

ASPECT NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2009

ISSUE 1

History and Background to the ASPECT Program



NEW PHD AT VIRGINIA TECH IN SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ETHICAL, AND CULTURAL THOUGHT

In January 2008, the Virginia State Council of Higher Education approved a new Ph.D. at Virginia Tech in Social, Political, Ethical,

and Cultural Thought. ASPECT is a theory based, interdisciplinary, and project centered research and teaching program that focuses on developing interdisciplinarity within the social and human sciences.

Planning Process

State Council approval concluded a multi-year planning process at Virginia Tech, during which support levels for the program, as well as general design, infrastructure, and curriculum were established in deliberations be-

tween the director, department chairs and participating faculty units, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (where the program is administratively placed), the University's central administration, as well as College, University, and Trustee level councils responsible for program approval. An on site visit with external evaluators, coordinated with the State Council, concluded a final round of program input.

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ◆ Learn about the history and formation of the ASPECT PhD program
- ◆ Be introduced to the 2008 cohort of ASPECT students
- ◆ Come join us at one of our many ASPECT Sponsored Events this Spring



Testimonial on a Student's First Semester in ASPECT



"What is uttered from the heart alone, will win the hearts of others to your own."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

This sentence describes in simple words my experience in the ASPECT program during the Fall se-

mester of 2008.

But let's start from the beginning. In January 2008, I received an e-mail from a listserv with a link describing a Ph.D program called ASPECT.

The acronym caught my attention. I clicked on the link, and the more I was reading the more my curiosity and desire to learn about the program continued to grow in me. I remember during that same night I dreamt about the theme of my doctoral proposal, and when I woke up the next day I sat down

on the computer I wrote it all down. In the subsequent days, I applied online and gathered all the required application documents.

The online application is a very useful and helpful tool that facilitates the application process. For the application documents that I needed to mail I received competent advice and help from the ASPECT assistant. I was very excited and

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History and Background: Continued ...

Important initial decisions were the strategic decision of Virginia Tech's administration—a University whose motto is “invent the Future”—to commit resources to enhance the University's extant disciplinary based departmental degree offerings by creating an innovative, interdisciplinary and theory based Ph. D. program spanning the social and human sciences. Four core departments in the College of Human Sciences and Liberal Studies committed to lend support to the initiative; History, Interdisciplinary Studies (a unit comprising programs such as Women's Studies, Humanities, Religious Studies, and Appalachian Studies), Philosophy, and Political Science. A further key decision was to widen potential faculty affiliation to members of the broader University community, wherever their tenure homes are, so long as they, like those affiliated members from the core departments, wished to contribute to the program's mission. Deliberations between the director and key administrators concluded with commitments made to attach 24

graduate TAs to the program, each of four year's duration, phased in sequentially beginning in 2008. Additionally, new faculty lines were committed to contributing departments in support of the program, and a number of new hires await.

Overseeing the development of the program, its curriculum, the program's infrastructure, and most importantly, a scholarly community which now numbers 50 affiliated faculty, were all elements of the exciting process leading to the formulation and approval of the Ph.D. program. Participating faculty and course offerings now come from three Colleges at Virginia Tech: among them, the core contributing departments of History, Interdisciplinary Studies, Philosophy, and Political Science, as well as from Africana Studies, Area Studies, Business and Economics, the Center for Public Administration and Policy, English, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Government and International Affairs, an emerging program in Public Humanities, Science and

Technology Studies, Sociology, Urban Affairs and Planning. Building upon these elements, ASPECT faculty expect in the coming years to solidify a national and international reputation for social, political, ethical, and cultural thought.

Program Rationale

By design, the ASPECT Ph.D. prepares graduate students to undertake theoretically based, problem-centered, multi- and interdisciplinary analysis on important and challenging issues whose understanding requires simultaneous attention to their social, political, ethical, and cultural dimensions. ASPECT enables doctoral students to pursue work with teams of faculty whose work focuses on such problems.

