He recently presented a poster titled “An Empirical Test for Natural Normativity” at the 2009 meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology at Indiana University and participated in a workshop on artificial intelligence and theory of mind at the 2009 Performance Metrics for Intelligent Systems Workshop at the National Institute for Standards and Technology. His contribution to the latter was titled “Theory of Mind, Computational Tractability, and Mind Shaping.”

William Griffith’s (Professor) current work-in-progress is a paper on what we have learned from the justification and criticism of the Bush Administration’s decisions to permit highly coercive interrogations of detainees, including outright torture.

Joshua Miller (Lecturer) co-authored a paper with Steven D. Maloney titled “Foresight, Epistemic Reliability, and the Systematic Underestimation of Risk” for the forthcoming issue of The Good Society. He is also giving a paper at the upcoming Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy Conference called “Subsistence and the ‘Secret Solidarity’ between Humanitarianism and Biopolitics.”

Tom Morris (Professorial Lecturer) has had three articles accepted for publication this year: “Manliness in Plato’s Laches,” forthcoming in Dialogue; “Cephalus in Plato’s Republic,” in Existencia; and “Socrates’ Way of Being Religious: The Epilogue of the First Speech in the Apology,” forthcoming in the Heythrop Journal. Additionally, “Plato’s Cave” has been accepted by the South African Journal of Philosophy pending modifications, and the British Journal for the History of Philosophy is considering a revised version of “Is Plato Really in Favor of Monotonous Literature? Republic 392c6-398b9.”
Alumni News

After completing his undergraduate studies in Philosophy, **John Hanson ’67** attended and graduated cum laude from GW Law School in 1970. After practicing in Madison, Wisconsin, he returned to Washington D.C. to work in the Civil Division of the United States Justice Department from 1972 to 1979, after which he joined Beveridge & Diamond, P.C., where he represents clients in civil litigation matters, appearing in state and federal courts around the country and before federal agencies. John was an adjunct professor at the Columbus School of Law of the Catholic University of America for five years until 1983. John writes, “I value my training in Philosophy because it taught me to think about ‘why’ not just about ‘what’ and ‘how’.”

**Neal Hightower ’69** completed patronage appointments with Senators Richard B. Russell (G.A.), Eugene McCarthy (M.N.), George Murphy (C.A.), and the U.S. Senate Superintendent’s Office. In the fall of 1971, entrepreneurship began at the Hermit Restaurant (currently Front Street) in Provincetown, M.A., lasting until fall 1974. Neal continued to practice the culinary arts in Boston as General Manager at the Hampshire House (1975-76), Maitre d’ at the Plaza Bar at the Copley Plaza Hotel (1983-85) and in Charleston, S.C. as Assistant Food and Beverage Director at the Mills House Hotel (1986-89). From 1996 to 2003, he worked in non-profit fundraising with NPO Direct Marketing, the Institute for Individual and World Peace, and A Word Fit for Kids. He currently is writing poetry and consulting educationally in holistic health. [www.nealhightower.blogspot.com](http://www.nealhightower.blogspot.com)

After double-majoring in Philosophy and Communications, **Donn Weinberg ’75** graduated from the University of Baltimore School of Law, where he served as Editor-in-Chief of the law review. Weinberg engaged in private law practice for fifteen years, including a one year stint in 1982 as a prosecutor in Baltimore City, but mostly specialized in plaintiffs’ medical malpractice litigation. He left private law practice in 1993 to become Corporate Counsel for the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, a private independent charitable foundation the mission of which is to make grants to nonprofits that provide direct services to economically disadvantaged individuals throughout the U.S. and in some foreign nations, primarily Israel and the former Soviet Union. Donn became a Trustee and Vice President of the Foundation in 2002 and will become Chairman early in 2010. [www.HJWeinbergfoundation.org](http://www.HJWeinbergfoundation.org)

Reflecting on his four years at GW, Donn remarks, “I had the privilege of learning philosophy under the direction of wonderful professors, such as William Griffith, Thelma Levine, Walter Soffer, William Pfuntner, and Richard Schlagel. Without a doubt, reading philosophy in college made a huge difference in my life, and it continues to enrich it. I just wish I had more time for philosophical studies.” Donn has, however, continued to read in philosophy. He is a fan of the Objectivist philosophy of Ayn Rand and some of that philosophy’s progeny and is a supporter of the Atlas Society, an Objectivist organization. Donn identifies as a political libertarian “along the practical, gradualistic lines set out by the Cato Institute.” His primary hobby is singing, as a volunteer at various senior facilities in Baltimore. He has been married for over 30 years, has two adult children, and recently became a grandfather.

