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Congratulations to our 2018 graduates and welcome to our first department newsletter! When I joined the ODU Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in 2002 as a visiting assistant professor, I never imagined that I would eventually be serving as department chair and leading an almost entirely new group of faculty. I strive to create a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment where teacher-scholars can flourish. Together we provide students with a solid grounding in philosophy and religious studies and challenge them to become culturally competent global citizens capable of analyzing complex problems, including contemporary ethical issues, and developing novel ways to address them. It is an honor to work among talented and award-winning faculty committed to instilling in our students a genuine love of learning that reaches beyond the classroom and persists long after they have graduated from ODU. We hope this first issue of our newsletter offers at least a glimpse into why we are so excited about our most recent achievements and the future of the department. We look forward to hearing from alumni, students, and friends of the department about their adventures and successes and we welcome feedback about this first newsletter.

In America, we love our troops and we celebrate their service. Yellow ribbons hang from trees, “Support our Troops” stickers cling to bumpers, and twangy country songs proclaim undying devotion to our men and women in uniform. But what happens when troops come home and hang up their uniforms? For many veterans, this means grappling with an ugly truth of military service: combat trauma. Too often we hear stories of veterans suffering from PTSD, addiction, depression, and in the worst cases, suicide. In fact, it is estimated that upwards of 22 veterans commit suicide each day. Clearly, the current methods of treating trauma in combat veterans is failing and new approaches are desperately needed. ODU Philosophy Professor Dr. MaryCatherine McDonald hopes to use philosophical frameworks and theories to help us better understand, and thus better treat combat veterans struggling with trauma. Dr. McDonald, who has been studying combat trauma among veterans in the US for eight years, has recently been awarded a Summer Research Fellowship Program grant to finish work on her latest project, a book entitled Haunted by a Different Ghost: The Phenomenology of Trauma.
The Philosophy and Religious Studies Department is incredibly proud of Dr. McDonald’s important work in this field and for being awarded a place in the ODU Summer Research Fellowship Program. Only three faculty from the College of Arts and Letters were granted this honor in 2018. According to Dr. McDonald, “having people and the college support [the book] has been one of the most exciting parts of the project” and the support of the Program will “make this project possible by providing the release from teaching and time needed to finish the manuscript.”

With hopes of completing Haunted by a Different Ghost by September first, Dr. McDonald is by no means finished exploring the philosophy of combat trauma. She looks forward to exploring how combat trauma is understood and treated in other countries and cultures and why it is, or appears to be, less of a problem throughout the rest of the world. We are certainly excited to see where this important work continues to take her.

In this work, Dr. McDonald outlines the traditional nonscientific and psychological methods of treating combat trauma and what philosophy can add to this discussion. While clinical approaches tend to see trauma primarily as a singular event or series of events which people need to learn to “get over” or “fix.” Haunted by a Different Ghost argues that this view does not represent a complete picture of the complex effects of trauma. Instead, by utilizing a phenomenological approach, we can reveal deeper layers of understanding. Phenomenology, generally, has to do with the study of human experience and consciousness. In her work, Dr. McDonald uses phenomenology to explore and analyze first personal experiences.

Phenomenology helps us to see trauma not as a singular event or series of events that have caused a person psychological and emotional pain, but rather as a shattering of their personal narrative and worldview. She also contends that because phenomenology holds human beings as fundamentally adaptive, traumatic responses should be viewed as adaptive responses. By reframing combat trauma in this way, Dr. McDonald hopes that it will be seen “as a set of symptoms borne of strength and survival rather than weakness or disorder.”
On March 14th, the Institute for Ethics and Public Affairs had the pleasure of welcoming Dr. Brian H. Williams to campus for a talk on Race, Violence, and Medicine. Dr. Williams is the Medical Director of the Parkland Community Health Institute where he leads cross-functional teams charged with delivery of innovative programs to address community health needs by reducing health disparities, preventing chronic disease and relieving suffering in Dallas County. Prior to his role as Medical Director, Dr. Williams was an Associate Professor of Surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center where he dedicated his time teaching and mentoring medical students, surgery residents, and fellows.