Students enter the program having previously earned an M. A. or equivalent (e.g. MFA, March, MBA, JD). ASPECT is designed to be of particular interest to graduate students seeking a program of study with a
(Continues on Page 3)

“the ASPECT Ph.D. prepares graduate students to undertake theoretically based, problem-centered, multi- and interdisciplinary analysis “

Meet the 2008 Cohort of ASPECT Students

Damion Blake

He completed both his undergraduate and post-graduate studies at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus. As an undergraduate, his major was History with concentrations in Caribbean and European History and a minor in Political Science. While a Department Fellow for the Department of Government at UWI, he completed a Masters of Science in Comparative Politics and Political Theory with a thesis on the nature of Democracy in Jamaica. His research interest include exploring
(Continued on page 5)



Jeremy Carter, Yanka Petkova, Scott Tate,
Damion Blake, Dana Cochran, and Robert Kirsch

History and Background: Continued ...

framework wider than that of a specialized department. Its curriculum follows an emerging national trend in interdisciplinary studies in offering education that combines multidisciplinary subject areas of concentration – in this case, social, political, ethical, and cultural-- which purposefully integrate both departmentally- based and program specific courses. In addition, core program seminars, several of which are team taught, permit focused integration of interdisciplinary theory and interdisciplinary methodology. As part of their pedagogical training, students are prepared to teach introductory and required courses in particular disciplines and departments, and they may further avail themselves of a conceptually complementary certificate course of study in teaching theory and practice offered to all graduate students through the University's graduate school. A student's research emphasis, however, is on questions that span concerns articulated in a number of disciplines and whose complexity requires the entire tool kit of knowledge offered by integrated social, political, ethical, and cultural thought.

Some program graduates may prefer positions in government, non-profit, media, or industry organizations, where a broad understanding of the multiple contexts of significant social problems addressed by the program, along with the skills necessary to answer emerging ones, is required. ASPECT,

however, will primarily prepare future faculty to conduct theoretically and methodologically attentive interdisciplinary research and to contribute as teachers and scholars to the expected 21st century "knowledge economy."

ASPECT as a Research and Teaching Program

It bears special emphasis that ASPECT is an integrated research and teaching program. Good teaching, as the maxim goes, is informed by good research. Course offerings are complemented by a variety of research settings in which faculty and students participate. Program workshops, conferences, and a lively working paper series enable participants to receive interdisciplinary feedback and an avenue to share their research; while an e-journal and book series allow scholars to publish their findings along with scholars from other institutions. Graduate students are expressly encouraged to participate along with faculty in these venues. They contribute to the research clusters that ASPECT has thus far developed around themes such as Democratic Planning and Participatory Research; The Politics of Memory; Religion and Politics; Social and Individual Transformation; Epistemology in the Social Sciences and Humanities; Democracy and Democratic Theory; and Alternative Economic Development (see www.aspect.vt.edu). Program design foresees extending these topics to



emerging others, commensurate with faculty and student interest. Such venues are augmented by an ASPECT-sponsored topical lecture series integrated with a team-taught seminar that brings renowned scholars to campus to discuss their work on a particular research field. These research activities, in turn, contribute in further integrating the interdisciplinary Ph.D. curriculum, leading to new course development and modification of existing ones in departmental and program settings.

Employment Rationale

Abundant evidence supports the view that the 21st century workforce, both at the university and elsewhere, expects a professoriate, and the students they prepare, to be sufficiently interdisciplinary in education and orientation to address multiple sources and kinds of problems, data, and information. For one, The AAU Task Force on the Role and Status of the Humanities makes a passionate case that AAU universities should not allow the humanities and social sciences to wither; it also suggests the (Continues on page 4)

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History and Background: Continued ...

“graduate education in ASPECT is ideally suited to prepare new Ph.D.s who will be competitively positioned for success as teachers and researchers “

great value of enabling programs of the type ASPECT models. Its fourth overall recommendation is that AAU universities “should provide flexible structures for faculty and student interaction and collaboration on humanities scholarship and teaching, including interaction and collaboration with the social and natural sciences and the professional schools, and with community agencies and organizations.” The report goes on to describe the strategies and goals of “interdisciplinary initiatives” in terms that closely match those of ASPECT: “Interdisciplinary initiatives sponsor or help to sponsor a wide range of activities including conferences, workshops, internships, curriculum and faculty development. The goals of such initiatives are: to bring together faculty across a college and university who share complementary research and other strengths into interdisciplinary clusters; to bring national visibility to these programs as well as to the departments and other programs which are affiliated with them; to enhance the intellectual climate of the college and university; to increase research funding, scholarly and creative activity and curriculum development among faculty; and to improve recruitment of faculty and graduate students. Reports by other agencies as disparate as the US Bureau of Labor, the Rand Corporation, and the Social Science Research Council, and the recent strategic plans of a number of research universities, all offer a prognosis which support the timeliness

of the ASPECT program.

