From the Chair - Dr. Matt Altman

Central Washington University as a whole is known for its high level of teaching, which includes the opportunity for students to engage professors in small classes, and professors who focus on educating their students rather than simply pursuing their own research. The Philosophy & Religious Studies Department is committed to this idea wholeheartedly. In recent years, we have lowered course caps in both our general education courses and our more specialized, upper-division courses. Philosophy and religious studies are areas of study that benefit from dialogue, and we want to foster the exchange of ideas.

My colleagues and I got into this profession because we wanted to teach. We love philosophy and religious studies, and we want to work with students to explore complex ideas. Among other things, that means that students should never be reluctant to visit professors during their office hours. I joke with my students that they get extra credit if we’re discussing philosophy in my office and I have to miss a meeting. Meetings are necessary sometimes, but none of your professors would rather be talking about university policies than talking to students about issues such as what makes right acts right or the interpretation of sacred texts.

Take advantage of your professors’ willingness to engage you both inside and outside of the classroom. Come to class prepared to ask questions about the material, and stop by our offices during your free time to discuss the ideas that puzzle you. Get involved with the Philosophy & Religious Studies Club. Come to our department colloquia and social events. You’ll discover how exciting the study of philosophy and religion can be.

A Spotlight on... Dr. Lily Vuong
Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

Where did you get your degree(s), and when?
University of Toronto (Honours BA 2001 - Religion and English); Wilfrid Laurier University (MA - Christian Origins); McMaster University - Biblical Studies (PhD).

Where are you originally from?
I was born in Bac Lieu, Vietnam, but grew up in Toronto, Canada.

Tell us something about yourself.
I am a serious and loyal fan of Harry Potter and Tolkien literature.

What do you do outside of teaching?
Spend time with my family, reading, hiking, swimming, volleyball, etc.

What do you love most about teaching?
Inspiring and challenging students to think outside their comfort zone.

What classes are you teaching now?
This fall I’m teaching RELS 101 World Religions and RELS 353 Judaism. Winter quarter I’m teaching RELS 101 and RELS 376 Contemporary Religious Thought, with a focus on women and western religious traditions. And in the spring, I’ll be teaching RELS 101 and RELS 398, a Special Topics course on Lost Scriptures/Lost Christianities. In this class, we’ll be exploring fascinating ancient texts that for some reason or other don’t make it in the Bible.

What’s your most embarrassing moment while teaching?
I once, after doing an all-nighter to meet a publication deadline, went to class the next morning and taught Tibetan Buddhism (material from my World Religions class) to my Women and Early Christianity class. Needless to say, I was embarrassed but also surprised no one realized or stopped me for five whole minutes.
Dr. Coe directed the Women’s and Gender Studies Program from 2007 to 2014, including co-directing the Suffrage Centennial Celebration (2009-10). She served on the Faculty Senate General Education committee from 2003 to 2011. Within the department, she has chaired two tenure-track searches and the department personnel committee, and she crafted the department’s assessment plan and serves as the assessment coordinator. In terms of professional service, she served a term on the American Philosophical Association’s Committee on the Status of Women. Finally, she is a Sexual Assault Victim Advisor and a Safe Space ally.

Matthew Altman 2015 - CAH Outstanding Chair Award

Dean Robertson presented this year’s Outstanding Chair Award to Dr. Matthew Altman. CAH is known for having eight deserving candidates for this award every year, but what set Dr. Altman apart this year was his commitment to excellence and consistent organization, preparation, and advocacy for the students, faculty, and staff of his department. While this is true every year, 2015 was a particularly successful year for his department, due in no small part to his efforts.

Gary Bartlett 2015 - CAH Outstanding Faculty Research Award

Dr. Bartlett has been working on several papers on mental ontology: the nature of mental states. The word ‘state,’ just used in the last sentence, is in fact a central focus of his work. It is used in philosophy of mind as a ‘catch-all’ term for all kinds of mental states phenomena. Dr. Bartlett argues that it is a mistake to lump all mental phenomena under that term, for it ignores the possibility that many mental phenomena are processes. Many philosophers actually accept that this is not only a possibility, but actually true; yet they still speak generally of mental states. Dr. Bartlett thinks they should stop.

Kristy Magdlin 2014 - November CWU Employee of the Month

This award recognizes employees who go above and beyond their normal job responsibilities, who offer unique contributions to their work unit and/or the university as a whole, who have a significant positive impact on those they work with or come in contact with, and who consistently perform for the betterment of CWU. Kristy keeps the department running and has helped to manage the budget amid all kinds of financial pressures.

Riley Schmit 2015 - Raymond Smith Award for Achievement in Scholarship

A 2015 graduate, Riley Schmit was a Philosophy major from Snohomish, Washington, who also completed minors in Religious Studies and Ethics. He won this award for his senior thesis, where he makes an argument about the death penalty. “An Overreaching State: How Capital Punishment Goes beyond the Role of Government” gives a sophisticated philosophical treatment of a controversial topic. The reviewing committee was impressed by the detailed treatment of retributivism and his analysis of punishment in general.

Sergio Madrid 2015 - Associate Dean of Students Achievement Award

Sergio Madrid is a McNair Scholar majoring in Philosophy and minoring in Law & Justice and Spanish. Since coming to CWU, Sergio has been committed to improving the campus community. His is a founding member of the Academic Achievement Leadership Council and a Community Service Officer for E.M.P.I.R.E. He has also participated in Citizen Days in Pasco and Yakima, helping volunteer immigration attorneys and interpreters offer free assistance with citizenship applications. Sergio recently served as a Washington State Senate Legislative Intern in Olympia.

Melanie Stankus 2015 - Paper Selected for Publication

The paper Melanie presented at the Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, titled “Demett’s Intentional Strategy Applied to Animals,” was selected for publication in Res Cognitans, the online journal that Pacific University runs in order to publish the best conference papers. Only about 20 of nearly 100 papers presented at the conference each year are selected.

Jim Briggs 2015 - Marji Morgan Outstanding Student Award

This award recognizes undergraduate students who excel academically and are good citizens, working to improve our campus and community. Jim Briggs, a Philosophy major with a Religious Studies specialization and minors in Ethics and Anthropology, was one of the two recipients. Briggs excels academically as a writer, a careful reader, and a catalyst for dynamic classroom discussions. Briggs operates a farm and horse training business, spending his summer offering clinics in the PNW and Alaska. As the wrestling coach at Cle Elum/Roslyn High School and Middle School, Briggs has established “Plato’s Cave,” a mandatory study hall for athletes that has raised the team’s GPA.