Meet the new secretary

The Philosophy & Religious Studies Department has a new secretary! Kristy Magdlin comes to us with twelve years of combined experience at CWU. She’s worked in the College of Education & Professional Studies, the President’s Office (for nine and a half years), and most recently the Athletics Department. Kristy has been an Ellensburg resident for twenty years. She enjoys being outdoors and spending time with her family. If you haven’t had a chance to meet Kristy, please stop by and say hello!

From the Chair
Dr. Matthew Altman
Greetings to all of you wisdom lovers and meaning seekers, including all of our majors and minors, alumni, and anyone else who is interested in the goings on at the Philosophy & Religious Studies Department at Central Washington University. This is an exciting and eventful year for us. We have welcomed a new secretary to the department, Kristy Magdlin, as well as three new full-time instructors: Michelle Carpenter and Michael Fletcher in philosophy, and Geraldine O’Mahony in religious studies. You’ll begin to learn about our new additions in this newsletter.

What hasn’t changed is the department faculty’s shared commitment to providing our students with an excellent education, one that prepares them for the workforce while also introducing them to some of the deepest and most important questions there are, questions that are foundational to all other disciplines. In this sense, the department prepares students not only to make a living, but to live the good life — which, among other things, means repeatedly questioning what the good life is.

As the new chair of the department, the first thing I want to do is encourage you to keep the conversation going. That’s the main purpose of this newsletter: to get us all communicating about the exciting things that are happening in the department. If you’re an alumnus, we’d love to hear from you. Contact us by email (philo@cwu.edu) or friend us on Facebook. Let us know how you’re using your background in philosophy or religious studies. If you’re a current student, talk to your professors outside of class — discussing things with students is the best part of our jobs — and get involved in the Philosophy & Religious Studies Club. Student involvement is the most important element in a vibrant department.

Of course, I or any of my colleagues would be happy to do our part too. We’re excited to begin a new year. Let us know what we can do for you.

Fall Colloquium

On Wednesday, November 20, Dr. Michelle Carpenter will be giving our first colloquium of the year. The talk is titled “Plato’s Beauty,” and it focuses on the discussion of beauty in Plato’s Hippias Major. Dr. Carpenter writes, “For over 2000 years, everyone misunderstood what Plato had to say about beauty in his Greater Hippias dialogue . . . until now. I will discuss what Plato really does mean and, in doing so, I will explain why Socrates and I are often such seemingly arrogant bleeps!” The talk will be held from 4:30 to 6:00 PM in L&L 213. Refreshments will be served.
Where did you get your degree(s), and when?

I am currently finishing my Ph.D. in Development Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My doctoral program is interdisciplinary and so is my dissertation, incorporating African politics, religion, and law in post-conflict Liberia. During my time at UW-Madison, I also earned a graduate certificate in African Studies, minored in Middle Eastern Studies, and majored in Comparative Politics and International Relations. I earned a Masters in Comparative Politics at UW-Madison in 2007. Before that, I got a Masters in Islamic Studies from McGill University in Montreal, Canada in 2006. As part of that degree, I studied intensive Arabic at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon for a summer. For my dissertation I wrote about the role of Islam and Islamic identity in the Sudanese civil wars. I received my Masters in Divinity, with honors, from Edinburgh University in 2004. For my dissertation, I wrote about different Christian denominations’ positions on same-sex marriage. During the masters’ program, I got a scholarship to spend a summer at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, which is where I met my wife Lacy :-) And lastly, or firstly, depending upon how one looks at it, I read for my BA in Theology and Religious Studies at Newnham College, Cambridge University.

Where are you from originally?

I am originally from Mitchelstown, a small farming town in County Cork, the most southern and beautiful county of Ireland.

Tell us something about yourself.

When I was 16, I qualified as an auxiliary nurse (the US equivalent is a certified nursing assistant) so I could volunteer helping the elderly and infirm who went to Lourdes, France on pilgrimage. Over the next decade I spent between two and six months of every year volunteering in hospitals, clinics, rape crisis centers, orphanages, and refugee camps in a number of different countries — such as Bosnia during the last year of the Bosnian civil war, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho. I also worked teaching HIV and AIDS awareness programs in the United Arab Emirates and other countries in the Middle East.

What classes are you teaching now?

I am teaching Sacred Books of the World and Introduction to World Religions.

What do you love most about teaching?

I love pretty much everything about teaching (though maybe not grading!). I love interacting with students. Every day in the classroom brings something different and I am constantly learning from my classes, including different ways of seeing and interpreting information and the different perspectives students bring to bear on any given topic. I see teaching as a constant process of challenging my own ideas and preconceptions and those of my students.

What do you do outside of teaching?

I love to travel, both internationally and domestically. I currently have a goal of visiting every state in the US — I have been to 35 thus far! There are strict rules I follow — I have to stay overnight in the state, eat something local and do something cultural that is specific to the state — stopovers in airports do not count. I also enjoy cooking, biking, reading, and watching TV.

What is your most embarrassing moment while teaching?

I have had plenty of embarrassing teaching moments in my dreams — but thankfully none of those have come to pass! One of my first experiences lecturing was to a large lecture hall of 250+ students. I wore a clip-on/lapel microphone and had placed it on the left side of my top. Unbeknownst to me, all the way through the lecture, underneath the words I was speaking could be heard the constant and fast thumping of my heart! It was very evident to all just how nervous I was.

Ethics Bowl

On November 23, our Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (IEB) team will travel to Seattle Pacific University to compete in the regional tournament. In IEB, students debate some of today’s most pressing moral issues, including HIV criminalization, paying for transplant organs, and working conditions overseas. The team is coached by Dr. Matt Altman and Dr. Michael Goearger, and it includes Douglass An, Max Davis, Joe Garriott, Jeremy Johnson, Joe Ridgeway, and Dustin Waddle-Ford. Also, Professor Karen Turcotte will be one of the judges this year. Wish them luck as they represent CWU and the department on a regional stage!

Winter 2014 Courses

PHIL 101 - Introduction to Philosophy
PHIL 201 - Introduction to Logic
PHIL 202 - Global Ethics
PHIL 210 - Current Ethical Issues
PHIL 302 - Ethical Theory
PHIL 304 - Business Ethics
PHIL 353 - Western Philosophy II: Rationalism and Empiricism
PHIL 378 - Philosophy of Love (online)
PHIL 398 - Special Topics: Philosophy of Technology
PHIL 459 - Phenomenology
RELS 101 - World Religions
RELS 201 - Sacred Books of the World
RELS 351 - Religions of China and Japan