Theoretically informed scholarship in social, political, ethical, and cultural thought has indeed been at the forefront in rethinking how the university can respond to the new knowledge economy. Given the shift toward interdisciplinarity across the humanities and social sciences, including expectations emanating from disciplines and departments themselves, we believe graduate education in ASPECT is ideally suited to prepare new Ph.D.s who will be competitively positioned for success as teachers and researchers in the expected post-secondary landscape of the 21st century.

Curricular Rationale

The Ph.D. curriculum concentrates on methodological and theoretical issues, as well as on domains where social, political, ethical, and cultural thought are “put to work” in understanding social and individual transformations in contemporary and historical contexts.

All requirements of the doctoral program in Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought are consistent with those of the Virginia Tech Graduate School for doctoral-level studies.

Students pursuing the ASPECT doctoral degree select a major and a minor concentration chosen from among four areas: 1) social thought, 2) political thought,

3) ethical thought, and 4) cultural thought. Key ASPECT course requirements additionally offer instruction in interdisciplinary theory, methodology, and professional development. Following fulfillment of other curricular requirements, students must pass a preliminary exam, prepare and defend a dissertation proposal, and then complete original research for their dissertation, all under the supervision of a multidisciplinary advisory committee.

As indicated above, ASPECT offers a curriculum that fosters research and teaching and that communicates on the basis of theory across the “enabling limits” that frequently result in disciplinary divides between units in the social sciences, humanities, and professional schools. By design, the curriculum stresses student flexibility and originality. It permits a focus on overarching problems by offering education in multidisciplinary areas of concentration as well as solid grounding in both interdisciplinary and disciplinary ways of knowing. Each area of concentration is composed of an impressive range of departmental, college, and cross-college offerings.

It is the modest ambition of this program to foster a research and teaching program that enables Ph.D. students with ASPECT faculty to pursue appropriate course work and research commensurate with the complexities of the particular problem they aim to (Continued on page 6)

Testimonial on a Student's First Semester: Continued ...

genuinely desired to be part of this unique interdisciplinary program that I needed to mail I received competent advice and help from the ASPECT assistant . I was very excited and genuinely desired to be part of this unique interdisciplinary program . And I guess, as Paulo Coelho says, when one desires something the whole universe conspires in helping her to achieve her goal. In my case it was the ASPECT program that gave me the opportunity and chance to be part of the universe of interdisciplinarity.

I had a long transatlantic trip from Varna, Bulgaria, to Blacksburg, VA. I was picked up from the airport by the shuttle that the Cranwell International Center provides for the new foreign students. The Cranwell Center was very helpful in making sure that we follow all appointments and have all administrative requirements met. I was warmly welcomed in the community of Virginia Tech, where the professors and the students have one goal – to make you feel a part of the inclusive spirit and values of Virginia Tech and make you feel

proud to be a Hokie.

Dr. Natter, the Director of the ASPECT program, greeted me with a warm welcome and showed genuine interest in me. I remember feeling encouraged, motivated and very much welcomed after the meeting. Dr. Natter provided me a valuable advice on courses and how to design my schedule to fit the requirements of the program. I am very much grateful for his guidance and continuing advice that he gave us through the semester. He made sure we are making good progress in our studies and stay on track and was always there for us to talk and listen despite of his busy schedule. Dr. Natter is not only an exceptional advisor and intellectual but also a person with a big heart, whose ideas and messages reach the people and his students because of his great personality. I think that his ideas for the program were uttered from the heart and that is why he won not only the hearts but also the minds of many people, including our unique and diverse

group of first generation ASPECT- ians.

My teaching assignment was with the Philosophy Department, that provided an environment for me in which I felt very much appreciated. Prof. Fitzpatrick is somebody who I consider an important part of my teaching experience , because he was not only the professor I worked under but also a teaching mentor. He especially helped me along the process of my adaptation. I will never think that I have thanked him enough for his teaching mentorship and for making me teach philosophy and have fun and enjoy it along the way.

Looking back at the Fall semester of 2008, I can sincerely say that I feel part of the community of Virginia Tech. I am proud to be part of ASPECT, and I hope that my testimonial which comes from the heart will win the hearts of others to my own.

Sincerely, Yanka Petkova

“LOOKING BACK AT
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Meet the 2008 Cohort of ASPECT Students: Continued ...

