

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



Volume 1, Issue 6

Fall 2006

From the Department Head,

By Joe Pitt,
Philosophy Department Head

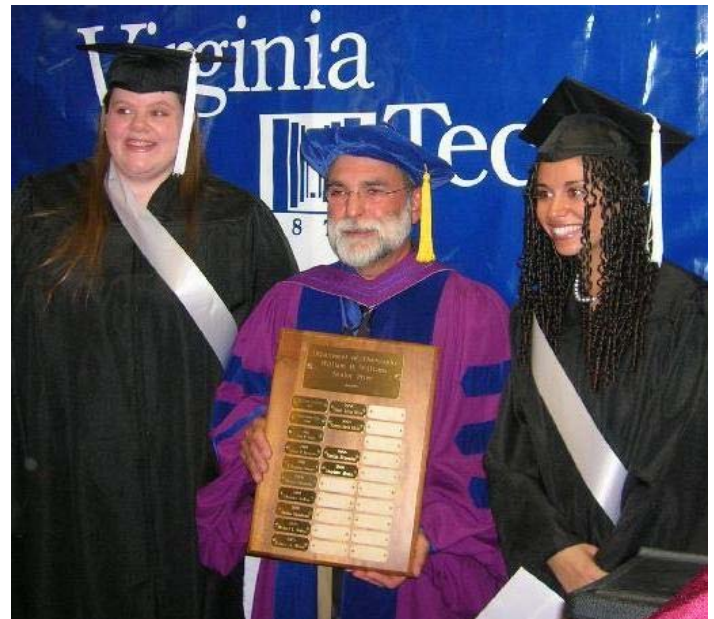
Greetings Friends,
This past year has been extremely eventful. The department hosted three enormously successful conferences: our second annual Graduate Student Conference organized by Lucas Covey, "Scientific Images: Learning From Pictures" organized by Dr. Laura Perini (A College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Humanities Symposium), and "E.R.R.O.R." organized by Dr. Deborah Mayo. We also conducted successful searches for two new faculty members. We received a record breaking number of applications for our MA program. One of our undergraduate majors, Gregory Sagstetter, was selected as both a member of USA Today's All-USA College Academic Second Team, and as the Undergraduate Representative to Virginia Tech's Board of Visitors for 2006-7.

Our two new faculty members are Daniel Parker (Ph.D., University of Maryland) and Walter Ott (Ph.D., University of Virginia). Dan is a specialist in the philosophy of physics while Walter is an established Locke scholar. We are very excited about the strengths they bring to the department and we look forward to working with them in the future. These are totally new positions which means the faculty roster has swelled to fourteen. This is an extremely important development since it means we no longer qualify as a "small"

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Dr. Joe Pitt with speaker Rachel Williams



Dr. Joe Pitt with Cherilynn Blumenthal and Sophia Bous (Williams Prize winners)

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Commencement! page 2

Spring 2006 Commencement Ceremony



This year's commencement ceremony, coordinated by Steve Daskal, was held on May 13 at the Atrium in Major Williams, and was a huge success. Rachel K. Williams, alumna, and now Verizon's Area Manager, Central Office of the Western Region of VA, was the invited speaker for the ceremony. Joe Pitt, Chair of the Department, presided over the ceremony, while Jim Klagge, Director of Undergraduate Program, presented the Williams Prize for excellence in Philosophy in undergraduates to Cherilyn Rose Blumenthal and Sophia Makram Bous. Bill Fitzpatrick, Director of Graduate Program, presided over the hooding ceremony.

Bachelor of Arts:

Barnett, Michael James	(Double major)
Blumenthal, Cherilyn Rose	
Bous, Sophia Makram	
Canard, Robert Leigh	(Double major)
Hawes, David H.	
Huber, Casey Leigh	
Johnson, Adam Taylor	
Lee, Seung (Thomas) Hyun	
Meissner, Colin James	
Moore, Bryan James	
Parsi, Pegah Kamkar	(December 2005 graduate)
Stewart, Charles Robert	
Woodward, Andrew James	(Summer 2006 graduate)

Master of Arts:

Covey, Lucas Scott
 Guajardo, Ivan
 Jurewicz, Nicholas Nmi
 Kopec, Matthew Carl
 Mueller, Nathan Everett
 Sides, Jonathan David
 Stevenson, Lynn Karen
 Wallace, Karen Lynnette

Graduating Summa Cum Laude:
 Sophia Bous

Graduating Magna Cum Laude:
 Bryan Moore

Seniors Phi Beta Kappa
 (three will not be
 graduating until next year):

