The department at a glance…

- # of philosophy majors: **64**
- # of philosophy/politics/economics majors: **20**
- # of philosophy minors: **38**
- # of 2018 graduates: **10**
- 2018 Enrollment in philosophy GUR courses: **2,034**
- *Our students are double-majoring in:* Art History, Biology, Business Administration, Communication Studies, Computer Science, Economics, English, History, Journalism, Linguistics, Mathematics, Political Science, and Sociology
Alumni Spotlight
Joseph Levy ('16)

How did you get into philosophy?

My first real experience with philosophy was the introductory epistemology course that I took with Professor Whitcomb. This class taught me a valuable lesson: I’m not as smart as I think I am. As it turns out, philosophy is not an easy subject. But I loved it. Even if it was tough, I loved thinking about complex issues and analyzing arguments. I immediately knew that this was what I wanted to study.

What have you been up to recently?

I’m finishing up my final year at NYU School of Law. I’ve become interested in a wide range of topics, but some of my most prominent interests are torts, administrative law, and trademark law. To me, each has its own philosophical pairing that draws me to the subject: torts with ethics, administrative law with political philosophy, and trademark law with philosophy of language and epistemology.

What do you hope to be doing next?

After I graduate, I’ll be working at the law firm WilmerHale, in their Palo Alto office. I’ll be doing general litigation, but I hope to eventually focus on appellate law. I’m also sending out applications to spend a year clerking for a judge, so hopefully I can do that someday as well.

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

Philosophy is, without a doubt, the most helpful major for law school. In many ways, “thinking like a lawyer” is just like thinking like a philosopher. You need to know how to critically analyze issues, create strong arguments, attack weak arguments, and write clearly. I was prepared to do all of this thanks to my philosophy background. Additionally, many people forget that the law is not disconnected from philosophy. When I arrived at school, I was well-equipped to consider the philosophical foundations of law itself.

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

First: do it. Philosophy teaches you how to think and write like no other field of study. If you’re worried about job prospects, then add a second major. Philosophy complements any field of study. And as an added bonus, it’s critical to a flourishing life.

Second, if you choose to study philosophy, understand that it is a rigorous field of study. Unlike how television portrays the typical philosophy class, learning philosophy takes work. Be sure to dedicate time so that you can learn how to think like a philosopher.
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I presented papers and workshopped in Boston, Amsterdam (with family!), Grand Rapids, Storrs, Fayetteville, and Palm Springs. I continue to write, teach, and publish on faith and humility. Ryan, Frances, and I revised *The Power of Logic*; the sixth edition comes out Fall 2019, at all fine booksellers. With Frances, I’m a new Husky fan; both boys started at the UW in Fall. Peter in Psychology, and William in Computer Science; both intend to double major...in Philosophy! Go figure. Neal is their favorite philosophy teacher so far (summer school). I spent a week on the PCT, the Alpine Lakes region; awe-inspiring! Nearly died in an off-trail scramble. In late September, bone spurs in my right AC joint were removed. I’m nearly ready to get back on the course for some mid-winter golfing.

FRANCES HOWARD-SNYDER

In 2018, I developed and taught two new classes: Philosophy of Literature, and Philosophy of Sex and Misogyny. I wrote a paper called, “Is this a Good Question?” and presented it at a conference in Amsterdam. I wrote many short stories, including two philosophical short stories which will be published in a philosophy collection and a philosophical fiction collection. Here is a link to a regular short story of mine entitled, “Day-Mare”.

On the personal front, a huge highlight was travelling with Dan and my sons, Peter and William, to Amsterdam in August where we enjoyed great art, great food and fun conversation with other philosophers. We also spent time with my parents and took a side trip to Oxford. In August, I travelled to Ashland with my son, William, to see plays and just reconnect.

Probably the most significant events of my year were seeing Peter and William graduate from high school and then dropping them off at the University of Washington for the start of their freshman year. Big changes – sad, happy and proud. But we all seem to be surviving.
HUD HUDSON

On the professional side: In 2018 I gave talks at Fuller Theological Seminary, and I participated in three wonderful pre-read workshops in metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of religion. My teaching highlight was a senior seminar on Hamlet and Schopenhauer (which despite how depressing it might sound, simply rocked).

