

JULY 2023

PHILOSOPHY AND HUMANITIES



Notes from the Chair

Greetings to the friends of ETSU's Department of Philosophy and Humanities,

Last year's newsletter was introduced by Dr. Leslie MacAvoy, in one of her final acts as Chair of the department, a position she held for twelve years. It would be unforgivably remiss of me not to begin this year's letter by thanking Leslie, on behalf of all the faculty, staff, and students who have been associated with the department during that period, for her exemplary leadership, wisdom, patience, and care.

During Leslie's time as Chair, she oversaw nine promotions of department faculty, several new hires, the addition of new courses, as well as the addition of the Justice, Ethics, and Law Concentration. In 2019, our department underwent a rigorous review of its work, policies, and practices. The process was conducted by a team of academics and administrators, some from ETSU and some from other universities. The extremely positive report we received was evidence not only of Leslie's diligence throughout the review process but also of the many ways she had shaped the department in the preceding years.

Throughout it all, Leslie went out of her way to support faculty research and help maintain high standards across all our courses. Leslie ensured the department served the college, university, and community to the best of its ability and she was a tremendous source of help and support through all the challenges that the pandemic wrought. On behalf of us all, Leslie, thanks for everything!

Over the last year, the department has sought to increase visibility through social media, both Facebook and Instagram. We are doing more to emphasize the benefits and feasibility of pursuing double major degree pathways that include a philosophy major. As detailed below, we sponsored or co-sponsored a number of guest lecturers and have introduced an unofficial Minor in Monsters. Our students continue to impress us with their creativity, commitment, and ambition and our faculty have been extremely busy with their research, teaching, and mentorship. These are challenging times for the Humanities in general, across the country, but we are doing everything we can to promote and demonstrate its enormous value.

Best,
David Harker
Professor and Chair

Department Introduces the Monsters Minor

The Humanities minor has been housed within our department since 1978. It has always encouraged students to explore a unifying theme from the perspectives of distinct humanist disciplines. Earlier in the year, we became aware that colleagues from several departments within (and beyond) the College of Arts and Science were planning courses that focused on monsters, horror, or something closely related. Dr. Michael Fowler (Art History) is planning a seminar on “the form, appearance, and conceptual uses of a wide range of fictional and (quasi-) real monsters in the global history of art, ranging from hybrid beasts (chimeras) that terrify and terrorize to “freak-show” oddities that simultaneously attract and repulse.” Dr. Julie Fox-Horton (Cross-Disciplinary Studies) is developing a course that explores “the evolution of the witch as a cultural construct, from ancient archetypes to the witch-hunts of the early modern period.” Dr. Bryan Maxson (History) is teaching a course on Ghosts and Ghouls in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Meanwhile, Dr. Josh Reid and Dr. Chelsea Wessels (both Literature and Language) are developing a course that “will cover literature (The Faerie Queene, Zone One, Borne), graphic novels (My Favorite Thing Is Monsters), and film (Alien, Night of the Living Dead, Let the Right One In, Jennifer’s Body, Bride of Frankenstein, Gojira, etc.)” and Dr. Matthew Holtmeier (also Literature and Language) is teaching a course on “Weird Fiction.” More monsters-themed courses are planned for the spring, including one on paranormal tourism and mountain cryptids in Appalachia. And not wanting to miss out on the fun, Dr. Harker is offering a course in the spring that will explore the ways in which monsters and horror have been utilized and regarded within contemporary philosophy.

We’ve enjoyed the planning and brainstorming that has surrounded this project and are optimistic that students will find the program of study rewarding and beneficial.

MINOR IN MONSTERS



New Hire in Religious Studies

Religious Studies at ETSU is taught by faculty from five different departments but has always had its home in the Department of Philosophy and Humanities. As such, we played a central role in the job search that resulted in the hiring of Dr. Jennifer Adler. Dr. Adler’s home department will be History, but we are excited that she will also be teaching a variety of courses that will be of interest to students who are pursuing either the religious studies minor or the philosophy major with a concentration in religious studies.

Dr. Adler graduated from Harvard with an A.B. in government and earned an M.A. and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. Her primary research focuses on American religious history and the concepts of sacred space, ritual, material culture, and lived religious experience. She teaches courses on American religious history, world religions, African American religions, gender, and material culture.





Department News

Circus and Philosophy

In March, our department hosted Dr. Meg Wallace (University of Kentucky) for two days. At her home institution, Dr. Wallace teaches a course on circus and philosophy, which introduces a variety of philosophical topics by first introducing students to some basic circus skills, including juggling, acro-balancing, and aerial dance. As part of her visit to ETSU, Meg took a group of philosophy and theatre and dance students into the air, taught them some basic maneuvers in aerial dance, and related these experiences to philosophical questions concerning the paradox of failure, the importance of social openings, and why it is valuable to explore new ways of thinking and believing, just as it's important to explore new physical experiences and challenges. All told, the event was a big success. Thanks to Dr. Wallace for all her time, energy, and insight!

Guest Speakers

This year we were pleased to sponsor or co-sponsor a total of eight lectures.

"Al-Farabi and Aristotle on the Mind and Imagination," Dr. Craig Streetman, King University, September 2022.

"What Is Philosophy For? "Sweaty Concepts" and Methodological Conflict," Dr. Rowan Bell, University of Missouri, October 2022.

"A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War," Dr. Jimmy Byrd, Vanderbilt University, co-sponsored with the Department of History, October 2022.

"Moral Problems for Pragmatic Faith," Dr. Matthew Baddorf, Walters State Community College, January 2023.

"What to do about Misinformation," Dr. David Harker, part of the Justice, Health and Humanities Lecture series, co-sponsored with the College of Public Health, February 2023.

"The Odd Universe," Dr. Meg Wallace, University of Kentucky, March 2023.

"Joking about God: Humor, Civil Discourse, and Religion in the Age of Jackson," Dr. Adam Jortner, Auburn University, March 2023.

"A cloth inspected: one thread of argument from Vasubandhu's Abhidarmakośabhāṣya against the Vaiśeṣika theory of composite substances," Dr. Eddy Falls, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, April 2023.

Student Accomplishments

Awards and Presentations 2023

2023 Scholarship Recipients

The Philosophy Senior Scholarship was awarded to Cade Gray. The scholarship was created in 2021 by the faculty in our department, to support rising seniors in the major. The scholarship is awarded annually and is a merit-based award.

The Dr. Neil Shanks Memorial Scholarship was awarded to Lukas Christensen. The scholarship was created in memory of former department faculty member, Dr. Neil Shanks. It is also merit-based and awarded to an honors student during their thesis year.

Honors Theses 2023

“Justification and Compliance: Public Health Ethics in a Post-COVID America” by Nathan Alan Turner, supervised by Dr. Michael Allen and Dr. Randy Wykoff.

“Abortion: The Right to Choose,” by Maggie Rogers, supervised by Dr. Allen Coates and Mr. Paul Tudico.

Alumni

Are you an alum? We want to hear from you! Stay up to date on department news by visiting our website etsu.edu/cas/philosophy

Newsletter Subscription

Want to receive our newsletter in the future or change your subscription preferences? Visit tinyurl.com/444j8y6k

Philosophy & Humanities

etsu.edu/cas/philosophy

(423) 439-4425



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Philosophy and Humanities