Philosophy and religious studies matter.

It’s not very fun having to justify the value of your academic field all the time, but it’s necessary, since a lot of people think that philosophy is only for toga-clad Greeks and religious studies is for medieval theologians. If you’re reading this, you probably know that this isn’t the case. Philosophy gives us the critical thinking skills and a familiarity with intellectual history that helps us to understand more clearly the state of the world. And there’s probably no field more relevant to today’s international challenges than religious studies, which helps us to appreciate the beliefs and values of different religious traditions.

The faculty in the Philosophy & Religious Studies Department are working hard to represent our disciplines and to demonstrate their value for the community beyond the university. We not only present important research at academic conferences. We also engage non-academics in the important work of critically engaging the world around us.

One example of this is our upcoming panel titled “Rogues & Heroes: Star Wars and the Cultural Imagination.” Professors Dippmann, Coe, and Altman, among others, will be using Star Wars to illuminate some central concepts in philosophy and religious studies, and using our academic background to develop a deeper appreciation of the films. Ethics, personal identity, spirituality, freedom and determinism – all of these issues are raised in the films, and we plan to ask questions and lead a discussion with the audience that reveals the complex ideas behind what may seem like a mere entertainment.

We’re active in smaller ways as well. I’ll be giving a talk on ethical vegetarianism for the social group Vegetarians of Yakima in a week. Dr. Coe will be involved with training public school staff in how to treat transgender students and others who challenge traditional gender categories. Dr. Carpenter will speak to the Catholic Campus Ministry group about love and happiness. Dr. Bartlett, who has an interest in philosophy for children (P4C), has been involved with introducing local schoolkids to philosophical exploration.

Philosophy and religious studies are very much alive. We emphasize this in the classroom and at conferences. We’re slowly convincing non-academics in the community of this as well, one group at a time.
PHILOSOPHY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCHOLARSHIPS

What many of you may not know is that the Philosophy & Religious Studies Department offers two scholarships for its majors.

The Philosophy & Religious Studies Founding Faculty Scholarship is open to any junior or senior declared major in either discipline with a 3.00 cumulative GPA. The focus of this scholarship is on the study of either Chinese or Indian religion and/or philosophy (or both), with the applicant committing to write their senior thesis in one or more of the four areas of study, i.e., Philosophy or Religions of India or China.

The Chester Z. Keller Scholarship requires a 3.30 cumulative and major GPA, and is open to any major in either discipline who has made a contribution to the department through their non-course-related, discipline-related activities.

Dollar amounts are determined at the date of award. However, the Founding Faculty Scholarship has been $1,000 the first two times that it has been awarded. For full instructions and application processes, go to cwu.edu/scholarships, click on the link provided for all GSA programs, and then limit your search parameters to Philosophy & Religious Studies.

Take note, however, that you MUST have a General Scholarship Application on file by February 1, 2017, and the specific scholarship application submitted by March 1, 2017.

If you have any questions about the scholarships, your specific eligibility, the application process, or anything else, please contact Professor Dippmann, the current Chair of the Department Scholarship Committee.

Call for Papers
21st Annual Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy Conference

The 21st annual Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy Conference will be held April 21-22, 2017 on the campus of Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon.

Submission deadline is February 1, 2017.

Registration: $50, payable at the conference. Funding may be available through CWU.

For further information, contact Professor O’Loughlin via email (ian.oloughlin@pacificu.edu) or by phone (503-352-1547).

Philosophy and Religious Studies
~ Spring 2017 Courses ~

PHIL 101 - Philosophical Inquiry
PHIL 104 - Moral Controversies
PHIL 150 - Critical Thinking
PHIL 314 - American Wilderness Philosophy
PHIL 354 - Kant and 19th-Century Philosophy
PHIL 361 - Theory of Knowledge
PHIL 488 - Junior Seminar: Ethics and the Other

RELS 101 - World Religions
RELS 355 - Islam
RELS 403 - Buddhist Thought and Practice
A Spotlight on... Dr. Gary Bartlett
Associate Professor of Philosophy

Where did you get your degree(s), and when?
I was a glutton for punishment. I got two BAs, both with honors, at the University of Otago. One in Philosophy, one in Psychology. That took five years, from 1993 through 1997. Then I went to Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, NJ, for my PhD in Philosophy, from 1998 through to 2006. So at this point in my life, I still have spent more time as a student than as a professor.

Where are you originally from?
I was born in Invercargill, right at the bottom of the South Island of New Zealand. (I have a map in my office if anyone wants a geography lesson.) But within a year my parents moved north a bit, to Dunedin, and they were nice enough to bring me along. So I grew up in Dunedin, all the way through until the end of my undergraduate career.

Tell us something about yourself.
I have a pretty intense love of board games – but nowadays it’s seriously good board games, not stuff like “M*******” (its name shall not be spoken), which I played a lot as a kid but would point-blank refuse to play today. My wife and I are on a constant lookout for people willing to play games like “Settlers of Catan” or “Ticket to Ride.”

What do you do outside of teaching?
See answer to previous question. I also love to go hiking, though balky knees have put a bit of a cramp on that lately; and play table tennis, though a lack of people to play with (and places to do it) has also slowed that down too. I occasionally write philosophy papers.

What do you love most about teaching?
Generally, whatever bit of it I’m doing at the time. When I’m talking to students, I love that the most. When I’m designing a new class, I love that the most. When I’m introducing a new concept to a class, I love that the most. (I guess the exception is grading.)

What classes are you teaching now?
This quarter it’s Philosophical Inquiry (PHIL 101) and Early Modern Philosophy (PHIL 353). In Spring, I’ll teach Critical Thinking (PHIL 150) and Theory of Knowledge (PHIL 361). I’m really looking forward to the latter, because questions about what is true, what we can know, and how we can defend our claims to know, are hugely important right now.

What’s your most embarrassing moment while teaching?
I like to make jokes in class. This can sometimes get me in trouble if I make a joke on the spur of the moment without thinking about it first. The worst instance of this was some years ago now. There’s a famous (in philosophy) thought experiment about ‘Mary,’ who grows up in an entirely black and white environment. (The issue is whether she can know anything about color, by studying it in books, etc.) That has to include her own body, so it’s usually imagined that her skin is painted or dyed to be black or white or some shade of gray. You might already see the potential for calamity here. Well, I’d recently read something about the fact that black cars get slightly hotter than white cars (because black paint absorbs more heat from sunlight). So I joked that perhaps it would be better for Mary if she was painted white, because she’d stay cooler. As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I realized what I’d just said, and was horrified. I wanted the floor to swallow me up. Luckily for me, the students in the class (which did include at least a couple of black students) were very chill: they assured me that they knew what I’d meant, and they weren’t offended. But I still shudder when I remember that day. And I try now to engage my higher cognitive functions before making jokes in class.