Dr. Williams was the presiding trauma surgeon on call the night of July 7, 2016, when seven Dallas police officers were transported to Parkland after being shot by a gunman targeting officers at a peaceful anti-brutality protest. He emerged from the tragedy of that experience committed to adding action to his passion for social justice. Since then he has shared his story and insight with groups and individuals around the country.

In his talk at ODU Dr. Williams shared how the night of July 7, 2016 forced him to come to terms with the oppression he has faced throughout his life as a black man. His candid storytelling encouraged everyone to examine their implicit biases and the impact that those biases have on one another and our community. Ultimately, Dr. Williams’ message was a call to action, asking each of us to engage in difficult conversations about race and to take a stand when witnessing oppression.

We offer many thanks to the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, the Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, the College of Arts and Letters, and Eastern Virginia Medical School for their co-sponsorship of the event. Without this truly interdisciplinary, cross community support, the event would not have been possible.
The New Philosophers on Campus

By Star Cranston

This year, Philosophy and Religious Studies welcomed three new professors into the department- let's get to know them!

Dr. Justin Remhof

Lived in Santa Clara, California before coming to ODU. Specializes in Metaphysics, (Constructivism) the study in the nature of reality connecting to our social practices. Started working in Philosophy when he was 18 years old.

Dr. Teresa Kouri Kissel

Born in Montreal, Canada, she lived in Columbus Ohio before coming to work at ODU. She specializes in Logic, Russell’s Paradox and has worked in Philosophy for 13 years.

Dr. Andrew Kissel

Born and raised in Columbus/Cincinnati, Ohio. He has worked in Philosophy for 7 years and specializes in Contemporary Free Will Philosophy of the mind.
A LOOK INTO THE LIFE OF A PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR

Questions
1. Favorite Books read this past year?
2. Most Prized Possession?
3. A unique facts about yourself?
4. Hobbies and interests?

Dr. Remhof

1. *Manifest Reality* by Lucy Allais, which is about Kant's view that reality is constructed and *The Nietzschean Self: Moral, Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* by Paul Katsafanas.
2. His wiener dog, Magnum—who is thought of more as a companion than a possession.
3. Loves to play Sega Genesis video games and learned how to play the Ukulele while having an injured thumb.
4. To spend time with animals, play soccer, and play guitar.

Dr. Kouri Kissel

1. *Thinking to Some Purpose* by Susan Stebbing
2. Computer and Coffee pot
3. Was on the Synchronized Swimming Team in college, and made it to the nationals located in Canada
4. Likes to cook, work on logic and crossword puzzles.

Dr. Kissel

2. Long time owned Drum Set.
3. Spirit animal is a sailfish, was secretly a jock, captain of the wrestling team in high school and ran cross-country. Piano player and drummer. During his time in Ohio, Dr. Kissel was in a band known as Vienova.
4. Playing video games, reading, and listening to music.
Words of Wisdom from the New Professors

Many people have worked hard and faced certain challenges to get to where they are in their career. Even if you have a set plan on what you want to do in the world, change could always happen so keep your options open. While in college take advantage of the resources in front of you. “Make use of your professors, when you get confused— that is what your professor is there for—to help you with confusion.”

-Dr. Kouri Kissel

That ladder of life comes with challenges and successes, look at the things you have achieved and let that be your motivation. “Find a way to motivate yourself whether it’s externally or internally...everytime you make that next step it’s a change”

-Dr. Kissel

Tips for People Wanting to Study Philosophy:

Dr. Kouri Kissel
“Be the obnoxious 2 year old that always asks ‘why?’ Why do I believe this is to be true? Why is this the case?” These questions can spark ideas into current issues, relating to the minds of various philosophers.

Dr. Remhof
“Being incredibly organized, knowing exactly when you have to do things, and being good at estimating how long it will take to do those things.” As Professor Remhof also stated, philosophy is very competitive, but it is possible to succeed, using himself as an example.
Alumni Spotlight

Matt Shumaker
Class of 2014

Matt is currently wrapping up the last semester of his MA in Divinity at South Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and explained that his degree in Philosophy and Religious Studies has been essential in his studies and job. The connections between Philosophy and Religious Studies and Ministry are quite obvious and courses such as Medieval Philosophy and his Seminar on Thomas Aquinas prepared him well for his study at Seminary School. However, it is the critical thinking, problem solving, and writing skills that have been indispensable to day to day job functions.

