



Philosophy  
Department  
Annual  
Newsletter



'16-'17 Department

Faculty

- Berry Crawford
- Dan Howard-Snyder
- Frances Howard-Snyder
- Hud Hudson
- Christian Lee
- Neal Tognazzini
- Ryan Wasserman, Chair
- Dennis Whitcomb

Office Manager

DeNora Lombard

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More below...

- Faculty News
- Alumni Spotlight
- Departmental Awards
- In Memoriam: Richard Purtil

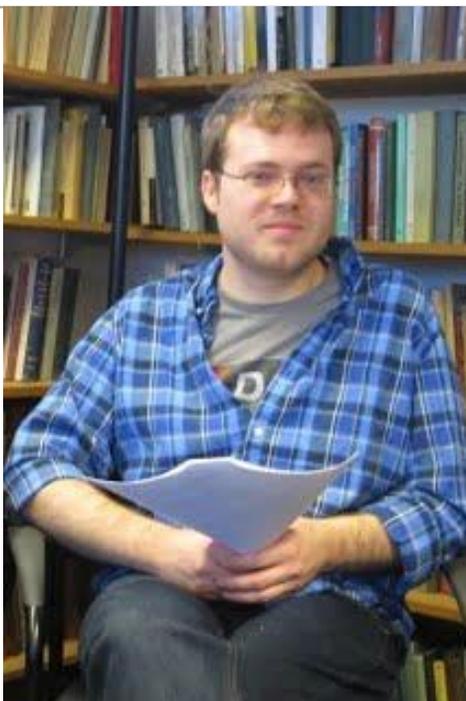
## The department at a glance...

- # of philosophy majors: **63**
- # of philosophy/politics/economics majors: **13**
- # of philosophy minors: **48**
- # of 2016 graduates: **22**
- 2016 Enrollment in philosophy GUR courses: **2,020**
- Most common second major: **Psychology & Comp. Sci.**
- Other second majors: Communication Studies, Linguistics, Behavioral Neuroscience, English, Political Science, Sociology, Biology, Human Services, Music, Environmental Studies, Business, Accounting, History, Economics/Mathematics, Manufacturing and Supply Chain Management

*After graduating from Western, you entered into the PhD program at Syracuse University. Can you say a little bit about what it was like at Syracuse, and how graduate school differed from studying at Western?*

Graduate school is basically professor apprenticeship. At Syracuse we have two and a half years of required classes. These were very similar to smaller upper-division classes at Western. Professors-in-training do lots of other things that aren't expected of undergraduates. Syracuse hosts a lot of different philosophy talks—regular department colloquia on Fridays, half a dozen conferences and lecture series each year, and a dozen opportunities for graduate students to present works-in-progress. Graduate students are expected to attend most of these events and ask questions. Then there's a dissertation to write, which requires setting a research agenda and following it pretty diligently for years. You also have to learn how to teach, publish, give a talk, network, and acquire the whole constellation of skills it takes to get a job.

Syracuse was a great place for me because I had good mentors and good peers. I went there to study metaphysics with [Kris McDaniel](#). He supervised my dissertation, and we just published a paper on essential properties together. He was an excellent supervisor for me



## Alumni Spotlight

Steve Seward ('09)

because he knows a lot about the topics I was working on, we get along well, and he diligently pushes his students to finish their work. Kris ran a monthly workshop for his dissertation students, where we all had to present a chapter every semester. Those sorts of things really helped me work out my ideas and finish my dissertation on time.

*How do you think your undergraduate studies here at Western prepared you for grad school?*

The philosophy professors at Western gave me excellent training in how to think through an argument, read a hard paper, and write and speak clearly. I was able to take enough Western classes

to have a pretty broad background in lots of areas of philosophy. I also managed to take independent studies with Ryan Wasserman and Hud Hudson on meta-metaphysics and Leibniz's philosophy—topics that eventually made their way into my dissertation at Syracuse. So I would say my studies at Western set me up well for success in graduate school.

