The department at a glance…

- # of philosophy majors: 52
- # of philosophy/politics/economics majors: 14
- # of philosophy minors: 39
- # of 2017 graduates: 30
- 2017 Enrollment in philosophy GUR courses: 1,809
- Our students are double-majoring in: Behavioral Neuroscience, Biology, Business Administration, Communication Studies, Computer Science, Economics, English, Environmental Studies, History, Human Services, Journalism, Linguistics, Manufacturing and Supply Chain Management, Mathematics, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology
Alumni Spotlight
Jennifer Monnier ('15)

How did you get into philosophy?

During my first semester at WWU, I took an introductory philosophy course focusing on epistemology. Candidly, I don’t know why I chose that course in particular – I had no prior academic experience with philosophy – but it grabbed me right away. I enjoyed having a formal and rather rigorous setting in which to try to sort out significant problems, so I continued to study philosophy. The writing and reasoning skills I accumulated in my philosophy courses became increasingly valuable as I decided to pursue a career in science writing.

What have you been up to recently?

After working in communications at Seattle Children’s Hospital for a couple of years, I decided to make the venturesome transition into journalism. To that end, I’ve just begun my second semester at New York University, earning my Master’s degree in Science, Health and Environmental Journalism.

What do you hope to be doing next?

I look forward to writing widely comprehensible stories about convoluted, but important topics in science: bioethics, pathology and pollution, for example. I aim to work at a regional newspaper in the U.S., where I can report in depth on local issues. I’m also building my multimedia journalism skills, so that I’ll be well-equipped to dabble in the recently booming world of science news podcasts.

How do you think your background in philosophy helped prepare you for the kind of work you are doing now?

As a science journalist, I’m required to dive into any topic in the wide world, identify and comprehend the most important stuff, and report it back correctly, while providing some original insight and context. It’s not an exaggeration to say that my philosophy courses provided me with practice in doing just that.

What advice would you give other students considering philosophy as a field of study?

I advise students to spend a good chunk of time in philosophy courses grappling with arguments and perspectives that make them uneasy – the stuff that seems irritatingly counterintuitive. Do this by writing about those perspectives in a very organized way. Think about them point by point. Listen to what advocates have to say. After all that, you might reach the same conclusion I did: that studying philosophy in this way is highly effective at making you a better thinker, writer and listener, whether your opinions change or not.
BLPR 2017 addressed the nature and value of faith. It featured Ryan Preston-Roedder of Occidental College and Daniel McKaughan of Boston College. I presented papers and workshopped in Palm Springs, Seattle, and Amman (Jordan), where I rode a camel in Wadi Rum, slept with Bedouins, climbed to the Monastery at Petra, floated on the Dead Sea, dipped my toes where Jesus was baptized, visited Moses’s grave, and—best of all!—hookahed into the early morning hours. I published two short papers on foundationalism and coherentism (for a textbook), one on intellectual arrogance and servility (with Dennis and a team of scientists!), and four on faith. No garden this year, but I swam a lot in Perrygin Lake, and walked around Bryce Canyon, Zion National Park, Kolob Canyon, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon; four novels and a lot of 70’s R&R on the road. The boys turned 18; they’ll be off to college soon. I committed a mortal sin (not the first): I started playing golf; I’m totally hooked and loving it!

2017 was a busy year for me. In February, I travelled to Pennsylvania to give two lectures on trust. I was most warmly welcomed by the small philosophy department at Geneva College. In April, I travelled to the APA to present a philosophical short story on Faith. This was a first for me, and seemed unusual to most of my audience. I felt very appreciated and grateful to the organizer for giving me this opportunity. In June, I travelled to Oxford to attend a conference on philosophical fiction, where I learned a lot and made some good friends. In September, I travelled to Copenhagen to deliver a paper on Difficulty and Impossibility. I had never visited Denmark before and was appropriately impressed. Two highlights stand out – I had a genuine sense that the Danes were happier and more civic-minded than Americans, in no small part because of the nature of their government. I also took a train up to Kronburg Castle, which is the basis for Elsinore castle in Hamlet.
I travelled with my son, Peter, to England in April to visit my parents. He learned to play bridge and everyone connected wonderfully. I also took him to Ashland in August. We saw both Henry IVs and Julius Caesar and the Odyssey. If you’re wondering why I took him on two trips, well, William went to England the year before and will go to Ashland this year. I travelled with my husband, Dan, to Vancouver over Thanksgiving, where we had fun eating, sightseeing, and seeing and hearing The Canadian Tenors!!!

I published three short stories. (And wrote about 12).

A big, scary, wonderful highlight of 2017 has been seeing my sons navigate their final year of high school, apply for college, and turn 18. They’re officially adults now, -- smart, competent, thoughtful, compassionate. I am very proud.