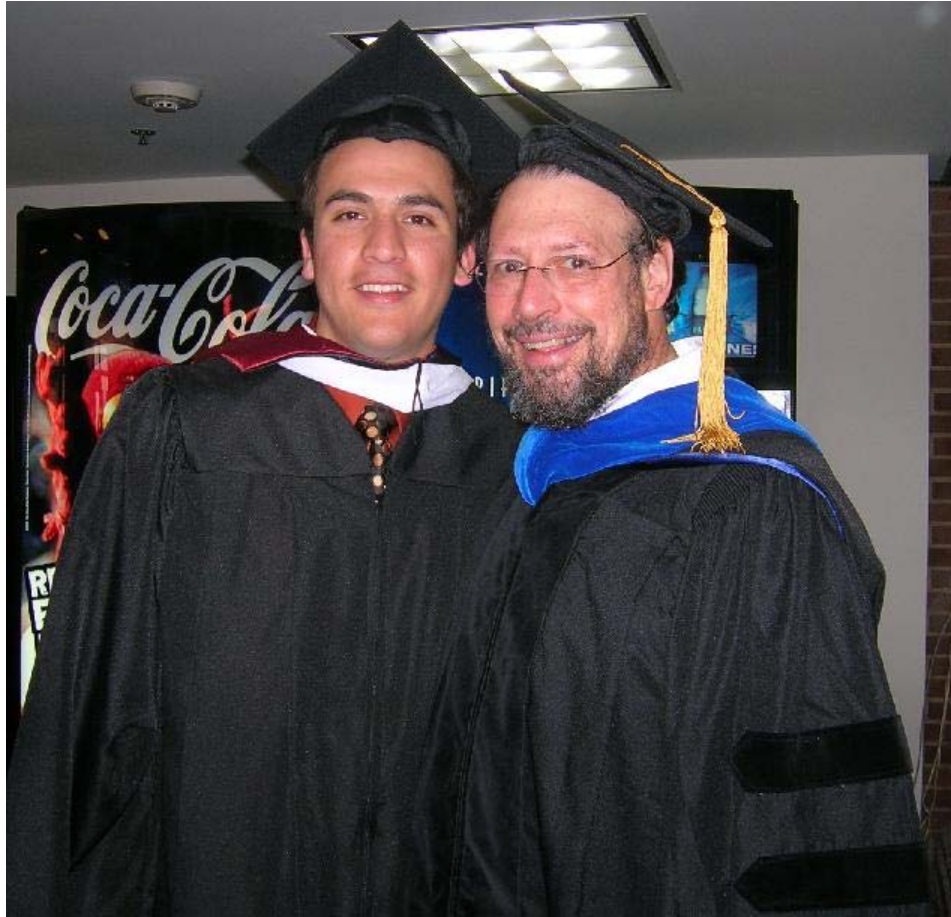
Brent Scott Alasandro	Computer Science/Philosophy
Sophia Makram Bous	Biology/Philosophy
Adel Ghaderi	Chemical Engineering/ Chemistry/Philosophy
Bryan James Moore	Biochemistry/Philosophy
Gregory Joseph Sagstetter	Philosophy/Political Science



Adam Johnson and Nicholas Jurewicz



Sarah Hippolytus and Karen Wallace



Ivan Guajardo and Richard Burian



Deborah Mayo and Rosa Mayorga

Adel Ghaderi and Jim Klagge



Steve Daskal and Nathan Mueller



William FitzPatrick and Sophia Bous

Annual Spring Conference

This year's Spring Conference, organized by Laura Perini, was "Scientific Images: Learning from Pictures," which presented the results of current researchers—from a variety of disciplines—aiming to understand what images contribute to scientific reasoning, and how they do so. Presenters at the conference were Stephen M. Downes (Univ. of Utah), Megan Delehanty (Univ. of Calgary), Andrea Woody (Univ. of Washington), Matthew Goodrum (VTech), Laura Perini (VTech), Jim Campbell (VTech), Peter Sforza (VTech), Robert P. Futrelle, (Northeastern Univ.), Michael Lynch (Cornell Univ.), Joseph C. Pitt, (VTech), William Goodwin (Swarthmore College), Anouk Barberousse (CNRS, IHPST).