Democracy, Democratic Theory and the process of Democratization; particularly as it relates to the developing world. His aspirations are to construct a model for assessing and appraising Third world democracies; especially those in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Michael V. Butera

Michael received his M.A. in Philosophy from Virginia Tech in December and a B.S. in Philosophy, Sociology, and Music Production from Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn. He is interested in Sound Studies, or the way that the experience of

sounds themselves becomes a fundamental (though not essential) element of being in the world. He is approaching this topic through existential/phenomenological, sociological, and historical perspectives.

Jeremy Carter

Jeremy completed both his M.A. and B.A. in English at Radford University, Radford, Va., as well as receiving a B.A. in Philosophy. While at RU, he was a Kirk Scholar and Graduate Teaching Fellow in the English Department. He is

a Founding Member of the Radford Philosophy and Religious Studies Club and Treasurer for New River Bo-cay Project. Jeremy also served as an adjunct instructor of English at RU from 2005 to 2008.

Dana Stoker Cochran

Dana received her M.A. in English, with an 18-hour Certificate in Appalachian Studies, from Radford University, Radford, Va., and a B.A. in Humanities, English concentration, from Bluefield State College, Bluefield, W.Va. She was a Graduate Teaching (Continued on page 6)

History and Background: Continued ...

“Significantly, these team taught venues embed in the curriculum settings in which authentic interdisciplinary work can be planned, practiced, and extended on a recurring basis.”

investigate. The program institutionalizes the recognition that no single discipline has purchase on their full scope, but that each has made significant contributions to understanding the issue. The program thoughtfully places in tandem bodies of thought and their research applications that otherwise, and not least for curricular reasons, too frequently have cast divisions along fault lines of political theory vs. cultural studies, social theory vs. ethical thought, etc. A positive resolution to the situation is embedded in the ASPECT curriculum. A regular feature of the program are team taught, theory based, topical seminars. Significantly, these team taught venues embed in the curriculum settings in which authentic interdisciplinary work can be planned, practiced, and extended on a

recurring basis.

Summary

In conclusion, for students, the program offers Ph.D. candidates the opportunity to choose course offerings appropriate to their self-selected areas of concentration and the problems they wish to address in their research. ASPECT-specific coursework provides integrated exposure to interdisciplinary theory, interdisciplinary methodology, and to interdisciplinary professional development. The program offers students comparative and integrated insights into work centered on a problem as it has been pursued, for example, by historians, architects, philosophers, political, cultural, or social theorists. The research outcome this curriculum promises is original and significant work, which will reflect a range of relevant disci-

plines, departments and fields. At the same time, students will receive both hands on experience and education as instructors while teaching introductory undergraduate courses in departments and interdisciplinary programs participating in ASPECT.

Should this program be of potential interest to you, your colleagues, or students, I encourage you to visit the ASPECT website (www.aspect.vt.edu) or to contact me directly. It has been said that the program is a bellwether for higher education in the United States. I hope you will find reasons when you visit the website to contribute to the ringing of that bell.

Dr. Wolfgang Natter
ASPECT Director

Meet our 2008 Cohort of ASPECT Students Continued ...

Fellow in the English Dept. at RU and was an adjunct instructor of English and Appalachian Studies, 2007-2008. Publications include “Anne Spencer: From Appalachia to the Harlem Renaissance.” *Pluck! The Journal of Affrilachia Arts & Culture*, Issue #3, 2008; co-editor of *ALCA-Lines*, (*The Journal on the Arts and Culture of Appalachia*, an affiliate of NCTE); and co-author of *Bramwell—A Town of Millionaires*, Arcadia Publishing, 2005. Conference presentations include “Anne Spencer’s Appalachian Roots: A Poetic Voice from America’s Third World,” Virginia Humanities Conference, Radford University,

2008; “Are We Losing Literature in America?: Finding Appalachia, Ourselves, and the Nation,” Appalachian Studies Association Conference, Marshall University, Huntington, W.Va., 2008; “*The Devil’s Dream: Women in Country Music*.” Appalachian Studies Association Conference, Maryville College, Maryville, Tenn., 2007; “Anne Spencer: The Appalachian Roots of a Harlem Renaissance Poet,” Women of Appalachia Conference, Ohio University, Zanesville, 2006. She is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of English, Bluefield State College, Bluefield, W.Va. Her research interests include labor, class and gender

studies in the Appalachian coal fields.

Robert Kirsch

Robert has an M.A. in Political Science from Virginia Tech and a B.A. in Political Science from Saint John’s University, Colleagueville, Minn. He has also completed the ASPECT Certificate at VT. His conference papers include “Aesthetic Liberation: Interdimensionality.” One of his research issues is the possibility of rebellion in an increasingly totalizing bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. Robert looks at many (Continued on page 7)

Meet our 2008 Cohort of ASPECT Students Continued ...



