Welcome to a new year in the philosophy department here at Western Washington University. Here’s a quick recap of 2014: Linda Zagzebski (University of Oklahoma) gave the annual Bellingham Lectures in Philosophy of Religion; the 12th annual Northwest Student Philosophy Conference took place in May; the annual Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference was a ton of fun as usual; we said a fond farewell to Professors Saint and Marsh, who moved to MN (and got married!); and we welcomed Professor Tognazzini, a WWU alumnus (‘03) who joins us after earning his PhD in CA, and teaching for five years in VA. For more news, read on.

Department Clubs
The department sponsors two active AS Clubs: the philosophy club, and Theistic Thinkers. Read about them below.

Alumni Spotlight
Matthew Yoo (‘13) is using his critical thinking skills in the so-called real world. Read an interview with him below.

Faculty News
Seven full-time faculty members call this department home. Read more about their work and lives below.

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...and more
Philosophy Club

Western has for many years had a very active philosophy club. The club meets every Wednesday night @ 5:30pm while classes are in session down at Rudy’s Pizzeria (1232 N. State St.) for food and conversation. There is no formal agenda for the meetings, and it’s a great way to get to know other majors and former majors. (Faculty members occasionally show up, too.)

In addition to the club meetings, the club also hosts the Northwest Student Philosophy Conference, which takes place in May. In 2014 the keynote speaker at that conference was Alex Guerrero (University of Pennsylvania) and there were presentations from several WWU students, as well as students from as far away as Colorado, Kansas, and Indiana. This year’s conference will be the 13th annual.

To keep up-to-date on the goings-on of the WWU Philosophy Club, search for them on Facebook to find the club page.

Theistic Thinkers

Now in its third year, Theistic Thinkers is a club for students who are interested in discussing philosophy of religion. Last fall the club met twice a month in the Viking Union to discuss various academic papers on topics such as religious language, omnipresence, and divine consciousness. During winter quarter the group will read a monograph on the divine attributes, namely: The Nature of God by Edward Wierenga.

The group is open to all students, regardless of religious faith. If you are interested in finding out more about it, or attending meetings, contact the group’s president, Dana Gutierrez, at gutierd3@students.wwu.edu.
Alumni Spotlight

Matthew Yoo ('13)
Deputy Campaign Manager/Field Director
Shari Song for State Senate, 30th LD

How did you get into philosophy?
Like many other students, I got into philosophy with the plan of going to law school. I initially started as a Politics/Philosophy/Economics major, but I ended up dropping Economics and double-majoring in Politics and Philosophy instead. Philosophy classes were consistently the most challenging out of all three subjects, and it was obvious that my improvement in analytical reasoning was directly attributable to those courses.

What have you been up to recently?
After graduation, I had the unique opportunity to be a legal intern for the U.S. Judge Advocate General Corps at Osan Air Base in South Korea. The internship allowed me to employ my analytical skills, and my supervisors were surprised at my ability to relevant research, distill, present, and evaluate legal facts for pending cases. After my time with the JAG Corps, I started an internship with a political consulting firm in Seattle, which led me to land a job as a deputy campaign manager and field director for a highly-contested legislative race for the 2014 cycle. Our team ran one of the strongest campaigns in the state, but we were working in a tough district and ultimately could not overcome low voter turnout.

What do you hope to be doing next?
I plan on managing another political campaign while I work on applying to graduate school. If all goes well, I will land a position on one of Seattle's City Council races while I wait to see if I get into a masters program in public policy.

How do you think that your background in philosophy helped prepare you for the kind of work you're doing now?
I’ve been able to excel in my profession because of the communication skills I’ve honed while studying analytic philosophy. Strong written and verbal communication skills are absolutely necessary in campaigning, because you use them in every part of the job – e.g. writing position papers and fundraising emails, persuading voters, etc. Sometimes I found myself debating with a voter at their door, and I would use concepts I learned in ethics, or even just formal logic, to drum up a persuasive argument. Furthermore, the critical and evaluative nature of philosophy classes forces students to really flesh out their ideas before stating them out loud in order to avoid crushing counterexamples from their peers and/or professors. Knowing how to communicate tactfully translates well to any career, but it’s especially useful in politics, where you engage others on their fundamental beliefs vis-a-vis social justice and economic fairness.

What advice would you give to other people who are considering philosophy as a field of study?
I would say go for it! Philosophy is great to study for its intrinsic value, because it helps you construct your worldview with necessary rigor. Additionally, learning philosophy, especially from our department, trains you superbly in the essential communication skills you need to thrive in the workforce. You’d be surprised by how much employers value those skills and how uncommon it is to find recent graduates who have them. Coming from personal experience, I will say, however, that nothing makes you more marketable than your work experience. Take the flexibility you have during your undergraduate years to do internships in the careers that interest you; applying your analytic reasoning skills, gaining experience, and networking while doing so.

I’m happy to be a resource for students who are looking to get involved in politics/campaigns in Washington. I can be reached at:

(360) 296-4455
or matthewsoomin@gmail.com.
Faculty News

DAN HOWARD-SNYDER
It was a treat to hang out with Linda Zagzebski, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oklahoma, who headlined the February 2014 Bellingham Lectures in Philosophy and Religion. Palm Springs (January) and Chicago (June) found me working with the Intellectual Humility group. I spent July in Columbia, MO, with Frances and the boys, and 18 others, at The Nature and Value of Faith project. If you’re interested, see the blog page for papers, and videos from the October conference in St. Louis. William, Peter, and I drove home from Columbia in August through southern Colorado (Durango) and Utah (Moab), camping and biking. In November, I enjoyed four days at the American Academy of Religion meetings in sunny San Diego (Jimmy Carter was the keynote speaker!), followed by four days in the Chocolate Mountains of southwestern Arizona tracking wild burros (it was 85 degrees for Thanksgiving!). The boys started ninth grade at Sehome High: studying, socializing, and sporting constantly. Frances published three short stories—excellent! We still have carrots coming out of the garden. So, all in all, another busy year. But the best part was gaining our new colleague, Neal Tognazzini. He’s terrific!