Graduate conference

For the second year in a row, the graduate students organized a two-day conference. This year's keynote speaker was Helen Longino from Stanford University. Next year's conference is scheduled for November 3-4 (submission deadline: September 15, 2006). Keynote speaker is Brian Leiter (Univ. of Texas) who will be presenting "Why Tolerate Religion?"

Summer Workshop

Experimental Reasoning, Reliability, Objectivity and Rationality E.R.R.O.R: Induction, Statistics and Modeling, organized by Deborah Mayo. Among the special invited speakers were: Alan Chalmers, John Worrall, Alan Musgrave, David Cox, Aris Spanos, Peter Achinstein, Henry Kyburg, Larry Laudan, Clark Glymour

department. We are not yet a “big” department, but we are, nonetheless, a mighty one!

In addition to Drs Parker and Ott, we have also hired Dr. Dylan Wittkower (Ph.D., Vanderbilt) as a Visiting Assistant Professor for this academic year. Dylan specializes in 19th century philosophy and brings areas of interest that have been missing from the curriculum, such as Hegel and Marx.

Our undergraduate program thrives. Our classes are full and we are, unfortunately, turning students away. This is a situation that is being repeated across the university. In one sense, it is a healthy sign that Virginia Tech is an increasingly attractive place for good students. But, it also shows that there are limits to increasing enrollments without increasing resources to support those enrollments. For this problem, we foresee no quick solutions.

The MA program continues to shine. We are extremely proud of our graduates. This year we saw students going to Ph.D. programs at Duke (Jonathan Sides), Wisconsin (Matthew Kopec) and Washington University/St. Louis (Jason Gardner), fully funded.

On the graduate front, we have more news. While the department has been told that it will not be getting a Ph.D. program, we are one of four core units in a new interdisciplinary adventure, ASPECT (The Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical and Cultural Thought). The College and the University have put a lot of resources into ASPECT- including seven new faculty hires, two in philosophy (Drs Daskal and May were hired last year), and funding for now six graduate students (eventually for something like twenty graduate students). A proposal is working its way through the appropriate university committees and we hope to send it to the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, SCHEV, by the first of the year for final approval, with an eye to admitting students for fall 2007.

With the development of ASPECT, the department is in a unique position. Our graduate work is grounded in a first class MA program with openings into two interdisciplinary programs, the other being Science and Technology Studies. One of the benefits of these arrangements is that we are now successfully tied to other departments in a way that strengthens and deepens our research in several different areas.

This coming year will offer more excitement. The graduate students will once again offer what has become a yearly event, our Graduate Philosophy Conference. This year the

News from Alumni:

The Ultimate Spanish Phrase Finder, book published by Mc Graw Hill written by **Whit Wirsing** alumnus. It contains 37,000 common phrases and idiomatic expressions and gives invaluable guidance on phrase construction, along with a range of synonyms to choose from.

Brandiff Caron was named Graduate Student of the Month in April 2006 for the whole university

Mike Geruso sends us the following update:

"Great news - I've just been admitted to Princeton's Econ PhD program, with a tuition waiver and fellowship support. I'm thrilled, since the school was my first choice and is among the top few econ programs in the world. My fellowship lasts four years, two of which I'm expected to work as a TA. I start in August, and I couldn't be happier."

Chris Meyer (grad alum from a few years ago) was awarded an Academy Professorship in English and Philosophy at West Point

Chris Upton is at Notre Dame Law School and “having a great time.” This summer he worked as a summer associate at Hunton & Williams in Richmond, VA and “really enjoyed being back in Virginia.”

Thomas Firey (MA 1999) remains a full-time policy scholar at the Cato Institute, but he is also enrolled in George Mason University's PhD economics program. He was offered full funding, but declined it (preferring to stay with Cato fulltime and pursue the PhD part-time).

“I can honestly say that my training at VT significantly helped to prepare me for the GMU program and was looked on highly by the GMU econ faculty.”

From the Department Head ... continued

Key Note Speaker will be Brian Leiter, editor of the Philosophical Gourmet, a ranking of philosophy graduate programs around the country. The spring will see Wittgenstein scholars descending on Blacksburg for another weekend of lively conversation. It is possible that we may be hiring again, which means more reading of dossiers and long hours interviewing – but we expect that, as in the past, we will be getting the best people applying. In short, we just keep on going!

I hope you will come visit the department when you are in town – we love visiting with old friends.

joe

(jcpitt@vt.edu)





Faculty NEWS!