Beyond career growth, Matt also described the Philosophy and Religious Studies courses as a wonderful opportunity for personal development. “The classes I took forced me to better understand my own beliefs and values...and really think through my faith.” Matt also appreciated the small size of his classes and the ability to build strong personal connections with his professors. As he described, “[The Professors] all knew where I was coming from, and even when they didn’t agree with me philosophically, there was always support and encouragement.”

For those students currently deciding whether or not to major or minor in Philosophy and Religious Studies, Matt has some advice: “Do it. Just go for it. One of the best things about this degree is that you can do just about anything with it...It teaches you life and job skills that will benefit you in your future.”

For most students, it takes four years of determined effort to complete their undergraduate degree. But what happens once you finally have your degree in hand and take off your cap and gown? For those in the Humanities, this can be a particularly intimidating question to face. Alumnus Matt Shumaker, class of 2014, was kind enough to answer a few questions to give us insight on what life after graduation can look like for ODU Philosophy and Religious Studies Majors.

Matt is currently an Associate Pastor at London Bridge Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, ministering to college students and young adults. When he began his educational journey at ODU, Matt planned to study Biology on a Pre-Med track. However, after taking Introduction to Philosophy to fulfill a general education requirement, all of that changed. Studying philosophy forced him to examine his own beliefs and values and question the world in new ways. As a life-long Christian, Matt soon found himself being called to a life of ministry, thus solidifying his choice to study Philosophy and Religious Studies as a Major.
OUR FAVORITE READS

Looking for something good to read this summer? Why not try one our favorites?

Manifest Reality
by Lucy Allais
Recommend by- Dr. Remhof

Callous Objects
by Robert Rosenberger
Recommend by- Dr. Wittkower

Varieties of Logic
by Stewart Shapiro
Recommend by- Dr. Kouri Kissel

Skepticism and Naturalism
by P.F. Strawson
Recommend by- Dr. Miller

When Breath Becomes Air
by Paul Kalanithi
Recommend by- Dr. Willock

The Nietzschean Mind
by Paul Katsafanas
Recommend by- Dr. Remhof

Wen Doing the Right Thing is Impossible
by Lisa Tessman
Recommend by- Dr. Cahill
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Recommender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Technology and the Virtues</em></td>
<td>Shannon Vallor</td>
<td>Dr. Pearson</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Entre-Nous: Thinking the Other</em></td>
<td>Emanuel Levinas</td>
<td>Dr. McDonald</td>
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<td><em>Notes on Suicide</em></td>
<td>Simon Critchley</td>
<td>Dr. McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Thinking to Some Purpose</em></td>
<td>Susan Stebbing</td>
<td>Dr. Kouri Kissel</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Neuroexistentialism</em></td>
<td>Greg Caruso &amp; Owen Flanagan</td>
<td>Dr. McDonald</td>
</tr>
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<td><em>Race Matters</em></td>
<td>Cornel West</td>
<td>Instructor McDonald</td>
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Faculty Spotlight
ACLS Awardee Dr. Nicole Willock

When you hear the passion with which Dr. Nicole Willock describes her first encounter with Tibetan culture, it is easy to understand what led her to pursue a life of scholarship on Tibet through the lens of religious studies. Her unique combination of the mastery of Classical and Modern Tibetan sources as well as Chinese language (and German), and her highly productive scholarship on the intersection of these sources, was recently recognized with the prestigious Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Research Fellowship in Buddhist Studies administered by the American Council of Learned Society (ACLS). At ODU Dr. Willock is an Assistant Professor in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department, where she has taught a variety of religious studies courses, including upper level Buddhism courses, since 2014. Her ACLS-award winning project is a book project entitled *Lineages of the Literary: Tibetan Buddhist Scholars Making Modern China*. She is the first professor in the history of the department to be awarded an ACLS fellowship. The ACLS is “the leading private institution supporting scholars in the humanities and social sciences at the doctoral and post-doctoral level.” In the 2016-2017 grant cycle alone, they awarded over 20 million dollars in research grants to more than 325 scholars around the world.

The Philosophy and Religious Studies Department is thrilled to have one of our own chosen for such a prestigious honor.

