

**Letter from the Chair**

Dear Friends of the Virginia Tech Department of Philosophy,



Joe Pitt with Leisa Osborne, who retired on March 1, 2014

It has been an eventful year! I have had the privilege to serve as Interim Department Head during a time of substantial change. The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences resigned to become Provost of Northern Kentucky State University January 1.

Joan Hirt from our School of Education was appointed Interim Dean and a search for a new dean was set in motion. As I write this, the three finalists have come to campus and the search committee will meet soon to make its recommendation. So what the future holds for us is something of a question mark. Why is this important? Under the policies of the previous dean we went from a full time faculty to 14 to 7. We are now back up to 9, but next year we will be down to 8 again for reasons I will explain below. The new dean is important because she needs to see how important regaining our full strength is to the health of the college. Your continued support is crucial and much appreciated.

Sadly, Dr. Walter Ott has resigned to accept a position at the University of Virginia. We will miss his energy, intellectual rigor and his sense of humor and we wish him well!

We are currently searching for four visiting assistant professors for next year. This is exciting as it means we will be bustling with young vigorous faculty bringing lots of new ideas to our discussions and courses. 2014-2015 is going to be an another active year!

Our faculty continue to be incredibly productive, publishing books and articles in first class places, giving papers at prestigious conferences, contributing to the reputation of the department and generally making us look really good!

The graduate students once again did us proud, putting on a fantastic conference in November. The theme was the history of modern philosophy. They invited two keynote speakers from Stanford University, Michael Friedman and Graciela de Pierris. Our students served as commentators and they were brilliant! A good time was had by all!

There is more on the positive front. An anonymous donor has endowed a graduate student scholarship that will provide full tuition and fees for one of our MA students beginning in 2015. We are extremely grateful for his generosity and (hint, hint!) hope he serves as a model for other successful alumni!

While I cannot say I have “enjoyed” this year, I am always happy to be of service. However, I am looking forward to once again being a simple faculty member teaching my classes and working with the students who always cheer me up.

Joe

PS: The Wolfhounds thrive! 🐕

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**We want to hear from you!**

Please write to us and let us know how (and what) you're doing!

Write to: Joe Pitt (jcpitt@vt.edu)

To make sure you continue to get the Newsletter, go online to: <http://www.alumni.vt.edu/gateway/index.html> to update, view, and edit your information.

# Commencement

## Spring 2013 ceremony

On May 18, Professor James C. Klagge presided over the 2013 Commencement Ceremony in Torgersen Hall. Lydia Patton presided over the hooding ceremony, while Joe Pitt presented the undergraduate diplomas.

Joe presented the William H. Williams Prize for undergraduate excellence to Sarah Pelham, while Lydia presented the Marjorie Grene Memorial Prize for outstanding graduate student to Lindley Slipetz.

James Klagge gave the commencement address, entitled 'Taking Philosophy with You.' 

### Bachelor of Arts:

Brooks, Bret Lewis  
*Campbell, Jason Scott\**  
Ceritano, Davide Walter  
Childers, Luke  
Coleman, Courtlyn Whitney  
Collins, Karen Tyler  
Dawood, Jennifer Lynn  
Desmarais, Craig Allen  
Ehtesham, Sama Anisa  
Frazier, Joseph  
Geer, Brittany Nicole  
Gerben, Stacey Ruth  
*Iruvanti, Sirisha Sayi\**  
Jarboe, Rebecca Lyndsey  
*Jernigan, Elliott Textor\**  
Johnson, Jasmine Renee  
*Lee, Richard David\**  
Levy, Hannah Hoffner  
Lewis, Katherine Elaine  
*Lindsay, Alexander Edward\**  
Love, Guy Benjamin Mitchell  
McCormick, Meaghan Kara  
Nestor, Christina Louise  
Nguyen, Allison Thu Anh Tri  
Nguyen, Nam Tien  
Nguyen, Ngoc-Anh Christina  
Overcash, Justin Michael  
Pelham, Sarah Muriel  
Rais, Saadia Subah  
Riggs, Allison Danielle  
Roberts, James Garrett  
Robertson, Courtney Brooke  
Schumann, Roland Weyburn IV  
*Seltzer, Dieter Reinhardt\**  
Shonk, Katherine Anne  
Sutton, Rebecca Helene  
Taliaferro, Robert Ryland

*\*Phi Sigma Tau*

*\*Awarding of Posthumous Degree*

### Master of Arts:

Bartlett, Matthew Monroe  
Bernal, Amiel  
de Araujo, Eric William  
Hovey, George E.  
Johnson, Cory  
McCormack, Jessica L.  
Nordby, Kevin Todd  
Nordby, Stephanie Nicole  
Schimpf, Brian  
Slipetz, Lindley  
Stiso, Christopher  
Thompson, Blake Barrett