Mike Butera, Na Mi, Martin Saavedra, Reed Taylor, and Xiaochen Zhang

perspectives to address this problem, from neoliberalism to men's fashion and literature to the practice of everyday life.

Na Mi

Na Mi completed an M.A. in Political Science at Virginia Tech. She has also completed an M.A. in Diplomacy and a B.A. in International Politics at Peking University, Beijing, China. Her awards include the "Guang Hua" Scholarship, the Peking University Social Working Award, Excellent Organizing and Working Award in School of International Studies, "Chinese National Music" Second Class Award of "Universities Art Festival in Beijing", and the Peking University "Hong Lou" Art Award in 1999 and 2000. Her research interests include political roles of think tanks in China's policy-making; comparative study on the changing of political culture; transformation of gambling culture in China; and social and political status of establishment intellectuals in China.

Yanka Kirilova Petkova

Yanka received a Bachelor's Degree in International Economic Relations from the University of Economics, Varna, Bulgaria, a Bachelor's Degree in International Economic Relations, VFU "Chernorizetz Hrabar" Law, and a European Regional Master's in Human Rights and Democracy, Università di Bologna, Italy. Her internships and awards include the Erasmus scholarship at FHL-Lausitz Cottbus, Germany, Thesis on European Contract law; internship in the law firm of Schaune-

mann & Dr. Grabau, Germany; Leonardo da Vinci scholarship at the Human Rights Center, Germany; and internship at the OSCE mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina Human Rights Department. Yanka's research interests focus on human security in post communist countries as a moral and security dilemma. She wants to investigate whether the human security debate, which is usually based on the freedom from want and freedom from fear dichotomy in the post-communist countries, can be translated into the moral and security dilemma. Can we look at security as a moral problem? Do post-communist countries through their experience in the transition period offer the answer to that question? Does democracy mean security and did communism breed insecurity? What threats to security post-communist countries pose to the interdependent, global world? Can post-communist countries participate in the human security agenda and help to solve the moral and security dilemmas that other countries face?

R. Martin Saavedra

Martin completed his Master's Degree at Virginia Tech, Political Science Department, where he has also received an ASPECT Graduate Certificate. His Law Degree is from Universidad de Buenos Aires, Facultad de Derecho. In addition to teaching assignments at Virginia Tech, he has participated in Study-abroad programs sponsored by the University of Baltimore School of Law in Santiago,

Chile, Buenos Aires, Argentina and Cape Town, South Africa and served as a teaching assistant at Universidad de Buenos Aires Law School. Martin's many publications include *Miradas desde el Sur, Introducción al Coloquio LatCrit sobre derecho internacional y derecho comparado Buenos Aires 2003*, *Revista Jurídica de la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico* 38 (2003): 7-34; *Same-Sex Marriage Under Capricorn's Tropic*, *Feminism & Psychology*, Special Feature on Marriage II 14, no.1 (2004): 47-51; and *La tentación de la censura. El caso del film La última tentación de Cristo ante la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*, Colección de Análisis Jurisprudencial de Teoría General del Derecho, ed. Eduardo Ángel Russo (Buenos Aires: La Ley, 2002). Martin is a Board Member of LatCrit (Latina and Latino Critical Theory) Inc. His research interests include institutional and social memory, cultural theory, public/private space, political protests, identity issues and critiques of capitalism.

Juan Carlos Sanchez Sierra

Juan Carlos has received an M.A. in History, Virginia Tech, an M.A. in African History, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) Paris, a Certificate in International & European Studies, Birkbeck College, University of London, and a B.A. History, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota. Juan Carlos' publications include *Fallas de* (Continued on page 8)

"NA MI research interests include political roles of think tanks in China's policy-making; comparative study on the changing of political culture; transformation of gambling culture in China; and social and political status of establishment intellectuals in China."

Meet our 2008 Cohort of ASPECT Students Continued ...