*While at Syracuse, you earned a certificate of advanced studies in disability studies. Can you tell us a bit more about that program?*

In the 1970s, Syracuse started one of the earliest academic centers that studied disability's social, cultural, and political significance. The certificate program required five classes and a culminating paper. I was interested in it because I had worked at [FACES Northwest](#), a camp for kids with autism in Bellingham. I wanted to know what autism is, and what disability is. My disability studies classes didn't really address those questions, and at first I did not understand the questions disability scholars were asking. The concerns in that discipline are always practical and political, and I was raised on a steady diet of analytic metaphysics, so it took some time for me to adjust. When I studied feminist philosophy, I started to see the possibility of doing serious philosophy with a constant eye toward using that philosophy to support a political movement in a practical way. Now when I'm



**Alumni  
Spotlight,**  
Steve Seward ('09)

theorizing about disability, I always have the practical goal in mind: how can this idea make things better for people with disabilities?

*Your paper “Solving the Lucky and Guaranteed Proof Problems” recently won an award from the Leibniz Society of North America. What can you tell us about that?*

**That paper** grew out of a phenomenal Leibniz seminar taught by Kara Richardson and Kris McDaniel. Those two taught me most of what I know about doing history of philosophy. The class had three outstanding Leibniz scholars as guests. One of them, Robert Adams, introduced the so-called Problem of Lucky Proof in his book on Leibniz. When Adams came to the seminar to discuss his book, I was confused about how the problem was supposed to work, so I asked Adams about it. As I thought about it longer, I became convinced that the problem was merely apparent, because it was based on a misunderstanding of Leibniz’s concept of analysis. So I wrote a paper to clarify how Leibniz was thinking about analysis and show that the problem dissolves once the relevant concepts are clear. Then I presented it at a couple conferences, revised in light of excellent comments from other Leibniz scholars, and submitted it to the Leibniz Society of North America’s annual contest. I’m still shocked that I actually won.

*Do you have any advice for current students who might be thinking about applying to graduate schools in philosophy?*

A lot of the advice I would offer came straight from my Western professors. Don’t go to graduate school unless you can do it without taking on debt, and you’ll be happy with your choice even if you don’t get a job in philosophy.

It’s a huge plus if you go to a school where several faculty members work in your favorite subfield of philosophy. You need one great dissertation supervisor, and all sorts of things can interfere with a good supervising relationship, so your chances improve if you have several choices. If there are several professors working in your area, they will attract lots of students in the same area, so you’ll have more colleagues with similar interests.

Once you’re in graduate school, figure out where you want to be when you graduate, and work backward to make a plan to get there. Explore parts of philosophy that are unfamiliar to you – wide-ranging knowledge will make you a better colleague. Plan for how you’re going to learn to teach, publish, meet course requirements, and, especially, write a dissertation. My dissertation was based entirely on papers I wrote for classes. I had to plan ahead and take four classes on similar topics to make that work, but getting a jump-start on the dissertation was extremely valuable.



## + faculty news

### DAN HOWARD-SNYDER

[BLPR 2016](#) addressed racism, featuring Jorge Garcia, Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, and Luvell Anderson, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Memphis. I directed the Nature and Value of Faith workshop all July, and the accompanying September conference, both held in Fairhaven. I presented papers in LA, Cleveland, Seattle, and Bellingham. My professional leave resulted in three papers on Hick, two on faith, and one on divine hiddenness, as well as *Approaches to Faith*, a 115k-word collection of new essays which I co-edited for the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. We are still eating carrots out of the garden, helped by the cold weather. The boys turned 17. Letters from colleges stuff the mailbox. Frances continues to write fiction. After a personal best of 6 under par, and five hole-in-ones, my folging “career” is on ice, as I recover from knee surgery.

