Spring 2019 has finally arrived in Ellensburg! Cool nights are giving way to mild and sunny days, while flowering trees and plants are beginning to “pop” all over town. Shorts and sandals are now the norm, though I have yet to see any hammocks strung up outside my office window. As you know, spring also marks the beginning of the end of the 2018-2019 academic year, and the end of my first official term as Department Chair. It’s been a productive and exhilarating year for the department, its faculty and students, and I have been grateful for the opportunity to become even more aware of and involved in the great things being accomplished within the Philosophy & Religious Studies Program and among its alumni (you!). Accordingly, we have created a new web portal for you to submit updates and news about your life and careers. Here, you’ll be able to update your contact information, tell us what’s up in your life, and, with your permission, allow us to share your news with your fellow Philosophy & Religious Studies travelers in forthcoming newsletters. Please take a look at cwu.edu/philosophy/alumni-survey and send us an update! We look forward to hearing about your adventures!!

Our faculty have been busy as always. To note just a few highlights, congratulations go out to the following: Dr. Altman has been awarded a two—quarter sabbatical, along with a spring quarter Faculty Research Appointment, for 2019-20 in order to complete work on his latest monograph, tentatively titled “A Theory of Punishment.” Dr. Coe has been named a Fellow for the upcoming Regional Institute on the Holocaust and Jewish Civilization, sponsored by the Holocaust Educational Foundation of Northwestern University and the Ray Wolpow Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Crimes against Humanity of Western Washington University. Dr. Vuong is the recipient of a $10,000 grant from the International Catacomb Society and the Shohet Scholarship program for her project “The Apocryphal Mary in Text, Pictorial Art, and Iconography.” Please extend your congratulations to each of them if you get an opportunity!

We’ve also had an exciting year for departmental colloquia and related events. We kicked the year off with an illuminating presentation by Dr. Jordan D. Rosenblum, Belzer Professor of Judaism and Director of Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, entitled “Rabbinic Drinking: Beer and Wine in Judaism in the Roman World.” This was followed by a colloquium featuring Drs. Bartlett, Coe, and...
Nuckols, along with Dr. Ralf Greenwald from Psychology, on “Zombie Brains: Thinking about the Undead.” As part of a series on Chinese Culture, I offered presentations on whether “Confucius was a Foodie” and “‘Great Togetherness’ (Datong 大同): Utopian Idealism From Confucius to Mao Zedong.” Dr. Coe and I also participated in an Asian Studies program focusing on protest, memory, and trauma as it relates to the 1980 Gwangju Massacre in South Korea. In January, Philosophy alum Nash Fung (2005) returned to campus and wowed our students with his magic performance. Dr. Clayton Bohnet rounded out our lineup in February, when he presented his research project on “A People on the Edge of the Void: Towards a Philosophy of Protest.” Our final colloquium of the year will feature six of our seniors, who will be sharing their thesis projects with each other and the community on April 30th.

Our end-of-year BBQ is going to be a little different this spring. As you all know, it has been hosted annually by our faculty members, who have graciously opened up their homes and backyards to the departmental family. This year, we are planning to gather at Ellensburg’s Mountain View Park on the corner of S Maple and Manitoba. The BBQ will be held on May 30th beginning at 5 PM. If you are familiar with the Park, you know it boasts a picnic shelter, large grassy area for Frisbee, a basketball court, and a baseball diamond. In addition to good fellowship and food, we will be holding initiation ceremonies for our Honor Societies, Religious Studies’ Theta Alpha Kappa (for which we have an astounding 13 student-scholars eligible!), and Philosophy’s Phi Sigma Tau. I would like to invite not only current students and faculty, but any alum who are able to join us. As always, families and friends are welcome, and we would love to see all of you for a reunion and celebration of the Philosophy & Religious Studies family!!

Our faculty reading group has continued working our way through Kitaro Nishida’s An Inquiry into the Good. I think we will all attest to the fact that the sculpture to the left, located in Nishida’s study, and currently housed at the Nishida Museum of Philosophy (Kahoku Japan), accurately represents how we’ve often felt trying to wrap our heads around his thought. It has been a challenge and a great opportunity to exercise our philosophical muscles! If you have been reading along with us, we are on track to finish by the end of the quarter, having discussed his views on Ethics last month, and then spending our next two meetings wrapping up with Nishida’s perspective on Religion and God.

For next fall, we have already chosen an obscure, but very important work by the 17th century philosopher, Lady Anne Conway (1631-79). As described by the Stanford Fall 2019 Schedule
Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Her only surviving treatise, Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy … propounds an ontology of spirit, derived from the attributes of God, which she sets out in opposition to More, Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza. Her concept of the monad, which is indebted to the [sic] Kabbalism, anticipates Leibniz.” If you are interested in reading along with us, we will be reading the Cambridge University Press version (1996).

We are also very excited to be the hosts for this year’s annual Pacific Northwest Regional conference of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), and American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). For those of you in Religious Studies, you know that AAR and SBL represent the national community of scholars within our field. While our faculty have been active participants in the region over the past twenty years (with Dr. Szpek and myself serving as President from 2011-12 and 2006-07 respectively), we have never hosted the conference. We are looking forward to showcasing our program and the beauty of the Ellensburg campus to nearly 100 scholars representing the geographically largest region in the country. In addition to Washington State, we are joined by the finest scholars from Oregon, Idaho, western Montana, Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta, as well as others from around the country. The conference runs from May 3-5, with sessions being held in Hogue and Michaelson Halls. If you are in the area, please join us for a stimulating weekend of cutting edge, innovative scholarship! If you can’t make the entire conference, one day registration is also available. Go to https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2019-pnw-aar-sbl-conference-tickets-46047780150 for more information.

Watch this space and our homepage for news about upcoming events starting this fall. 2019-2020 marks the 55th anniversary of the department’s founding (1965-2020), and the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the religious studies program (1974-2019). We are busily planning a year long slate of programs and special events celebrating a half-century of alumni, faculty, and intellectual excellence!!

Finally, I am pleased to announce the winner of last newsletter’s “I identified all the faculty members in the photograph, and all I got was this lousy shout-out” contest! Emeritus Professor Heidi Szpek was the only one to correctly name the following individuals in the 2001 photo taken at the Brooks Library. From left to right: Drs. Jay Bachrach, Jeff Dippmann, Peter Burkholder, Eliza Kent, Chester Keller, and Raeburne Heimbeck. Behind the camera was Emeritus Professor Chenyang Li. Congratulations Dr. Szpek!! The occasion marked the receipt of a limited edition (one of only 500 copies) Chinese version of Confucius’ Lunyu (Analects), presented to Central Washington University by the Confucius Hall of Hong Kong. Housed in the Brooks Library Special Collections, the slip cased edition was secured through the efforts of Professor Emeritus Heimbeck.

This volume’s contest features a photograph from 2011, and may be a little easier than the last. Good luck and be sure to send your guesses to philo@cwu.edu.

Happy spring, and I hope to see many of you May 30,

Jeff Dippmann