Dear Friends of UW Philosophy,

I write to you from my new “office suite”, a desk previously known as the dining room table, combined with a videoconference room conveniently located in my bedroom. My teen and I negotiate private spaces for Zoom meetings and search for solid internet connections. The transformation of our lives has been both dramatic and quiet.

This unanticipated change descended right in the middle of a bustling, productive year for the Department of Philosophy. Our courses have been packed with students, and the number of undergraduate majors has been steadily growing. Senior Lecturer Ian Schnee, who serves as Director of Undergraduate Studies, has implemented an innovative logic course using an online textbook developed from scratch. The Center for Philosophy for Children hosted another successful High School Ethics Bowl competition.

Things are booming on the research front as well. Stephen Gardiner contributed two lectures, available online, to the first Cambridge Global Conversation—a platform developed at the University of Cambridge, UK, devoted to climate ethics. Emeritus Professor Karl Potter completed the 25th volume of the Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, a project that is the most authoritative work of its kind and has been 40 years in the making! Conor Mayo-Wilson has been promoted to Associate Professor with tenure, and Sara Goering has been promoted to full Professor, in both cases on the basis of outstanding research trajectories.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of our year has been decidedly forward-looking. For the first time in five years, the department launched international searches for new faculty members. My colleagues worked around the clock to read hundreds of application files, interview top potential candidates, and bring finalists to campus for extensive visits that included public lectures, campus tours, and time to meet with students. Our graduate students actively partnered with us in this process, developing a detailed set of questions to ask each finalist regarding their teaching methods and their research aims. It was exhausting and exhilarating!

In the end, every ounce of effort was worth it. I am thrilled to announce that starting in Autumn term, we will have three new faculty members in the department: José Mendoza, Aaron Novick, and Amelia Wirts. Collectively, they will deepen our expertise on issues of social justice and immigration, strengthen our philosophy of science group with special focus on the biological sciences, increase attention to philosophy of race, and reinvigorate our work in philosophy of law and feminist philosophy. These new faculty will also allow us to broaden the range of our teaching to include study of both Latin American and Classical Chinese philosophical traditions.

The pandemic descended on the UW campus the same week we secured these three hires. It was surreal. On a dime, our community had to “stay home” while restructuring our courses in just a few days for online instruction and learning.

Spring term has brought a multitude of new challenges, and I am so proud of the work faculty, staff, and graduate students have done to maintain our teaching mission and support our students academically and personally. There are so many heroes among us, including advisors who have guided students and spent countless hours fielding questions and faculty who devoted themselves to teaching even while quarantined...
as members of highly at-risk communities. We also take pride in the dedication and excellence of folks all across this great university, from our brave colleagues at UW Medicine to our steadfast leaders, who have exemplified decision-making firmly rooted in evidence, science, and compassion.

And here again, members of our community are leading. Colin Marshall, Paul Franco, and Ian Schnee helped to spearhead workshops and conversations to support philosophy faculty across the globe shifting to online learning and remote instruction. The Center for Philosophy for Children stepped up with an excellent set of resources for parents trying to support their children during the pandemic. An undergraduate video contest, launched well before the disruption, has fortuitously provided a platform for our students to articulate the value of philosophy with insight and creativity. I recommend them for brief respite.

May you and all your loved ones remain safe and well, and may you find moments of joy and contentment in the midst of this stressful season. Take comfort in the fact that the beauty of a Seattle spring is as relentless as the spread of a virus.

With very best wishes,
Andrea Woody
Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy

People Involved:  Andrea Woody
News Category:  Announcements  Community Impact

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