### FRANCES HOWARD-SNYDER

Highlights from my 2016 include: a visit to my parents in England in March, a visit to Ashland, OR with my son William in August, where we watched six plays and ate like princes, a wonderful workshop on faith in Bellingham with my husband and lots of other smart philosophers, and publishing five short stories, including two in philosophical collections. Here are two of my favorites: click [here](#) and [here](#).

### HUD HUDSON

*On the professional side:* In 2016 I gave a talk on Human Enhancement and Persistence in Orlando, Florida, presented the Dean's Lecture at WWU on The Fine-Tuning Argument, and attended an intensive workshop in Breckenridge, Colorado on Michael Rea's upcoming Gifford Lectures. I completed a paper, “Science, Skepticism, Scripture, and Supertasks,” which consists

of a set of replies to four papers that will be featured together in a symposium devoted to my 2014 book, *The Fall and Hypertime*, and that will be published in the *Journal of Analytic Theology*. In addition to teaching introductory courses and the history sequence (Rationalists, Empiricists, Kant), I very much enjoyed offering an independent study on Milton's magnificent *Paradise Lost*. And, finally, I was nominated for the national Robert Foster Cherry Award for Great Teaching. Wish me luck!

*On the personal side:* Bear, the Shih Tzu, sends his greetings to you and reminds you that he likes treats. Xerxes (my imaginary friend) and I faithfully continue our habit of reading one book every week and posting her reactions online. This coming April we reach a milestone – completing our tenth year! You are all invited to [click the 'Xerxes' link on my homepage](#) each Sunday to follow our progress.

### **CHRISTIAN LEE**

After completing graduate school in 2012 I spent two years teaching philosophy courses in Perth, Western Australia: wonderful weather but terrible beer. Happy to have returned to Western (where I completed undergraduate degrees) to exchange sunshine for our wonderful local breweries. During the past year-and-a-half I travelled: beginning with a conference in Bayreuth, Germany I road-tripped around Europe. I climbed around the Southwest of the US and spent a month in the Virgin Islands. I visited Spokane and Colorado (where I completed graduate school) followed by many, though not nearly enough, trips to beautiful Squamish, B.C. for rock-climbing. I am returning to Perth winter quarter to attend a wedding and later visiting Gothenburg, Sweden to give a philosophy talk or two.



On the professional side I have been working on a variety of unrelated topics in philosophy: counterfactuals, plural responsibility, and issues in the philosophy of time. I also recently began writing an essay on the nature of exaggeration (obviously the most neglected topic in the history of philosophy). In addition to introductory courses, this year and the one that went before will have seen me teaching courses on intrinsic value, philosophical anarchism, the philosophy of art, the problem of punishment and problems/paradoxes associated with voting. (What could possibly go wrong with voting you wonder? Not funny.)

In any event, it is exciting to be working beside a wonderful group of philosophers and, after 10 years, to be back home in the Northwest.

### **NEAL TOGNAZZINI**

Seems like I travelled more in 2016 than I have in awhile, with the highlight being a trip to Denmark and Sweden to talk about the ethics of forgiveness (and, of course, to visit Søren Kierkegaard's grave and drink overpriced Scandinavian beer). But I also enjoyed research trips

to New Orleans, San Francisco, and New Brunswick, as well as an annual family vacation on the Oregon Coast and a long weekend in Santa Barbara for my brother-in-law's wedding. I continue to think and write about free will and blame, but in this past year I have also expanded into moral psychology more broadly, writing papers on regret, pride, and faith. I submitted my tenure dossier earlier this fall and just last week I received the letter from the Provost saying that I'm being promoted with tenure! I'll celebrate by trying to figure out what the next stage of my career will look like. Some possibilities: writing a book for a general audience, developing a competency in classical Chinese philosophy, and trying to create a course on the ethics and aesthetics of beer. Speaking of which: over the summer I hit a personal milestone when I passed a five-hour written, tasting, and hands-on exam to become a Certified Cicerone® (basically, a sommelier but for beer instead of wine). Geneva started kindergarten last fall and continues to remind me that there are more important things in life than philosophy – like knowing the names of all the *My Little Pony* characters. The pursuit of the good life continues.

