

Kansas State University

Department of Philosophy

Newsletter

January 2007

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Greetings from the Department Head

This has been another year of accomplishments for the Department of Philosophy.

With the support of K-State President Jon Wefald, we were able to renovate our seminar room, outfitting it with an impressive new seminar table and chairs, new carpet and air conditioning. We thanked Dr. Wefald at a November reception which was also attended by Provost Duane Nellis and Dean Stephen White. We are appreciative of both President Wefald and Dr. Charles Reagan, a member of the Philosophy faculty and associate to Dr. Wefald, for making the renovation possible.

I am also delighted to announce that we have the first endowed scholarship in the history of the department. The Virginia M. (Gina) Sylvester Memorial Scholarship for Excellence in Philosophy will be given annually to a philosophy major who shows academic promise. The entire department wishes to thank the family of our dear colleague Gina, especially her husband Utsab Chaudhuri, son Simon Chaudhuri-Sylvester and brother John Sylvester, for their generosity and efforts in making this happen.

For the sixth consecutive year, we are listed as one of the top undergraduate philosophy

programs in the nation. The quality of both our students and faculty is reflected in that ranking. Faculty has continued its research at an amazing pace. In addition to having many articles printed in some of the top journals in the profession, faculty members have written or edited three books that are forthcoming from major university publishers: Blackwell, Oxford University Press and MIT Press. In the last two years, our faculty has presented refereed or invited papers in over 15 countries throughout the Americas and Europe.

Our students continue to thrive. Almost half a dozen graduating philosophy majors are preparing applications to some of the best graduate programs in the world, including Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Chicago, Brown, Georgetown and Texas, in areas ranging from Philosophy to Law School to Religious Studies. Best of luck to them!

And I send my thanks to all of you, our alumni and friends, who stay in touch and provide us with your support. We continue to be grateful for your generosity.

Marcelo Sabatés
Associate Professor & Department Chair



John Exdell Wins Coveted Teaching Award

Many alumni have fond memories of social and political philosophy courses taught by Associate Professor John Exdell, who has been at K-State since 1972. They have described his classes as "life-changing" and extol him as a "motivator" who "guides students to apply the logic of philosophy toward understanding and addressing social situations."

In 2006, Dr. Exdell's commitment to students was recognized when he was one of two K-State professors presented with the Commerce Bank Undergraduate Outstanding Teaching Award. When he won the award, it was noted that although he is demanding and academically rigorous, he creates a classroom environment that fosters open discussion of social issues, including race and economic justice, and treats his students in a supportive and non-judgmental manner. Dr. Exdell does not just teach – he educates reflective, participating members of our democratic society.

We congratulate John on this well-deserved honor!

Special Thanks

We would like to express our appreciation for the generosity of the following donors in 2006:

Brent and Michel Coverdale
Jason and Kelly Ekeler
Patrick M McFadden and Elaine M Frangedakis
Bill A Kassebaum
Blake and Jodi Kaus
Mary Beth Kirkham
Scott James Miller
Stephen Benjamin Moore
John D Sylvester
Ben and Marilyn Tilghman
Norman and Betty Wood

Thank you!



One of the Department of Philosophy's most exciting accomplishments in recent years has been the establishment, together with six other departments, of The Center for the Understanding of Origins. Begun in 2004, the Center fosters interdisciplinary teaching and research on topics concerning the origins of the physical universe, the Earth, life, intelligence and language. The Philosophy department is involved in several aspects of the Center, including teaching, presenting speakers and seminars, and developing research opportunities.

The highlight of the 2006 Origins speakers' series was an early public screening of the controversial film *Flock of Dodos* by evolutionary biologist and filmmaker Randy Olson, followed by a panel discussion moderated by Philosophy Associate Professor Bruce Glymour. Panelists and audience members, including the filmmaker and a prominent member of the State Board of Education, hotly exchanged ideas and opposing perspectives. The film was also shown at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York and other film festivals and universities including Harvard.

In Fall 2006, Assistant Professor Scott Tanona taught the philosophy component of

Origins: Humanity, Life, and the Universe, an interdisciplinary undergraduate course co-taught with professors from Physics, Biology, Geology, and English.

During the 2007-08 academic year, K-State expects to launch a graduate certificate program in Origins, allowing students in a variety of fields to further their studies. The Philosophy department will also offer a new course on the history of philosophical issues in science.

Alumni News

Paige Nichols, 1990

Paige writes: I flew the K-State philosophy coop for law school at Boston's Northeastern University in 1990. Deeply moved by my work as an intern representing death-row inmates in Texas and North Carolina, I dedicated myself to criminal-defense lawyering upon law-school graduation. I now specialize in research and appellate work on cases ranging from misdemeanors to capital murder. I describe my mission as giving voice to the criminally accused and keeping the government in check in an often corrupt and always threatening adversarial system.

I helped launch the Midwestern Innocence Project at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, where I taught as an adjunct professor while earning my LL.M. I have authored numerous articles for legal trade journals and lecture frequently around the state. When not lawyering, I read and garden in Lawrence, Kansas. I recently bought an accordion and am still looking for a monkey to go with it.

Dennis Whitcomb, 2001



Dennis writes: I started graduate school in philosophy in 2001 at Rutgers University in New Jersey. I'm currently finishing up my Ph.D. and am hoping to defend it this May. Over the last few years, I have enjoyed close access and regular visits to New York City. I've also come to appreciate New Jersey itself, among other things because of its rabid opposition to the villains who are currently running the country. In recent years I have become a die-hard Bruce Springsteen fan. Feel free to drop me a line at whitcomb@philosophy.rutgers.edu.

We'd love to hear from you too!

Tell us where you are and what you're doing! Send us your news and we'll print it in our next newsletter.

You can contact us at philalum@ksu.edu or Donald Wilson, Department of Philosophy, KSU, 201 Dickens Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506-0803.