As a child, trips to Europe to visit family imbued in Dr. Willock a thirst for travel and an ardent love of foreign languages. This prompted her to complete her undergraduate degree abroad in Australia, during which time she spent a year in China intensively studying Chinese. While in China, she and a friend decided to visit Tibet during the New Year’s celebrations—a month long holiday occurring between late January and early March, changing yearly according to the lunar calendar. Dr. Willock describes how she felt “culture shock within culture shock” at the contrast between the Chinese culture and society where she had been living in Beijing and Chengdu, to the Tibetan one she was encountering in Lhasa. This wonderment ignited a passion for the subject of Sino-Tibetan relations that resulted in two MAs—one in Sinology and one in Tibetology, a PhD in Religious Studies & Central Eurasian Studies. While pursuing her Ph.D. she was awarded a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Research Fellowship for research in China and in India on Tibetan Buddhist scholars.
Dr. Willock’s ACLS funded project *Lineages of the Literary* expands on her dissertation with new research and translations. In her doctoral dissertation she translated and analyzed the autobiography and poetry of Tseten Zhabdrung, one of the “Three Great Scholars” of Buddhism after the Cultural Revolution in China. *Lineages of the Literary* extends this work by examining the works and lives of all of the “Three Great Scholars”: Tseten Zhabdrung, Dungkar Rinpoche, and Muge Samten. With this project, Dr. Willock hopes to accomplish a number of things. First, her translations will make many important Buddhist works from the last century available in English for the first time. However, the importance of her work reaches far beyond just translation. Through the analysis of their lives and works, Dr. Willock illuminates how these “Great Scholars” “safeguarded, taught, adapted, and celebrated aspects of Tibetan Buddhism” through a time of great cultural upheaval and harsh state oppression. This study will offer new perspectives to those interested in ‘multiple modernities’ by considering the role of religious subjects in constructing institutional and ideological patterns constituting modernity in order to move beyond Western exceptionalism.

Such an ambitious project has certainly come with its fair share of challenges. To this day, Sino-Tibetan relations continue to be strained, a situation which at times has created political obstacles to Dr. Willock’s research. For example, in the aftermath of the 2008 uprisings across the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and a few ethnically Tibetan areas in Qinghai Province, she was unable to travel to the TAR.

Perhaps the most striking challenge that Dr. Willock mentioned was the issue of confidence. To the casual observer, success like Dr. Willock’s seems destined— a straight path leading neatly from one accomplishment to the next. However, what we often do not see are the many rejections, detours, and uncertainties that precede most great achievements. Indeed, Dr. Willock is no stranger to disappointment and spoke about how difficult it can be, especially as a woman, “to find your voice and vision…and be confident in that.” To be sure, the path to success does not always look like we might think it does and Dr. Willock therefore encourages students and colleagues alike to remember to “have an open mind and an open path—every moment is full of possibilities.”
**Student Awards**

**Phi Sigma Alpha Honor Society Inductees**

Phi Sigma Tau is the international honor society for philosophy. The purpose of the organization is to encourage interest and activity among exceptional students and to promote ties between philosophy departments in accredited institutions.

This year's inductees: Carmen Jones, Colleen O'Connor, Tanner Jonske, Luke Ouchenreither, James Kelvington, Ashley Tucker, Gregory Lagasse

**Machette Prize Winner: Tanner Jonske**

Each year, a prize from the Franklin J. Matchette Foundation is awarded to one outstanding senior philosophy major at Old Dominion. There is no application; all graduating majors are automatically considered.

**Philosophy Book Prize Winners**

Add The recently created Philosophy Book Prize is meant to honor outstanding students in Philosophy courses. Professors are asked to nominate the top students in their classes and award them with a book of their choosing.

This year's winners: Erick Brooks, Danielle Brown, Alicia Graham, Carmen Jones, Luke Oschenreither
ODU Philosophy Club Welcomes YOU

By Tyler Pittman

Philosophy Club is a wonderful place to sit down and have some of the most interesting conversations you’ll ever have. In general, philosophy classes are a relaxed setting, where all opinions are encouraged to be voiced. However, it can be intimidating to voice your thoughts and opinions in front of 30 of your peers, some of which may not necessarily want to be in the class to begin with. In the Philosophy Club, everyone who is there is there because they want to be there. It is a completely different dynamic from the classroom because everyone is actively engaging in exchanging different perspectives in the pursuit of knowledge.