Richard Burian,

who specializes in philosophy of biology, gave a talk to the Philosophy Club on Charles Darwin and Creationism in April that was attended by about 140 students and faculty from all over the university. He continues to work on an extended project on changes in the gene concepts in the 20th century. This project led to three notable invitations this year – to participate in workshops at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and at the inaugural workshop of Arizona State University's Center for Social Dynamics and Complexity and to deliver a lecture on "The changing ontology of the gene – historical and philosophical perspectives" at the National Eye Institute's Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Bethesda, MD. His 2005 book, *The Epistemology of Development, Evolution, and Genetics* (Cambridge University Press) is aimed at biologists, historians, and philosophers, and contains two of his essays on gene concepts.

Steve Daskal

received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan last summer and joined the Virginia Tech philosophy department last fall. Since his arrival in 2005, he has taught undergraduate courses in ethical theory, global ethics, and business ethics, as well as a graduate seminar on practical reasoning.

Steve grew up outside of Chicago and lived for four years in the Phoenix area before enrolling as an undergraduate at Amherst College. After completing a double major in philosophy and religious studies, he spent some time abroad and then lived in Seattle for a few years, where he held several jobs including that of a stock trader for a small brokerage firm and a fund-raiser for a non-profit organization.

Steve's primary philosophical interests are in moral and political philosophy. One of his ongoing projects involves bringing philosophical tools to bear on practical issues, such as welfare policy, in a way that both addresses the problem at hand and facilitates the development of an adequate moral or political theory. When he's not working, he tries to get out in the woods to go hiking or canoeing.

William FitzPatrick

works in ethics and serves as Director of Graduate Studies. His research and teaching range over all three major branches of ethics: metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. He has recently published articles on topics ranging from the foundations of ethics and the nature of normativity (e.g., "The Practical Turn in Ethical Theory: Korsgaard's Constructivism, Realism, and the Nature of Normativity," *Ethics*, Vol. 115, No. 4; and "Reasons, Value, and Particular Agents: Normative Relevance without Motivational Internalism," *Mind*, Vol. 113, Issue 450), to issues in normative ethical theory (e.g., "The Intend/Foresee Distinction and the Problem of Closeness," *Philosophical Studies* 128 (April, 2006), to ethical issues surrounding human embryonic stem cell research (e.g., "Surplus Embryos, Non-reproductive Cloning and the Intend/Foresee Distinction," in *The Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 33, No. 3). Other current work addresses further issues in the debate between realists and constructivists in ethical theory, questions about the nature of moral responsibility, and our obligations to future generations. He is also chair of the New River Valley Local Human Rights Committee.

Brian Epstein

delivered "The Realpolitik of Reference," at the 4th Barcelona Workshop on Reference in Barcelona, Spain on June 2005. His paper will be published in the January 2007 issue of *Dialectica*.

Mark Gifford

is on leave this year.

Valerie Hardcastle

is currently Head of the Department of Science and Technology in Society and Graduate Director of the Science and Technology Studies program.

Jim Klagge

slogged through 28.1 miles of mud in 7 & a half hours, but did not complete the 50-mile ultra-marathon. He may try again. He published "Great White Wonder: The Ethics of Bootlegging Bob" in the collection *Bob Dylan and Philosophy in the Philosophy & Popular Culture series*. He will be on leave Spring, 2007, to complete his book on Wittgenstein.

Simon May

joined the department this past fall as assistant professor. His paper "Principled Compromise and the Abortion Controversy," appeared in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* in Fall 2005.

Deborah Mayo

received a National Science Foundation Scholar's Award for the project "Learning From Error: A Philosophy of Evidence and Inference." Her publications this year include "Severe Testing as a Basic Concept in a Neyman-Pearson Philosophy of Induction," with Aris Spanos, *The British Journal of the Philosophy of Science*, June 2006, "Frequentist Statistics as a Theory of Inductive Inference," with D.R. Cox, *The Second Erich L. Lehmann Symposium*, vol xx, Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS), Lecture Notes-Monograph Series, 2006, and "Critical Rationalism and Its Failure to Withstand Critical Scrutiny" in C. Cheyne and J. Worrall (eds.) *Rationality and Reality: Conversations with Alan Musgrave*, Kluwer series Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science, Springer, The Netherlands, 2006. She also presented two paper written jointly with Sir David Cox: "Frequentist Statistics as a Theory of Inductive Inference: When Should We Take Account of Selection Effects and Non-Novel Data?" *London School of Economics (Evidence Series)*: May 11, 2005," and "Frequentist Statistics as a Theory of Inductive Inference" at the *Econometric Society World Congress*, London, August 2005. Together with Dr. Aris Spanos, Chair of Economics she organized two workshops/conferences: Workshop on the Philosophy and Methodology of Experimental Economics, held June 27-29, 2005, at Virginia Tech, and on June 1-5, 2006 Experimental Reasoning, Reliability, Objectivity and Rationality E.R.R.O.R: Induction, Statistics and Modeling.