FRANCES HOWARD-SNYDER
For me, the highlights of 2014 were PUBLISHING MY FIRST PIECE OF FICTION, “Leap of Faith” at Wordhaus, a trip to Ashland in August with my son, William, a trip to England in March to visit my parents, time spent in Columbia, MO, discussing faith and making new friends, and presenting a philosophy paper, “Trusting Fiction”, a trip to Leavenworth with Dan in August, celebrating the 25th anniversary of our private non-official wedding, participating in a conference at Purdue on themes from Swinburne, publishing my second piece of fiction “The Two Potions” at Wordhaus, winning a local fiction contest on the theme of Competition with a story entitled “Writing Contests will be Banned” and watching my sons, Peter and William, start High School and flourish in the new environment.

HUD HUDSON
On the professional side: I enjoyed travelling in 2014, giving three different papers in philosophy of religion – one at a conference in celebration of Richard Swinburne at Purdue University (Indiana), one at a conference in celebration of Alvin Plantinga at Baylor University (Texas), and one at an International Symposium on Objects and Persons at Aix-Marseille University (France). My new book – The Fall and Hypertime – came out with Oxford this Summer, and I completed two forthcoming papers: “Non-Naturalistic Metaphysics” in the Blackwell Companion to Naturalism (Blackwell) and “Swinburne’s Aesthetic Appeal”, Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne’s Philosophy of Religion (Oxford). In addition to my normal teaching assignments, I enjoyed reviving the course on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason last Spring, and I had fun conducting senior seminars in the Summer and the Fall – one on sins and vices and the other on the good life.

On the personal side: We added a new addition to our family in June – Bear – a handsome and oh-so-loveable little Shih Tzu puppy that you can see when you visit my ‘Photos’ link on my homepage. Bear is wonderful! Finally, Xerxes and I faithfully continue our habit of reading one book every week and posting her reactions online. You are all invited to click the ‘Xerxes’ link on my homepage each Sunday to follow our progress.

NED MARKOSIAN
Three of my papers were published this year: “Do You Know That You Are Not a Brain In a Vat?”, “A Spatial Approach to Mereology” (in which I renounce Brutal Composition and defend a new response to The Special Composition Question), and “The Truth About the Past and the Future” (in which I do not renounce Presentism). They are all online, and I would welcome feedback/rants from past, present, and future students. 2014 did not include as much travel for me as some other recent years, but I did manage to attend a conference at Oberlin College (my alma mater), and I gave talks at The University of Illinois, the Pacific Division Meeting of the APA (in San Diego), The University of Calgary, and Brown University.
NEAL TOGNAZZINI
First, let me say that I’m very grateful to have been given the opportunity to join the department. After graduating from WWU in 2003, I spent six years at UC Riverside earning my PhD, and then taught for the next five years at The College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. But my wife Anna and I both grew up in WA (she’s a political science WWU alum), so we’re delighted to be back. I work mainly in ethics and metaphysics on issues of human agency (free will, moral responsibility, and blame). This quarter I’m teaching a senior seminar on the emotions.

In 2014, in addition to moving across the country, I also managed to write a paper on free will and time travel, publish papers on the moral emotions and moral responsibility, and publish the entry on ‘blame’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. When I’m not doing philosophy, I spend my time taking pictures (like the one on the first page of this newsletter, taken out my office window in BH 310), brewing beer, and being silly with my 4-year-old daughter Geneva.

RYAN WASSERMAN
The most significant event of my year was helping my son Benjamin to grow over two inches of new bone in his right femur. Benjamin has had to have several surgeries over the years because of a rare condition called Proximal Focal Femoral Deficiency. This year's procedure was by far the most challenging, but also the most rewarding. You can learn more about his adventures by clicking here.

On the academic side of things, I was very happy to complete a draft of my book on the paradoxes of time travel. I have been working on-and-off on the project for three years now, and have used portions of the manuscript in many different classes. It is now under review at Oxford University Press. I also wrote three new papers this year—one on vagueness, one on fatalism, and one on persistence.

DENNIS WHITCOMB
This year I branched out by learning some speech act theory. I wrote a paper on the act of question-asking and taught a seminar on the same topic. I also gave a keynote talk at a conference in Istanbul, and wrote up a paper on humility, and started another paper on curiosity. I am also learning to play the guitar! I'm no Jimi Hendrix, but I have great fun playing old Leadbelly songs and like. My wife Maria continues to operate our small organic farm in northern Skagit County, on which I continue my unsuccessful attempts to refrain from doing hard labor.
Congratulations!
These students won departmental awards for the 2014-2015 academic year. Click here for more information about these awards.

Downing-Montague Scholarship for Philosophy, Healthcare, and Technology

Buddy Scott

Paul J. and Rebecca Ann Olscamp Scholarship

Benny Halbert

Departmental Tuition Waiver Scholarship

Jennifer Monnier

Dear Alumni,

We love hearing from you – what you’re up to, when you’ll next be in town, how you’ve found your philosophy degree valuable in your life or career, etc. Please send news, photos, and stories to Neal Tognazzini (neal.tognazzini@wwu.edu), who is taking over this year as editor of the newsletter.

Save the date for May 15-17 this year for another fun-filled weekend at Back2Bellingham, Western’s annual alumni extravaganza. Check out the website for the event to find out what’s going down.