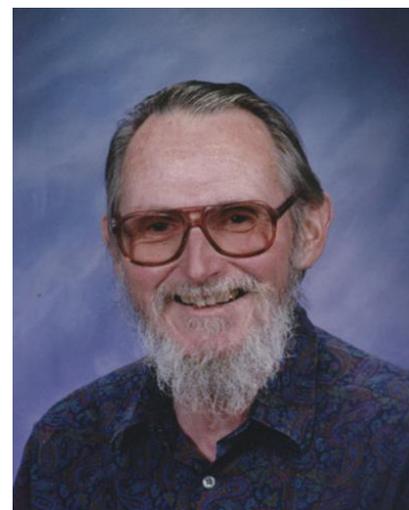
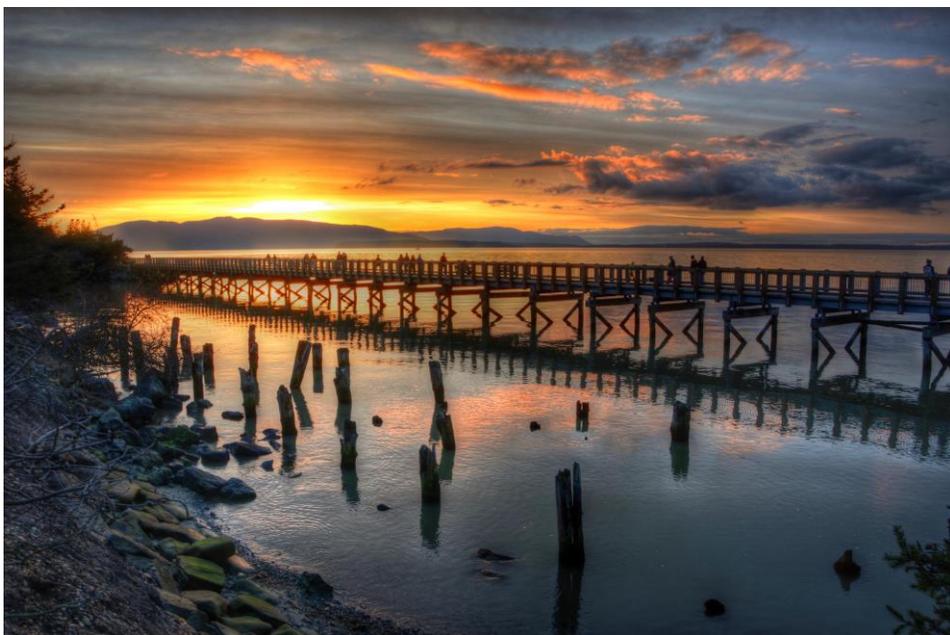
### RYAN WASSERMAN

The highlight of my year was seeing my children grow and experience new things. Ben began middle school and joined orchestra. Zoe started hip hop dance classes and is now taking art courses as well. We also took both of the kids on their first international trip (to Panama). As far as teaching goes, the highlight of my year was a new philosophy seminar on happiness and games. (On that topic, I highly recommend Daniel Haybron's book *A Short Introduction to Happiness* and Bernard Suits's book *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*—they're both short, accessible, and a real pleasure to read.) Finally, when it comes to my own writing, I had four [papers published](#) or accepted for publication this year: "Theories of Persistence" (*Philosophical Studies*), "Dispositions without Teleology" (*Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*), "Freedom and Time Travel" (*A Companion to Free Will*), and "Time Travel, Abilities, and Arguments by Analogy" (*Thought*). I also submitted the final draft of my [book manuscript on time travel](#) to Oxford University Press.



