LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Submitted by Kate Goldyn on May 25, 2017 - 12:14pm

As the days get longer and our campus bursts out in bloom, the Department of Philosophy bustles like a beehive. We continue our renewed efforts to reach out and beyond the campus walls. Our #PhilosophyResponds: Conversations after the Election series was a great success, filling the halls around our communal table with people concerned to move forward socially and politically in thoughtful, effective ways. Michael Blake has just been appointed a Commissioner on the King County Board of Ethics, where he will have a tangible impact on our local community. How refreshing it is to have a professional ethicist on the ethics board!

We are also joining in the struggle to protect the role of science in our national landscape. Steve Gardiner recently recorded a podcast discussing various dimensions of climate change for the Energy Humanities Podcast based at Rice University. Michael Blake was interviewed on KUOW, our local public radio station, about the significance of recent March for Science. And on June 7, I will join forces with Professor David Danks, Chair of Philosophy at Carnegie Mellon, to present a webinar on “Facts and Alternative Facts” produced by the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Inside the department, we are busy planning what comes next in terms of public engagement. Two important events are already on the calendar. The Program on Values will host “Ethics and Public Policy: 200 Days into the Trump Administration,” on September 29th, a full day event that will continue to grapple with issues of pressing social importance. A group of faculty and graduate students, led by Bill Talbott, is developing “Epistemology in the Real World,” an event generously funded by an attendee of the #PhilosophyResponds series and wanted to support our efforts to reach out. We hope you can join us for these events. And keep your eye on our website for announcements of more to come.

I can’t resist mentioning a few more things that broaden our reach. The department just completed the second public event in the Philosophy Branches Out project that aims to explore and facilitate non-academic career paths for our graduate students. The Center for Philosophy for Children once again hosted the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl, bringing high school teams from all across the area for a full day of inspired ethical reasoning. Emeritus Professor, and long time chair of the department, Ken Clatterbaugh has published a novel titled The Freedom of Will that skillfully weaves big philosophical questions into the narrative of the novel’s protagonist, Will Tillit. And finally, check out the article on Lonnie and Larry Robinson, UW alumni whose rich connections to our department exemplify the very best in our extended community.

This spring has also been replete with lectures and academic workshops that extend our scholarship and bring noted philosophers to campus. After a relatively quiet colloquium schedule in fall and winter, we’ve had a flurry of visitors this spring. Just take a glance at our events calendar. The department has also hosted several workshops. In March, Carina Fourie organized the Rabinowitz Symposium in Medical Ethics exploring race, health, and justice. In April, the department climate committee, spearheaded by Sara Goering, hosted a daylong workshop on issues of inclusion and diversity in philosophy at the Pacific APA conference. And May has been bursting at the seams: Steve Gardiner organized the Ben Rabinowitz Workshop on Climate Justice, Michael Rosenthal organized a workshop on Spinoza and Modern Jewish Philosophy, and Conor Mayo-Wilson brought the Formal Epistemology Workshop (FEW) to campus for the first time, bringing a cadre of epistemologists here over the Memorial Day weekend. All the while, the department has hosted visiting
Of course for many of our undergraduate students, spring culminates in that most significant of milestones—graduation. Our philosophy majors form a wonderfully vibrant, diverse community. We look forward to celebrating with them on June 9, recognizing their accomplishments and sending them on to their next challenges and adventures. We will miss them in our classrooms next year, but can’t wait to hear about what they do next. Please stay connected to us!

A week earlier, on June 2, the department will hold its annual awards ceremony (also made possible by a generous donor) to recognize exemplary members of our community—undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty alike. I should also mention that we have two faculty promotions to celebrate this year: Colin Marshall to Associate Professor (with tenure!) and myself to Full Professor.

In the face of all these activities, I want to recognize our fabulous staff. Without them, such events simply could not happen. Kate Goldyn coordinates and plans all our major events, with Annette Bernier and Bev Wessel facilitating at every step. Gina Gould leads the way for graduation, and Britta Anson helped spearhead the Philosophy Branches Out project. We are so lucky to have such a knowledgeable and dedicated staff.

Yes, it has been a very busy spring. I hope everyone gets out to enjoy the sunshine!

All the best,
Andrea Woody