**Student Spotlight**

As a volunteer for GlobeMed, **Nathan Zapolsky ’10 (Philosophy)** works to support and improve the partner clinic in Huye, Rwanda and the surrounding community. He is GlobeMed GW’s Director of Individual Giving, in charge of gathering funding and support. This year Nathan led GlobeMed GW members in private donation efforts that yielded over three thousand dollars for medical supplies and water systems for the clinic. He writes, “I became familiar with the people of Huye, and helped cultivate relationships between our donors and the Rwandans in need. I draw tremendous satisfaction from knowing they live healthier lives thanks to our efforts.” Nathan also currently works at the American College of Cardiology. As a student intern, he works in the division of Science and Quality, where he inculcates practices shown to decrease the readmission rates of patients suffering from Heart Failure, and subsequently lower the overall cost of health care. Nathan has also become involved in the effects of Appropriate Use Criteria and shared decision-making in the value of medical care for patients at risk or suffering from vascular and cardiac conditions. He is currently in the process of applying to medical schools, in hope of matriculating in the fall of 2010.
After graduating from GW, **Daniel Silber ’89** entered graduate school at Vanderbilt University. He graduated with a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1994, having written a dissertation focusing on Alan Gewirth’s ethical rationalism, a 20th-century variant of Kant’s ethical formalism. He then taught philosophy as an assistant professor at Kent State University (1994-97). In 1997, he joined the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Florida Southern College. As a philosophy professor at FSC, he had the opportunity to establish a major in philosophy, to enhance their philosophy offerings, as well as to make philosophy a more vital contributor to FSC’s extensive general education curriculum. He has recently begun working on a book dealing with the problem of philosophical skepticism. At FSC, he has become increasingly involved in college-wide work aimed at transforming FSC’s curriculum and pedagogy to meet the educational needs of the millenial generation of students. This year he was promoted to full Professor and also took on a full-time job as Associate Provost, a new position that has given him the opportunity to contribute to comprehensive changes at the institution. He writes, “The downside is that I am in the classroom much less, and, as you might expect, I attend ever more administrative and committee meetings. But FSC is going through an exciting period of rapid, positive change, and I enjoy being able to take a broad view of the college and contributing to decisions about the institutional direction we need to take. I have also discovered that the analytical skills I learned and practice as a philosopher are very helpful to me in my role as an administrator.”

Daniel notes that “it was the excellent professors at GW who first really taught me to love philosophy. I have very fond memories of the courses and individual conversations I had with current faculty members (Peter Caws, William Griffith, and Paul Churchill) and former faculty members (Andrew Altman, Judith Butler, Jonathan Moreno, and Richard Schlagel.)”

Daniel has been married to his second wife, Karin, for five years and has two children, Jason (9 years old) and Hanami (6 months old).

After years of working as a wilderness instructor, **Michael Benanav ’92** is now a freelance writer and photographer for the *New York Times*, *Lonely Planet*, and other publications. He has also authored two highly-praised books. For the first, *Men of Salt: Crossing the Sahara on the Caravan of White Gold*, he traveled for 1000 miles with one of the world’s last working camel caravans, schlepping salt to Timbuktu from mines in the middle of the desert. The second book, *Joshua & Isadora: A True Tale of Loss and Love in the Holocaust*, traces his grandparents’ unlikely escapes from Eastern Europe during World War II. He is currently working on his third book, about an endangered tribe of nomadic water buffalo herders in northern India. Michael lives in a small village along the Rio Embudo in northern New Mexico. www.michaelbenanav.com

**Student Spotlight**

**Fahad Juneja ’10 (Philosophy, International Affairs)** has been accepted into the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Undergraduate Philosophy Conference for a paper titled, “The Position of Stand-up Comedy in the Aesthetic Discipline.”

**Walter Lee ’96** attended the GW Medical School as a part of the 7-year B.A./M.D. Liberal Arts Medical Program Charter Class. He then completed an Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery residency at the Cleveland Clinic (1999-2005) followed by an oncology research fellowship at the
Alumni News

same institution (2005-2006). He was on staff for two years at the Cleveland Clinic and then joined Duke University Medical Center for his current position as Assistant Professor of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery.

After graduating, Josh Lappin '01 moved back to his hometown, New York City. He currently works for Major League Baseball at a new television channel called MLB Network which started broadcasting this past January.

Jeff A. Baehr ’04 currently holds the position of Portfolio Manager at Empiric Assessment Management, LLC. He is responsible for the research, development, and implementation of the Empiric models. His daily activities are focused on research and trading. Previously, Jeff was the Director of Research at ARIS Capital Management where he developed internal quantitative risk models and performed research on investment strategies. Jeff’s prior experience includes the World Bank Group, Deutsche Bank Advisors and Carlyle Asset Management.

Christian Hague ’04 will graduate with a Master’s in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University this October. After graduating, he will begin researching as an HIV Epidemiologist with Baltimore City, where he lives with his wife, a public school teacher.

Ashley Bohrer ’09 has begun a Ph.D. program at DePaul University.

Dasha Galperin ’09 is a first-year student at GW Law School.

Max Utzschneider ’09 has begun a Ph.D. program at the New School.

Donations

The department gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who have made recent donations:

Mr. Jeffrey A. Baehr
Mr. Morgan P. Corr
Ms. Heather L. Fink
Ms. Megan Elizabeth Gallagher
Mr. Thomas R. Goutman
Mr. Steven Levy, Esq.
Ms. Elizabeth St. J. Loker
Ms. Sarah Jean Nicholson
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Ms. Meredith Anne Raimondi
Mr. Marcus Lee Scribner
Mr. Clayton B. Standley
Mr. Michael Thacher

Giving to the Department

All donations to the Department of Philosophy are greatly appreciated and tax-deductible. To be a part of the Department’s continuing growth, send your donation through this site:

https://www.gwu.edu/online_giving

(Don’t forget to designate your gift to the Department of Philosophy!)

Credits

This issue of the GWU Department of Philosophy Newsletter was designed and edited by Julia Louie, with assistance from Professor Jeff Brand-Ballard and student assistants Brittany Buschel, Michelle Joseph, and Lizzie O’Boyle.