Origen. La discursividad historica de los actores del conflicto, el ELN. In: Mosquera, Claudia. (Comp) La Universidad Piensa la Paz, Obstaculos y Posibilidades. Editorial Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota, 2002; *Los estudios sobre el ELN, un Balance historiográfico.* In: Biermann, Juan Camilo. (Comp) Pensatiempos. Editorial Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota, 2002. He has participated in such conferences as *XV Congreso Colombiano de Historia*, Tunja (Colombia); *XXVIII ILASSA Annual Conference on Latin American Studies*, University of Texas at Austin; *VII African History Conference, Wars and Conflicts in Africa*, University of Texas at Austin; *VIII Conference on Political Theory*, University of Essex, England; *XIX Annual Warren I. Susman Graduate Student Conference*, Rutgers University, USA; and *XII Biennial Colombianists Conference*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. Juan Car-

los' research interests include: comparative politics in Africa and Latin America; ideological and strategic transformations in Liberation movements, guerrilla discourses and practices, twentieth century history Colombia and Angola; historiography and social theory.

Scott Tate

Scott has a Bachelor's Degree in communication studies with a political science minor and a Master's Degree in business management from Virginia Tech. He worked in management capacities in the private and public sectors before joining Emory and Henry College, where he worked for seven years as the director of campus service programs and community outreach and as an adjunct instructor in public policy. As an Extension Specialist in Community Viability for Virginia Tech, Tate serves as a community-based faculty member; linking communities, organiza-

tions, and leaders across Virginia with the knowledge and resources of the university and the Extension system. Tate serves on the Commission on Outreach and International Affairs for Virginia Tech, the Board of Directors for the Southwest Virginia Artisans Network, and the Virginia Entrepreneurship Advisory Group. Tate's general research interests include community development, rural issues, place studies, civic engagement, culture studies, and community change. A particular problem of current interest deals with the dynamics of community cultural change.

Reed Taylor

Reed has completed an M.Phil. in Philosophy and Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and a B.A. in History and Philosophy, University of New Mexico. Publications include "Hizb ut-Tahrir a Postcolonial (Continued on page 9)

“Tate’s general research interests include community development, rural issues, place studies, civic engagement, culture studies, and community change”



Meet our 2008 Cohort of ASPECT Students Continued ...

“XIAOCHEN’S research interests involve the application of interdisciplinary and evolutionary approach on global issues, such as climate change, global communication, global technological innovation, and sustainable development”

Analysis: Neo-colonialist in the making?” *Journal Maarif*, Vol. 3, No. 2, May 2008. Recent conference presentations include “The Case Against Democracy: Hizb ut-Tahrir in Aceh” at the International Conference and Cultural Event: On Aceh in Honolulu, November 2008; “Hizb ut-Tahrir in Uzbekistan: A post-colonial perspective” at the Central Eurasian Studies Society in Washington DC, September 2008; and “Hizb ut-Tahrir a Cultural Analysis: Neo-colonialist in the Making?” at the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, April 2008.

Reed is currently the president of the ASPECT Student Association and is an officer for the Sociology of Islam and Muslim Societies at Virginia Tech. Recently he has traveled to Banda Aceh, Indonesia, for research on the upcoming elections in Aceh. During this trip, Reed gave presentations at the Aceh Institute and the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Al-Raniry in January of this year. His research interests include the intersection of political Islam and identity formation in newly industrializing countries, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, and critiques of global capitalism. He is currently teaching a section of HUM 1704 Introduction to Appalachian Studies in the IDST department as part of the ASPECT program.

Xiaochen Zhang
Xiaochen has received a B.A. in Economics (majored in

International Relation and Internal Trade), Hebei University of Economics and Business, P.R.China, Double Degree in Economic Information Management, Hebei University of Economics and Business, P.R.China, 1st MA in Law (majored in International Relations), Communication University of China, P.R.China, and 2nd MA in Art (majored in Global Studies), Wroclaw University, Poland and Leipzig University, Germany. Publications include “The Impact of Clean Development Mechanism on the Climate Policy in South Africa,” *The Global Studies Journal*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Australia, 2008; “The Formation and Evolution of China’s Township Village Enterprises,” Paper Collection of the First Graz Schumpeter Summer School, Austria, 2007; “International Relations Studies in China,” (co-author), Communication University Press, China, 2006; and “People’s Livelihood Archives in China- From the Bottom,” (co-edited), Friendship Press of China, 2005. Xiaochen has participated in the 6th Global Forum of United Nations, Vienna; OECD-UNEP Conference on Resource Efficiency, Paris; European Development Days, Lisbon; Global Carbon EXPO Conference, Cologne; PhD winter school on Evolutionary Economics, Max-Planck-Institute of Economics, Jena; Kiel Institute of

