
PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER

A Newsletter Published by the Philosophy Department of the State University of New York at Potsdam

www.potsdam.edu/academics/AAS/Phil

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

FALL 2009

Greetings from the Chair

By Judith A. Little

Our students and faculty had a very good year in 2008-2009. The department graduated eight B.A. degrees in Philosophy and two philosophy minors, in addition to conferring honors upon nine outstanding philosophy students in May. The Philosophy Forum, led by David Curry, continued doing more than its share to enrich the scholarship and campus lives of students and faculty. For details on the activities of our students, see page 2.

Highlights of faculty activities include the following.

Φ Professor David Curry was inducted as an honorary member, and was the Keynote Speaker at the Annual Induction Ceremony for Phi Eta Sigma, the Freshman Honor Society. He also received, for the second time, the Phi Eta Sigma Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award. Curry also joined Dr. Caroline Downing (Art History) in escorting 15 Classical Studies students on an academic tour of Greece in May 2008, and taught two philosophy courses in Peru during the summer of 2008 for the University of Virginia Study Abroad Program.

Φ Distinguished Professor Di Giovanna presented the Keynote Speech at the Tenth Annual SUNY Potsdam Honors Program.

Φ Dr. Brian Huss' paper, "Three Challenges (and Three Replies) to the Ethics of Belief" was published by *Synthese* in early 2009. Huss also attended the Philosophy and Psychology Conference in Bloomington, Indiana, this June and will present the paper "Why It is Good to be Hard-Headed" at the Responsible Belief in the Face of Disagreement Conference in Amsterdam this August.

Don't forget to tell us all of your news by submitting the Report of Alumni Form information on page 3 to littleja@potsdam.edu and be sure to catch up on Alumni News on page 4.

Thanks to All Alumni Contributors!

Philosophy faculty would like to publicly express our sincere gratitude to the many former students who have so generously donated amounts ranging from \$20 to \$300 over the past five years to the SUNY Potsdam Philosophy Department Foundation Account. Your support overwhelms us and greatly contributes to our efforts. Thank you.

Philosophers' Corner

By Judith A. Little

In these troubled economic times, a little bit of philosophy humor can't hurt and might help!

Philosophical Warning Labels*

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The reader is advised that he or she may be subject to an illusion generated by an evil genius, and that his or her "sensory fibers" may be falsely manipulated at any time with neither advance warning nor any possible legal remedy.

*From Bert Christensen's Truth & Humour Collection
<http://bertc.com/subfour/truth/warninglabels.htm>

2008-2009 Philosophy Forum Activities

Philosophy students received awards, held offices in SGA, and commented on papers at an undergraduate philosophy conference this year. They also led discussions on philosophical issues in films, played **Philosophy Jeopardy** at one of the two Forum mixers, asked questions at **Meet and Grill Philosophy Professors** event and presented papers for Philosophy Forum events.

The Philosophy Forum, due to the extraordinary leadership and commitment of Dr. David Curry, continues enhancing its reputation for excellence and innovation by providing increased opportunities for student and faculty research and scholarship. It is difficult to choose highlights of this year's weekly Forum activities, but the **Christmas Party** hosted by the Di Giovannas and the **Picnic** held by the Currys, the **Oneonta Conference** trip and the play "**Socrates On Trial**" must lead that list.

Student paper presentations for the Forum included Will Hancock's "**Altruism and Biological Realities**", Matt Chick's senior thesis in Politics, "**Voting and Participation**", and Matt La Vine's Philosophy Honors thesis presentation, "**Opening the Possibilities of the Open Question Argument**." We also hosted paper presentations by a former SUNY Potsdam philosophy major, Frances Bottenberg (2002), and friend Adam Rosenfeld, both graduate students in philosophy at Stony Brook University. Frances presented "**The Case Against Disembodying Descartes**" and Adam examined "**Quantity and Opposition in Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Iota**", which philosophy students Will Hancock and Matt La Vine commented on. Drs. David Curry and Brian Huss took eight philosophy students to the **Fourteenth Annual Oneonta Undergraduate Philosophy Conference**, three of whom commented on papers. One of these students also attended the **Concerned Philosophers for Peace Twenty-First Annual Conference** at SUNY Cortland. Professors Curry and Huss also accompanied students to SUNY Oswego for **The 21st Annual Warren Steinkraus Lecture on Human Ideals**, "Inside Creationism's Trojan Horse" by Dr. Barbara Forrest.

Forum faculty presentations included "**Listening to Hope: A Critique of Peter Kramer's Scientism**" by Dr. Jennifer Hansen, St. Lawrence University, "**Divided We Fall: The Case For More Disagreement**" by Dr. Phil Neisser, Politics, and an account of "**Quine's Project to Naturalize Epistemology**" by Dr. Phil Tartaglia, Philosophy. The Forum also sponsored a

panel discussion on "**Nationalism, Globalism, and the 2008 Elections**" by Drs. Suzanne Zwingel, Tim Gordinier, and Ivan Katchanovski of the Politics department, and students Matt La Vine and Glen Shoup. In connection with Forum's strong support and co-sponsorship of the world premiere of Andrew Irvine's play "Socrates On Trial" produced by the Department of Theatre and Dance at the annual Spring Play Festival, Forum hosted the lecture "**Tyranny, Amnesty, and the Death of Socrates**" by Dr. Rebecca Futo Kennedy, Denison University.

Students also enthusiastically engaged in these additional Philosophy Forum activities.

Φ Watched and discussed the **films** *Match Point*, Woody Allen's philosophical thriller; *Watchman*, the film based on the award winning graphic novel by Alan Moore; *The Philosophers' Python*, a collection of Monty Python clips with a philosophical theme; and Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, "one of the greatest films of all time."

