From the Chair - Dr. Matt Altman

The beginning of the fall is always an exciting time: a slate of great courses, a dynamic mix of new and returning students, and professors ready to share our passion for philosophy and religious studies with all of you.

This year we’re emphasizing opportunities to do philosophy and religious studies outside of the classroom. The Department sponsors two student groups, the Philosophy & Religious Studies Club and the Ethics Bowl team, and we’re always looking for new members. The Club gives students the chance to develop programming that suits their interests. Students can do everything from having informal discussions and showing films to bringing in guest speakers and attending regional conferences. And once again this fall the Ethics Bowl team will travel to Seattle to debate controversial moral issues with students from throughout the Northwest.

The department will host a colloquium talk on October 22. I’ll be discussing the recent appeals court case in which a federal judge ruled that the death penalty in California is unconstitutional. The event will be followed by our annual faculty-student mixer. There will be pizza and soda for everyone, and faculty will be talking to students about their upcoming classes, their research, or whatever else comes up.

For the first time in nearly twenty years, the department will be hosting the Northwest Philosophy Conference in early November. There’s more information about the conference below, and we’ll be emailing our students as well. People from all over the United States and beyond will be giving philosophy talks. There will be a range of topics and a number of sessions, so you’ll be able to find something that interests you throughout the conference.

This is just the start. We have more events planned for the winter and spring. For now, I encourage you to get involved and explore your interests beyond the classroom. It’s one way that philosophy and religious studies will come alive for you.

Northwest Philosophy Conference at CWU

On November 7th and 8th, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies will host the 66th annual Northwest Philosophy Conference. The NWPC is held regionally at various universities and colleges around the Northwest: mainly Oregon and Washington, and sometimes Idaho and British Columbia. Recent hosts have included Pacific University, Oregon State University, Lewis & Clark College, and Seattle University. The NWPC was last held at CWU in 1997. The conference is being co-organized by Dr. Gary Bartlett and Dr. Matt Altman.

The conference attracts philosophers especially from the Northwest, but also from further afield. This year about one-third of the speakers are from the Northwest region. Others are from all around the US and Canada, and even beyond: there are speakers from England, Germany, and Turkey! In total there will be 58 speakers, on topics ranging all across the field of philosophy.

The NWPC is well-known for always having a distinguished keynote speaker. This year the keynote will be delivered by Linda Martin Alcoff, Professor of Philosophy at Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York, and former president of the American Philosophical Association. Dr. Alcoff has written on identity, race, epistemology, and political philosophy. She is best known for Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self, published by Oxford University Press in 2006.
A spotlight on . . .

Dr. Anne Blankenship, Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

Where did you get your degree(s), and when?

Where are you originally from?
I grew up in Olympia and attended the University of Puget Sound for my B.A.

Tell us something about yourself.
I’m excited to be back in the Pacific Northwest and look forward to exploring this side of the state.

What classes are you teaching now?
I’m teaching World Religions and Christianity this quarter. Later this year I’ll offer New Religious Movements (winter) and Islam (spring).

What do you love most about teaching?
My favorite part about teaching religious studies is its immediate relevance to the real world. My students give current events reports to demonstrate how we can better understand the news by studying world religions.

What do you do outside of teaching?
Outside of the classroom, I like to read (most everything), bake and travel (abroad and around the US). I’m also starting a new research project on religion and immigration in America.

What’s your most embarrassing moment while teaching?
While perhaps not embarrassing, I looked a tad ridiculous starting this school year on crutches. Breaking my foot by tumbling down a couple stairs in New York City this summer was embarrassing. I’ve happily left my crutches behind and am hobbling around on my own now.

Chester Z. Keller  
September 26, 1925 - July 12, 2014
by Rae Heimbeck, Professor Emeritus

Chester Z. Keller will be remembered at CWU for many things. First and foremost, he built the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at this University. Hired in 1960, he taught for one year through the Psychology Department before establishing the Philosophy Department in 1961 by hiring a second philosopher, John Utzinger. Peter Burkholder was the next to be added (1963), then Webster Hood (1965), Jay Bachrach and Rae Heimbeck (1967), and Bob Goedecke (1970). These seven were the core of the Philosophy faculty for 40 years. Chester chaired the Department from 1961 to 1995. He spearheaded the departmental Philosophy Colloquium in the 1970s. He also was instrumental in the creation of the Religious Studies Program in 1974 and its eventual incorporation into the Philosophy Department.

Chester’s favorite courses in teaching were Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Religion, Mysticism, and Philosophy of Ecology. These courses define his special interests as a philosopher. He was very popular with students, and his students were esteemed and beloved by him. He and his wife Rosemary endowed a fellowship for outstanding philosophy students that bears his name. Additionally, he was the first recipient of the Distinguished Professor for Teaching award when the University began making those awards in 1977.

Ecology was vitally important to Chester. He served as a forest ranger in Yellowstone for something like 40 summers. He also attended a top-level international ecology conference in Europe yearly.

Chester was a staunch advocate for the Philosophy Department throughout his tenure as Chair. He endeavored, successfully, to see each faculty member under him realize full potential in teaching and scholarship. His voice in University faculty meetings was powerful and respected. He must be counted as a leader in faculty causes throughout his service at this University.

Both Chester and Rosemary were diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in about 2005. They then moved to Portland, Oregon, to be near their daughter Kristin, a nurse. Rosemary died a couple of years ago, and Chester died in Portland on July 12, 2014. Everyone now affiliated with the Philosophy Department at CWU is indebted to Chester Keller for his outstanding contribution to our Department’s existence. Rest in Peace, Chester.