LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Submitted by Kate Goldyn on January 18, 2017 - 10:35am

There are so many terrific things happening in this department! As the new chair of the Philosophy Department, most of my time is spent facilitating all the great things members of this community are doing, many of which are discussed in this newsletter. Indeed, being more aware of all the things we do has been a joy of my first few months. Another aspect of my job is to think about our mission and how I can help this community thrive now and in the future.

The Philosophy Department is evolving in important ways, and I’d like to share just a few thoughts about ways we are moving forward. We welcomed Ben Feintzeig to campus this fall as a new faculty member working in philosophy of physics and philosophy of science. Ben is already hard at work preparing for the next O’Hara lecture in the Foundations of Physics and facilitating reading groups for our students.

The department’s research mission is expanding in many ways. One noteworthy trend is our growing connection to external grant funding and collaborative ventures with people outside philosophy. Steve Gardiner recently received funding from the National Science Foundation for his work on the ethics of climate change, Carole Lee continues her investigation of peer review practices, now with support of the National Institutes of Health, Sara Goering’s work as head of the Ethics Thrust for the Center for Sensorimotor Neural Engineering has been expanded through NSF funding, Michael Blake received summer support from the National Endowment for the Humanities to work on issues of immigration, and I have been working with a team of scientists on algorithmic search procedures through a grant from the Templeton Foundation.

The other significant focus I see is increased attention to engagement beyond our campus and academia more generally. The discussion series on immigration initiated by Michael Rosenthal last year was followed by a terrific conference organized by Bill Talbott this fall. Graduate students Paul Tubig and Blake Hereth recently completed a course for women incarcerated in the state’s prison system. Jana Mohr Lone More continues to expand the reach of The Center for Philosophy for Children. And in the wake of the national election, the department has developed a discussion series – #philosophy responds: Conversations after the Election – on topics pertinent to national politics: hate speech and slurs; facts and fake news; combating racism and sexism; and civil disobedience. Our graduate students have been especially active in advocating for us to reach out.

At the same time, the core of who we are and what we do remains the same. We are dedicated to our teaching mission. After Jon Rosenberg, one of our graduate students, won an Excellence in Teaching Award last spring, we received four new nominations, two for faculty and two for graduate students, this fall. Proportional to size, this is the highest number of nominations of any department on campus. But our commitment unfolds in more quiet ways also. This summer, one graduate student teamed with another to salvage an ethics course after a medical injury prevented the original instructor from being on campus for a majority of the class meetings. My colleague Jean Roberts heroically stepped in this fall to cover discussion sections of her own course after a graduate student faced a cancer diagnosis. In these cases, and so many others, we work as a community to provide the very best experience possible for our students.

As chair, I want to acknowledge the accomplishments of members of our community and cultivate a culture of appreciation. I’ve started collecting items to display in my office that represent all the wonderful scholarship, teaching, and outreach that we do. This should be a wonderful repository for visitors. Please
come take a look if you are ever on campus. Here I’ll give you a teaser of some noteworthy accomplishments, but please read the articles in this newsletter and on our website to find out more. Alison Wylie has had a banner year, having been elected as the next President of the Philosophy of Science Association and also being asked to deliver the prestigious Dewey Lecture at the 2017 Pacific APA conference in Seattle in April. We will undoubtedly have a fan section in the audience. Our students and alumni have also been on a roll. Undergraduate major Kaitlyn McGlothlen won two awards for her essay exploring identity in relation to memory. Collectively, our graduate students have been awarded a UW Presidential Dissertation Fellowship, an Institute of Ethnic Studies Publication Fellowship, a yearlong SSHRC fellowship from the Canadian government, and a National Humanities Without Walls Pre-Doctoral Fellowship. Alumni have secured two highly competitive grants from the APA to expand the reach of philosophy to children in Mexico and high school students from groups under-represented in academic philosophy. Their visions of inclusion are inspiring. And this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Finally, in closing, I want to thank everyone who has supported my transition to chair, especially Michael Rosenthal and Bev Wessel. Michael Rosenthal, our outgoing chair, provides a wonderful example to follow and has been unwavering in his support and extremely generous with his time. It will be hard to fill his shoes. Bev Wessel, our head administrator, oversees all fiscal matters for the department and has a wealth of institutional knowledge that is irreplaceable. This place would not run without her. I also need to mention the fabulous members of our Advisory Board, led so ably by Jana Mohr Lone with support from Kate Goldyn. We are lucky to have such a dedicated group of individuals in our corner. I look forward to working with them in the months and years to come.

Happy 2017! In this new year, please join us for a department event or simply drop by the chair’s office to see all the wonderful things on my shelves. My colleagues and I would love to share what we are doing with you.

Very best regards,

Andrea Woody