Φ Visited with students about philosophy, SUNY Potsdam philosophy programs, and The Philosophy Forum at the **Student Organization Fair** and **The Major Affair** college-wide events in the student union.

Φ Attended the department reception honoring Dr. David Curry for receiving the **President's Award for Excellence in Teaching**.

Φ Participated in discussions on **Classic Thought Experiments in Philosophy**, the (at the time) **upcoming 2008 Presidential Campaign**, and the question-and-answer session "**Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Graduate School But Were Afraid to Ask**" presented by Frances Bottenberg (2002) and Adam Rosenfeld.

Φ Acted as **hecklers** in the audience for performances of the play "Socrates On Trial."

Φ Played in the **Settlers of Catan Tournament** at the department's Annual Spring Picnic.

The Philosophy Forum owes much of its 2008-2009 success to its students' enthusiasm and hard work, particularly this year's **officers** Carrie Bates, Philosopher Queen; Matt La Vine, Philosopher Prince; and Vita Ayala, Minister of Finance.

Philosophy Students Need Your Help!

Please consider supporting our students' philosophical activities by making a contribution to the SUNY Philosophy Department Foundation Account. You can send a check with a note stating that your donation is for the Philosophy Department to SUNY Potsdam College Foundation, Attn: Lisa A. Murphy, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676-2294, or complete the College Foundation's **Online Giving Form** on the SUNY Potsdam website at <https://secure.potsdam.edu/giving>. You may even indicate the specific purpose your gift is to serve; for example, students' undergraduate conference trip expenses, book purchases, or small scholarships. No amount is too small and all contributions will be greatly appreciated by our students and professors.

Philosophy Graduates 2008-2009

Philosophy Majors

- Daniel E. Callahan (and Sociology Major)
- Matthew B. Chick (and Politics Major)
- Matt J. La Vine (and Mathematics Major)
- Erica M. Parker (and English Literature, Women's & Gender Studies Majors)
- Christopher J. Preston (and Psychology Major)
- Matthew C. Short (and English Major)
- Evan N. Smeby
- Nick Thomas (and Art Studio Major)

Philosophy Minors

- Matthew R. Curren (Psychology Major)
- Glenn Shoup (Anthropology, Sociology Majors)

Philosophy Department Student Awards for the Academic Year 2008-2009

Presented at the May 6, 2009, Arts & Sciences Honors Convocation

Phi Sigma Tau Awards

- Zoe Auerbach
- Jesse Will Hancock
- Sean Robert List
- Geoffrey C. S. VanderWoude

Departmental Scholar

- Geoffrey C. S. VanderWoude

Canfield Scholarship

- Jesse Will Hancock

The Outstanding Freshman Awards in Philosophy

- Kaci A. Milligan
- Laura B. Splittgerber

Presented at the May 16, 2009, Spring College Honors Convocation

The Philosophy Department Distinguished Achievement Award

- Matthew C. Short

The Philosophy Department Distinguished Service Award

- Matthew J. La Vine

The Award for Excellence in Philosophy

- Matthew B. Chick

Philosophy Department Faculty

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<u>REPORT OF ALUMNI</u>	
NAME _____	
MAILING ADDRESS _____	
E-MAIL ADDRESS _____	YEAR GRADUATED _____
DEGREE(S) EARNED _____	
EMPLOYMENT _____	
COMMENTS _____	

Please complete this form and return to Dr. Judith A. Little, SUNY Potsdam, 44 Pierrepoint Avenue, Potsdam, NY 13676; or fax to 315/267-2656; or e-mail to littleja@potsgdam.edu Thanks!

Alumni News

Evan Kreider (1993) completed his fourth year at the University of Wisconsin as an Assistant Professor in Philosophy. He teaches "the usual load of Intro and Ethics classes" and Philosophy of the Arts and Philosophical Ideas in Literature. Evan recently presented papers on Mill at the Tenth Meeting of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies, and the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, plus a paper on Aristotle at the 2009 Central APA Meeting. His paper "The Virtue of Horror Films" was published in the Spring 2009 issue of the *International Journal of Applied Ethics*.

Charles Rocca (1995, M.A. Math/B. A. Philosophy) earned his Ph. D. in Mathematics from SUNY Albany in 2001 and is an Associate Professor at Western Connecticut University. His current research is in the history of mathematics, which led to his presenting a paper on the philosophy discussed by Leonard Euler in *Letters to a German Princess*. Charles compared what Euler said about mind, body, and free will to the ideas of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, which Charles encountered in his Modern Philosophy course. "Thanks for the preparation that allowed me to give such a talk ... the department is frequently in my thoughts," writes Charles.

Joe Hedger is working on the Ph.D. in philosophy at Arizona State University in the areas of philosophy of mind

and philosophy of language. He is a Teaching Assistant and the President of ASU's Graduate Students in Philosophy, and currently is working on a paper on the semantics of racial slurs.

Sara Foote (2006) wrote that she "had a great experience" in every philosophy course she took and "hopes that everything is going well."

Stephanie Wackmann (2006) wrote that she "found herself thinking about [her] feminism and philosophy course" and wonders "how everyone's doing in the department."

Matt La Vine (Dec. 2008) dropped by the department to visit the last week of June. He has been accepted by the SUNY University of Buffalo and offered a graduate teaching assistantship in philosophy.

Lyon Kressner (2008) dropped into the department to visit last spring and reports he enjoys his studies in the English M. A. program at SUNY New Paltz.

Erica Parker (2009) is considering beginning graduate study in literature.

Matt Short (2009) will pursue a master's degree in Library and Information Science, and an M. A. degree in Comparative Literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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