World Economics Summer School on Welfare Economics, Kiel; National Graduate Forum on Political Science in Renmin University, Beijing; National Graduate Forum on International Relations in Tsinghua University, Beijing; National Graduate Summer School on World History in Peking University, Beijing; and Free University Berlin and Fudan University Summer School on World Politics, Shanghai. He is the Associate Editor, *The Global Studies Journal*, Australia, 2008- present, and was Lecturer on Business Communication (part-time), Peking University, China, 2004-2006. Xiaochen received the European Commission Scholarship (Erasmus Mundus), Global Studies, Poland and Germany, Xingguang Graduates Award, Communication University of China, China, and Academic Excellence Award, Department of Education of Hebei Province, China, 2001. His research interests involve the application of interdisciplinary and evolutionary approach on global issues, such as climate change, global communication, global technological innovation, sustainable development, etc.



Reed Taylor (fifth from the left) after giving a presentation at The Aceh Institute in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. January 2009

ASPECT sponsored events: Spring 2009

January 22

'Barriers against Democracy': Rethinking the Nation's Founding

Dana Nelson, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of English, Vanderbilt University

6:00 - 8:00 PM, Surge Building, Room 108

January 23

workshop with Dana Nelson, author of *Bad for Democracy: How the Presidency undermines the Power of the People*.

2:00 - 5:00 PM Major Williams 502 Workshop participation is limited and by confirmation
Lecture and workshop co-sponsored with the Women and Minority Artists and Scholars Lecture Series (WMASLS), Women's Studies Program, Philosophy Department, Institute for Policy and Governance, and the Department of Political Science

"Dana Nelson argues provocatively, and persuasively, that the mythological status accorded the presidency is drowning our democracy. The remedy will not come from Washington. It starts with people rediscovering, then reclaiming, their birthright as active citizens, restoring meaning to the sacred idea of self-government." William Greider, *The Nation* magazine, author of *The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral Economy*

“THE
MYTHOLOGICAL
STATUS ACCORDED
THE PRESIDENCY IS
DROWNING OUR
DEMOCRACY”

“If democratic practice is going to flourish in the United States, the American people are going to have to roll up their sleeves and take on the hard work of self-governance. Dana Nelson offers an astute historical analysis of how the presidency, far from advancing this goal, has actually impeded it. Highly recommended.” David Bollier, author of *Silent Theft* and *Brand Name Bullies*

Throughout our history, Americans have been simultaneously inspired and seduced by the American presidency, and concerned about the misuse of presidential power—from Lincoln, Wilson, and FDR to Nixon, Reagan, and George W. Bush—as grave threats to the United States. In *Bad for Democracy*, Dana D. Nelson goes beyond blaming particular presidents for jeopardizing the delicate balance of the Constitution, to argue that it is the office of the presidency itself that endangers the great American experiment.

The emotional impulse to see the president as a hero, as evidenced in the unquestioning reverence for the Founding Fathers, the deference to our military Commander-in-Chief, or the popularity of the George W. Bush "Mission Accomplished" action figure, Nelson contends, has ceded our ability to practice government by the people and for the people. She shows that exercising democratic rights has become idealized as—and woefully limited to—the act of voting for the president, thus teaching us that political life means representation, rather than active participation.

This urgent book reveals the futility of placing all of our hopes for the future in the American president and encourages citizens to create a politics of deliberation, action, and agency. Arguing for a return to the balance of power—both symbolically and in practice—to all the branches of government, Nelson ultimately calls on Americans to change our own course and imagine a democracy that we, the people, lead together.

Spring Lecture Series integrated with ASPT 6004 on Neoliberalism and Society

Co-instructors: Brian Britt, Wolfgang Natter, Phil Olson and Brett Shadle

All lectures are at 5:00 PM in Surge Building Rm. 104A

(Continued on Page 11)

ASPECT sponsored events: Spring 2009: Continued ...

February 4

Capitalism is dead; long live capitalism! Capitalist crisis and resilience.