HUD HUDDSON

On the professional side: In 2017 I gave talks on the philosophy of religion and the epistemology of testimony at the University of Southern California, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of Virginia, and I presented a keynote address on seven species of determinism at Calvin College. I celebrated completing a quarter-century (!) of teaching at Western with a very enjoyable senior seminar on Philosophy and Milton’s Paradise Lost. And I published a philosophical novel I hope you will read – A Grotesque in the Garden – available on Amazon. To entice you:

Tesque, the angel assigned to watch over the vacated Garden of Eden, believing himself to have been abandoned by God and suffering from his isolation and loneliness, meditates on the topics of divinely-permitted evil, divine hiddenness, divine deception, and obedience as he warms with himself over the decision of whether to rebel against God and leave his post. The noetic effects of sin, self-deception, moral luck, creaturely flourishing, the nature of divine love, and misanthropy are all on display in this novel on the difficulties of satisfying the two great commandments to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and to love thy neighbor as thyself.

On the personal side: Bear, the Shih Tzu, sends his greetings and reminds you that he likes treats. Xerxes and I faithfully continue our habit of reading one book every week and posting her reactions online; this coming April we complete our eleventh year. You are all invited to click the ‘Xerxes’ link on my homepage each Sunday to follow our progress.
CHRISTIAN LEE

Highlights of 2017: This year began with a lovely trip to Australia for a wedding and ended with a return trip for vacation. In between I spent time in Maui and Boulder. I travelled about Ethiopia too, which was a unique and rewarding experience. The trip involved lecturing at Addis Ababa University and visits to the Danikil Depression and Lalibela with an old friend and one new. (One of the many beautiful churches in Lalibela is pictured.) I again enjoyed numerous trips to Squamish, B.C. to rock climb with friends. I attended an APA conference in Seattle where I was able to spend time with my old buddy and fellow WWU alumnus Joshua Spencer. I sailed a bit at Lake Whatcom and enjoyed camping trips in the Goat Rocks Wilderness. Finally, throughout the year I attempted, without any hint of success, to better Dan Howard-Snyder's folfing score of 6 under par. Well, maybe next year...

NEAL TOGNAZZINI

At this time last year I was wondering what new projects I would take on after having achieved tenure. Well I am happy to report that I've managed to accomplish (or at least successfully begin) several of them. On the personal side of things, I started doing some freelance beer writing for the Bellingham Tap Trail website and also for Bellingham Alive magazine. On the teaching front, I designed and taught a new course during Fall quarter on existentialism (shout-out to my amazingly patient students who helped me work through Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Beauvoir). And on the research front, I got a decent start on a book aimed at a popular audience.

As if that weren't enough to keep me busy, I also bought a house! So we are now a slightly more permanent fixture of the Bellingham community, down in the Columbia neighborhood. (We can now walk Geneva to her 1st grade classroom in about 90 seconds.) During 2017 I traveled to Houston, TX and Morgantown, WV for conferences, and took family trips to the Oregon Coast (for the total eclipse!), Las Vegas (we left the kid home for that one) and Disneyland (Geneva's first time – she loved it, obvs). Looking forward to seeing what 2018 brings.
RYAN WASSERMAN

This was a year of many milestones. My son, Benjamin, completed his first year of middle school, while my daughter, Zoë, began her last year in elementary school. Zoë turned 10 in March and I turned 40; we celebrated with a trip to Disneyland. Later in the spring, we welcomed our first dog into the family—a rescued Maltese named "Chewie" ("Chewbacca"). He has definitely been the highlight of our year. On the professional side, I was happy to see my book, *Paradoxes of Time Travel*, finally appear in print with Oxford University Press; it will be available in the US early in 2018. I also published three papers: "Teleological Dispositions" (co-authored with David Manley), in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, "Time Travel, Ability, and Arguments by Analogy" in *Thought*, and "Vagueness and the Laws of Metaphysics" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

DENNIS WHITCOMB

For the first time this year, I published a (co-authored) paper in a psychology journal. That paper developed a way to measure intellectual humility. I also finally finished up a paper about curiosity that I’ve been whittling away at since 2014. This paper will come out in a book, co-edited by myself and a few other people, titled *The Moral Psychology of Curiosity*. I wrote an encyclopedia article about omniscience too, and I gave several talks (in San Francisco and - in January! - Palm Springs). In these talks I presented some of my works in progress about epistemic injustice and (again) humility. In my teaching I offered a seminar on epistemic injustice and oppression; and I also altered my longstanding Political Philosophy course to have a section of material on oppression as well. In short, my research and teaching have kept on rolling this year and have branched out in new directions. My favorite part about the year, though, comes from the home front. There, I’ve watched my foster daughter grow enormously. She’s made me proud over and over. The farm is going well too!
Class of 2017

Steven Alves
Landon Baldwin
Roxane Barbera
Greggory Bechtel
Sydney Brummet
Alana Bomberger
Jose Carrillo
Austin Carlton
Nolan Cheney
McKenzie Dent
Jared Frank
Matthew Handy
Blake Harris
James Hyde
Jeff Kent
Isaac Lawrence
Sean Mittelstaedt
Sean Nalty
Elizabeth Nicoletta
Danielle Payton
Emily Robertson
Ethan Rowe
Terrah Short
Spencer Stepniewski
Travis Swanson
Rachel Thody
Claire Tyler
Maxwell Westervelt
Nicholas Works
Robert York

2017-2018 Departmental Awards

Downing-Montague Scholarship for Philosophy, Healthcare, and Technology

**August Waldron**

Paul J. and Rebecca Ann Olscamp Scholarship

**Phil Fox**

Departmental Tuition Waiver Scholarship

**Roxane Barbera & Allison Cash**