In late November, I had the thought that if someday I acquire the ability to time travel, and if I choose to use that power to visit my younger self, I will face a difficult decision: How will I select a time and place for my great adventure? Of course I will travel to whichever time it is then true that I earlier visited, but what mental process will I undergo that leads to the decision to drop in then and there? Then I realized I might currently have some control over that later decision should it come to happen. My thought at the time: "If I now choose a special date and location for the visit, get dressed up, and head off to the reunion, then my older self will be so pleased that I thus committed to that specific occasion, I will honor the choice – showing up then or never." So, I issued an invitation to myself for a special birthday lunch on December-the-first at a little restaurant south of Bellingham." You’ll be happy to know that I did, in fact, show up at my time-travel date . . . but, unfortunately, only once. Nevertheless, I had a lovely time (as documented by the picture). You should know, however, that if I had shown up twice, I would almost certainly lie about it, since there is no chance anyone would believe me and that would be sure to spoil the experience to some extent. So, I’m not sure what you learned about the epistemology of testimony during your years at Western, but I hereby state that I did not have lunch with my future self on my last birthday, and if I did, I’m not telling the truth about it.

On the personal side: Bear, the Shih Tzu, notes that he will be five on St Patrick’s day 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 twelfth year. You are all invited to click the Xerxes link on my new (as of January 2019) webpages each Sunday to follow our progress.
CHRISTIAN LEE

Highlights of 2018: The importance of friendship! This year began with an end to a vacation in Perth, where I spent time with old friends. Later I spent time with other friends in Maui, Spokane, and Boulder. The year ended with a trip to Tucson, with still other friends. As with the previous year, there was plenty of climbing in Squamish and Index. A lovely road trip found me and my partner hiking Hells Canyon, climbing in the City of Rocks, and sleeping along the Salmon River beneath the stars. My very first trip to The Gorge, with old friends, was interesting: The Grateful Dead! (Oh, and I have been learning to do handstands!)

On the professional side of things I completed a course which focused on online technology and blended classrooms. I began a few research/paper projects too. And I have thoroughly enjoyed contemplating the nature (and importance) of solitude, a tour encouraged by a thoughtful gift from one of my dear colleagues. (The gift was a book entitled Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter by Philip Koch.)

NEAL TOGNAZZINI

Although I didn't plan this ahead of time, 2018 ended up being a year of branching out and trying new things. On the personal side, I taught a 9-week class on tasting beer for local homebrewers, participated in a one-on-one photography workshop on the Oregon coast to up my game, and explored a part of my home state that I had never visited (Neah Bay, where this picture was taken). On the teaching front, I taught two different versions of a new course on the metaphysical and ethical questions that arise out of the Harry Potter series. (That was a ton of fun.)

And on the research front, I decided to dip my toes into public philosophy. I got the opportunity to travel to Chicago in May to participate in a workshop led by an Op-Ed editor for the NY Times about writing for the public, and then over the summer the piece I workshoped in Chicago actually got published! You can read it by clicking here. Besides the trip to Chicago, I also traveled to more typical philosophy conferences in California, North Carolina, and Texas, and gave a talk at the University of Puget Sound on the ethics of judgmentalism. (You can read coverage in their student newspaper here.) Outside of work, these days I spend a lot of time playing Minecraft with Geneva, who turns eight next month.
RYAN WASSERMAN

This year I enjoyed taking a quarter of professional leave in which I wrote three papers on physicalism, explanation, and metaphysical indeterminacy. In the classroom, I continued to teach courses on metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, and ancient philosophy; I also had the chance to prepare for a brand new course on food ethics, which I am very excited about. At home, we spent most of our time playing with the newest member of our family, Chewbacca Wasserman (a.k.a. "Chewie"). We also helped our son Ben grow 5cm of new bone using the PRECICE Intramedullary Limb Lengthening System. Our summer trip this year included a number of stops in Oregon, including the beautiful Crater Lake (pictured to the right).

DENNIS WHITCOMB

This year I went to Hawaii with my family and had a great time. I was sure it would be an over-run tourist trap, but it turned out to be really serene. We also went to the Summer Meltdown music festival, which we love to do every year. If you are ever there, let us know! On the farm I built an animal shelter on one of our pastures. I am now (6 years after moving to the farm) getting to the point where I can do such things without being greatly frustrated by my lack of abilities. So that's something. On the philosophy front I gave talks at the University of Connecticut and at a conference in Palm Springs, and I finished up a draft of a paper on humility and oppression. I've gotten more and more interested in the latter topic lately. I hope to teach a seminar on it next year and write more about it in the future. If you are ever in town, drop me a line!
Class of 2018

Allison Cash
Lauren Hoffman
Miranda Levine
Taylor Lewis
Rosalie Lutz
Calista Mayer
Thomas Ruocco
Marcus Thornton
Sabrina West
Sara Wold

2018-2019 Departmental Awards

Downing-Montague Scholarship for Philosophy, Healthcare, and Technology

Anastasiya Usenko

Paul J. and Rebecca Ann Olscamp Scholarship

Phil Fox

Departmental Tuition Waiver Scholarship

Daniel McNabb, Christopher Mackinly, and August Waldron