### DENNIS WHITCOMB

This year was eventful on the home front. My wife Maria broke her leg and I hurt my back; this made it hard to keep up with the farm, but with lots and lots of help we made it happen. Both Maria and I are healing, slowly but surely, and we hope to get up to speed sooner or later. We still have our foster daughter Savannah, who is doing very well. I also continue to play guitar almost every day. I take online lessons and I have lots of fun with it. I also continue to have lots of fun teaching and writing philosophy. This year I finished up a project on epistemic injustice, which happens when one person unjustly treats another person as if they didn't know things. I also started up another project on epistemic injustice and I hope to report next year that some things from these projects are published. If you are in the Bellingham area, hit me up! I always enjoy catching up with former students.



## In Memoriam: Richard Purtill (1931-2016)

(Memorial notice from [Western Today](#))

Richard Purtill, age 85, died Sunday, Dec. 4, at home in Bellingham.

He was born March 12, 1931 in Chicago, IL to Joseph and Bertha Purtill. Richard was stationed in England while serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He earned his B.A. and PhD at the University of Chicago. He married Betty Banks on June 22, 1959 in her hometown, East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Richard was a professor of Philosophy at WWU for many years, and was named an emeritus professor of Philosophy after he retired. He wrote many books, from philosophy texts to science

fiction and had a small but devoted following of his fantasy novels, many of which were set in ancient Greece. A lover of all things Hellenic, Richard traveled to Greece many times throughout his life both professionally, as a guide and lecturer, and for personal pleasure. He will be remembered as a philosopher, avid traveler, swimmer, and lover of owls, as well as a devoted Catholic, husband, and father.

Richard was preceded in death by his sisters Shirley and Joanie. He is survived by his loving wife of 57 years, Betty, three sons, Mark of Kirkland, Tim and wife Kelly of Seattle and Steven and wife

Alexis of Bellingham, brother David of South Dakota, and many loving relatives and friends. Memorials in Richard's name may be made to EWTN (Catholic Television) at [www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com).

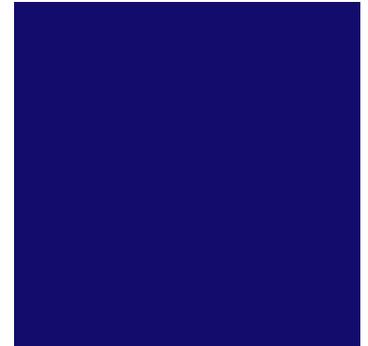
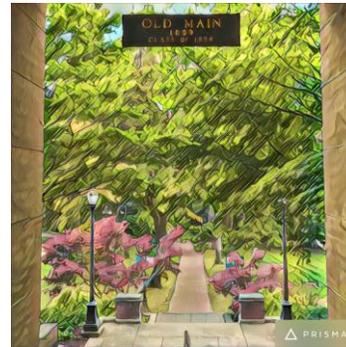
A Vigil Service was held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Thursday, Dec. 8 at 7:30 p.m.. Mass of Christian Burial was held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Friday, Dec. 9 at noon.

You may share memories with Richard's family at <http://www.westfordfuneralhome.com>.

## Philosophy Class of 2016

Alex Anderson  
Keira Chong  
Jonathan Fedele  
Dana Gutierrez  
Benjamin Halbert  
Ian Hansel  
Zachary Herzog  
Rebecca Ingle  
Joseph Levy  
Michael Millner  
Justine Mims

Colin Nardine  
Riley O'Leary  
Taylor Olson  
Dominic Pearson  
Shawn Plascencia  
Brian Priest  
Jared Rupert  
Simeon Simov  
Joshua Warnick  
Kyle Williams Brown  
Samuel Wolk



## 2016-2017 Departmental Awards

Downing-Montague Scholarship for Philosophy,  
Healthcare, and Technology

**Lauren Hoffman**

Paul J. and Rebecca Ann Olscamp Scholarship

**Emily Robertson**

Departmental Tuition Waiver Scholarship

**Dee Payton & Nolan Cheney**