Jerry Muller, Department of History, Catholic University

February 25

From Serfdom to Freedom; neoliberalism and the ambiguous geographies of post-socialist reform

John Pickles, Philips Distinguished Professor of International Studies and Geography, University of North Carolina

March 18

Claiming land to farm or farming to claim the land? African farmers and local governance in the neoliberal era

Sara Berry, Department of History, Johns Hopkins University

Other Spring Events

“THE EMOTIONAL
IMPULSE TO SEE
THE PRESIDENT AS
A HERO ... HAS
CEDED OUR ABILITY
TO PRACTICE
GOVERNMENT BY
THE PEOPLE AND
FOR THE PEOPLE“

Film Series on ‘Imperialism, Oil, and Religion: American Foreign Policy and Islam’

All films will be shown at the Black Cultural Center in Squires Student Building Rm. 126

Sponsored by Sociology of Islam and Muslim Societies, Sociology, Political Science, Religious Studies, STS, ASPECT, Coalition for Justice, Global Justice Alliance, and Sociologists Without Borders

Why We Fight? (2006) Jan. 28th; 5:30 – 7:30 pm

Taxi To The Dark Side (2007) Feb 11th; 5:30 – 7:30 pm

Standard Operating Procedure (2008) Feb 25th; 5:30 – 7:30 pm

The Power of Nightmares, part 1 (2004) Apr 1st; 5:30 – 7:30 pm

The Power of Nightmares, part 2 (2004) Apr 15th; 5:30 – 7:30 pm

January 31 - February 28

French and Francophone Film Festival

Another French and Francophone Film Festival is coming to the Lyric Theatre in downtown Blacksburg. The festival movies will be shown on Saturdays at 3:00 PM and all screenings are free and open to the public.

Sponsored by the Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures, the Cercle Francophone.

This Festival is made possible with the support of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy and the French Ministry of Culture (CNC).

March 5

The 'Turn to the Left' in Latin America: Alternative Modernizations, or Postdevelopment?

5:30 - 7:00 PM, Surge Building, Room 108

March 6

Territories of Difference: Place, Movement, Life, Redes (New Ecologies for the Twenty-First Century)

Arturo Escobar, Kenan Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, UNC-Chapel Hill, Director, Institute of Latin American Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill, Facilitator, World Anthropologies Network/Red de Antropoloías Mundiales, Research Associate, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología, Bogotá

Co-sponsored with Foreign Languages, Political Science, and Science and Technology Studies
2:00 - 5:00 PM GLC Room B Workshop participation is limited and by confirmation

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ASPECT sponsored events: Spring 2009: Continued ...

March 23 - Rescuing Economies from Economists

5:00 - 7:00 PM, McBryde, Room 129

March 24 - Cultural Studies and the Challenges of the Contemporary

Lawrence Grossberg, Morris Davis Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies and Cultural Studies; Adjunct Distinguished Professor of Anthropology; Director of the University Program in Cultural Studies, *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

2:00 - 5:00 PM Major Williams 502 Workshop participation is limited and by confirmation

Co-sponsored with Departments of Sociology and IDST

April 3

Research Symposium on Gender, Religion, and Identity in Social Theory

Symposium coordinator: Tom Ewing, Department of History

Eric Silverman, Associate Professor, American Studies and Human Development, *Wheelock College*

ASPECT Working Paper Series

Cranwell International Center

Wednesdays, 4-5:30 p.m.

Date tba

Edward Weisband, Department of Political Science

Evil Is as Evil Does: In Defense of Ontological Foundationalism, Edward Weisband and Courtney I. P. Thomas

Abstract: An inquiry into the ontological status of "human nature" that establishes a subset of heuristic presuppositions: the universality of anxiety, loss, and split subjectivity. This perspective is designed to show how and in what ways collective forms of reification enable us to define "evil is as evil does" within specific political contexts shaped by culture and ideologies. The analysis frames the linkages between universal foundations of human personality and particular episodes of bio-spatialized corporeal evil by applying the concept of jouissant-victimage to demonstrate how the dynamics of hate and ethno-conflict readily culminate in mass atrocity and crimes against humanity.

Date tba

Tom Ewing, Department of History

Voice, Visibility, and Vulnerability: Teachers' Conferences and the Stalinist Public Sphere

Abstract: This paper explores the significance of the public sphere in communist societies, with particular attention to the historical example of teachers' professional conferences during the decade of the 1930s, when state power reached its most destructive level in the Soviet Union. In particular, this paper takes issue with the assumption that the public sphere in the Soviet Union, even at the most intense period of repression, was solely an instrument of the state. Teachers' conferences served multiple purposes beyond their obvious function as a "transmission belt" for Communist Party leaders, as teachers used conferences as forums for professional dialogue, opportunities for social interaction, vehicles for articulating grievances, and resources for making sense of their context.

Other working papers by Rupa Thadhani, and Max Stephenson

Dates tba

Papers in the Series are made available on-line prior to the scheduled event. All are welcome to participate; the "price of admission" for participating is reading the paper in advance.



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