Rosa Mayorga

was chosen as a delegate to participate in the Oxford Round Table on Diversity March 12-17 2006, where she delivered "On a Peircean Approach to Issues of Diversity." She also traveled to Granada, Spain, for the presentation of paper "Peirce y el Individuo" at the Philosophy Department of the University of Granada in July 2005, and also presented a paper "Stimulating Student Discussion in an Online Course" at the Twelfth International Conference on Learning at the Faculty of Education at the University of Granada. In September she will travel to Buenos Aires, Argentina to present "Pragmatism and Pluralism" at the II Jornadas Grupo Peirceano and in June to Opole, Poland, for the III Conference on American and European Values devoted to Charles Peirce. Her book *From Realism to Realicism: On the Metaphysics of Charles Peirce* will be published February 2007 by Lexington Books.

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Laura Perini

received the Virginia Tech Humanities Symposium Award, which provided funding for an interdisciplinary conference held at Virginia Tech April, 2006, called "Scientific Images: Learning from Pictures." In addition to organizing that event, Laura was a co-organizer of a miniconference on scientific images, held at the Pacific APA in Portland, Oregon in March. Laura spent most of the spring at Dartmouth College, at the 2006 Dartmouth Humanities Institute on Visual Culture and the Life Sciences, where she worked on one of her current projects, "Visual Abstraction and Pedagogy in Biology." This summer Laura will travel to Brittany, France, where she has been invited to serve as an instructor for a summer school on "The Cognitive Bases of Scientific Images," funded by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.



Walter Ott

will join the philosophy department in the fall. Walter got his B.A. from Alfred University; after receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in 2000, Walter spent a year as a faculty fellow at Colby College in Maine before taking a tenure-track job at East Tennessee State University. In 2005-6, he was a visiting professor at Tech.

Walter grew up in central New Jersey and western New York. He has worked as the sports editor of a small paper, a manual laborer in a library, a clerk in a bookstore, a hack for the development office of a small college, and, for a single day, something in a bank.

Walters main area of interest is modern philosophy, though two forthcoming publications, Aristotle and Plato on Character (Ancient Philosophy 2006) and an introduction to the Barnes and Noble Classics edition of Aristotles de anima, concern ancient philosophy. In 2004 Cambridge University Press published Locke's Philosophy of Language, and among his current projects is a second book, on causation and laws of nature in the modern period.

Daniel Parker

joins the philosophy department this fall, having completed his PhD at the University of Maryland, College Park under the direction of Jeffrey Bub, who was co-winner of the prestigious Lakatos award in philosophy of science along with our own Deborah Mayo. He will be teaching courses in philosophy of science and logic over the coming year.

He grew up in Montreal, and completed his undergraduate degree at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where he completed a double major in the university's prestigious interdisciplinary program "Arts & Science" and physics before officially beginning his philosophical studies at the graduate level.

Daniel Parker's research interests focus on the philosophy of physics and philosophy of time. His current research projects involve foundational issues in statistical mechanics and attempts to ground the distinction between past and future in the 2nd law of Thermodynamics. Also, he has interests in scientific realism and in understanding the use and role of computational methods in the physical sciences.

Many thanks for your contributions!!!!

The Philosophy Department is grateful for the generous donations you have made through the Virginia Tech Foundation. Your support contributes in a very direct way to both the intellectual and social life of the department. In particular, it enables us to continue our tradition of hosting regular conferences and colloquia, which is vital both to our functioning as a recognized center of active philosophical research and to the broad education of our students.

Please contact our chair, Professor Joe Pitt (jcpitt@vt.edu) when you submit information about your gift. With your permission, we would like to list contributors in future newsletters, with categories as follows:

- Friends:** up to \$250
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If you are interested in making bequests or other special gifts, please contact Tysus Jackson, Director of Development for the College of Liberal Arts and the Human Sciences (540/231-8734 or tysusj@vt.edu)

We want to hear from you!!!!!!

Please give us your comments, suggestions on what you think of our newsletter, any special features you would want included in future editions, etc.

Remember to check our website www.phil.vt.edu



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PHILOSOPHY**



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