Each week we meet to discuss a different topic. Topics are diverse and range from pain, war, gender, alternative medicine, and really anything that can be spoken about from multiple points of view. At each meeting, you are guaranteed to hear at least three or four different opinions about the same subject. It is a great avenue to open your mind and see the world from a new perspective. Sometimes the debates get passionate, which is how it should be. If people didn’t get passionate about what they believe, why even believe it?

The Philosophy Club is also a great way to stay in the loop regarding guest speakers and events on campus. This past semester, for example, Dr. Brian H. Williams (Medical Director of the Parkland Community Health Institute who was the first doctor on scene in the Dallas shooting that resulted in many wounded officers) came to speak at ODU and the Philosophy Club students had the opportunity to meet with him in a small group setting before the event. The Philosophy Club also hosts our own events, such as book sales, and in the future we hope to host our own undergraduate philosophy conference.

Our Club is a great place to find events and people to further your interests in your own philosophies. It can be hard finding people who want to talk about the inner workings of life itself, and Philosophy Club is a great way to make those connections with those people. The Club meets Tuesdays at 12:30pm in room 3064 of the Batten Arts and Letters Building. Meetings generally last about an hour and all are welcome to join. All voices and opinions are appreciated and respected. For more information, find us on Facebook by searching “ODU Philosophy Club.” The topic for each week’s discussion can also be found on this page. We welcome anyone who is interested in joining!
In Fall 2018, the department will be offering a class that hasn’t been taught for some time: PHIL 305: American Philosophy. The course will focus on American Pragmatism.

Pragmatism, which originated in the late 19th Century, is one of the most important philosophical movements produced by the United States—and pragmatist positions are being revived in contemporary philosophy. Pragmatism was the first movement to break decisively with central rationalist and empiricist assumptions that had governed philosophy from Descartes to German Idealism. Pragmatists provide a revolutionary picture of cognition, knowledge, truth, meaning, reality, value, freedom, and faith by focusing on the practical consequences of accepting various philosophical and scientific positions. For the pragmatists, positions should be assessed in relation to how they affect people in concrete lived experience.

This course will examine three central figures: pragmatists Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) and William James (1842-1910), and neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty (1931-2007). Our study of James will be supplemented by investigating controversial metaphysical and epistemological positions developed in the mid-twentieth century by American philosophers Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) and W.V.O. Quine (1908-2000). Course topics include a radical new way of understanding truth, namely, that truth is simply what is useful; how to view philosophy as continuous with the sciences, most importantly evolutionary theory; the social construction of reality, including the social construction of material objects like planets, mountains, and trees; how to retain religious belief and free will while embracing science; and why genuine social progress might require rejecting the commonly assumption that truth is the goal of inquiry. Students will learn to identify, formulate, and evaluate arguments about these and other fascinating philosophical positions developed by the American Pragmatists. Hope to see you in class!

-Dr. Justin Remhof
I am very thankful to the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies for giving me the opportunity to teach a class this past spring that fuses two of my greatest loves: philosophy and video games. Video games inhabit a unique position in the social consciousness, combining elements of art, literature, film, sports and games, and technology, in a package that is now among the most lucrative forms of media on the market today. The class provides students the opportunity to explore the philosophical questions that arise from this diversity of influences. For example, many video games are story driven, with no clear win conditions, making them difficult to accommodate with traditional definitions drawn from the philosophy of sports and games. And yet, the proliferation of esports and other competitive games strongly suggests that studying video games solely through the lens of traditional definitions of art or narrative forms is also mistaken. Struggling with such questions is not only interesting in its own right, it has the potential to influence important policy decisions being made regarding video games.

The course offers the students the opportunities to play the games discussed in class, helping them to attach the philosophical questions to real world examples. The class meets in the computer labs in BAL every Friday to play games mentioned in the readings, as well as other examples of the philosophical problems discussed that week. While the particular details and kinks of the course are still being worked out, feedback from students has been extremely positive, and I’m looking forward to expanding on the course in future semesters.

-Dr. Andrew Kissel