Jim Klagge gives his commencement address



Joe Pitt with Gabi Seltzer, Barbara Seltzer, and Michael Seltzer



Master of Arts students

# Staff Notes

**Terry Zapata:** “I have been raising my granddaughter, Chloe, and taking online computer classes at New River Community College. I’m also building an LOC Precision Rocket kit called ‘Big Cletus,’ 49 inches high, 5.5 inches in diameter, and I named it ‘Silly boys....Rockets are for girls.’ I am trying to get my Level 1 Certification and hope to fly it on April 19th when the NRV Rocketry Club (NRVR.org) will meet at Kentland Farms in Blacksburg.”

**Leisa Osborne:** After 30 years of state service, most of it at Virginia Tech in the Department of Philosophy and earlier in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, undergraduate coordinator Leisa Osborne retired March 1, 2014. “Having the opportunity to work with students as they progressed through their academic careers was a privilege. I’ll miss everyone,” said Leisa, “but I’m looking forward to more time with my family, traveling with my husband, and doing lots of reading. I also want to continue to volunteer in the community.”

*We held a retirement reception for Leisa on February 24th. We wish her well in her retirement, and will miss her.*



Leisa's reception

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*“Having the opportunity to work with students as they progressed through their academic careers was a privilege. I’ll miss everyone.” - Leisa Osborne*

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Leisa and Terry

**Holly Belcher:** “I graduated from Concord University in 2008. My studies included Sociology and History, with an emphasis in Philosophy. I’ve been a music teacher, on the side, for about 3 years now (teaching guitar, percussion, and coaching bands). I’d like to go back to school and work on a masters (preferably here at VT!) I have been learning a lot lately, here at VT. I am learning new faces, working with students and training on everything from advising to Banner. I’ve also been forming relationships with various staff members during my transition to this wonderful institute. I hope to familiarize myself more with VT and become a valuable asset to both the students and my peers.

*Holly was hired in March as our new Undergraduate Administrative Specialist, after Leisa retired.*



Holly Belcher

# Conference

## Graduate student conference

The Graduate Philosophy Club held its tenth Annual Graduate Conference on November 1st and 2nd, 2013. The theme was “Topics in Early Modern Philosophy,” and we were honored to feature two keynote speakers from Stanford University: Michael Friedman, who spoke comprehensively about “Space in Kantian Idealism,” and Graciela De Pierris, who gave a detailed account of “Hume’s Skepticism and Inductivism Concerning Space & Geometry.” The selected graduate student speakers hailed from Saint Louis University, CUNY, the University of Iowa and the University of South Florida, and presented insightful papers on aspects of the works of Descartes, Hobbes, and Hume.

Virginia Tech MA students, led by club president Rory Malone and treasurer Derek Haderlie, planned and ran the conference from its inception, reviewing paper submissions, preparing incisive commentaries on the selected presentations, hosting visiting graduate students and arranging a delicious and festive conference banquet. The event was a great success, fostering academic and social connections with the broader philosophical community and giving VT grad students expanded insight into this key period of philosophical history.  $\Phi$



Rory Malone, Va. Tech Master's student



Ryan Ferguson, Va. Tech Master's student



Joe Pitt and Tristram McPherson



Graciela De Pierris



Michael Friedman

# Faculty News

**Professor Emeritus Richard Burian**, a historian and philosopher of biology, has remained active in research during the seven years since he retired from the teaching. Burian and his wife, Prof. Emerita of Biology Anne McNabb, plan to remain in Blacksburg for their entire retirement. In March of 2013, he presented “The Molecularization of Biology and the Regulative Ideal of the Integration of Science” in a series sponsored by the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Indiana University in memory of Albert Coffa. With two colleagues from the International Center for History and Philosophy of Biology in Paris and one colleague each from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, Burian is co-organizing two symposia on the fate of the so-called Modern Synthesis in evolutionary biology.

**Assistant Professor Ben Jantzen** spent the past academic year refining a new approach to the problem of natural kinds. Put plainly, this is the problem of identifying those ways of grouping things that are likely to support successful scientific generalizations. Chemical elements, for instance, are categories over which we can reliably generalize - one sample of hydrogen is like any other. But the category of green things does not support generalizations in this way. How can we tell in advance which categories are like hydrogen and which are like green? Prof. Jantzen’s approach has led to some promising innovations in the assessment of complex scientific models (like those of ecology) and in automated scientific discovery (algorithms that let computers make scientifically significant discoveries). He presented aspects of this work at conferences in New York, Lisbon (Portugal), and Montpellier (France). His book on natural theology, *An Introduction to Design Arguments*, was published by Cambridge University Press this spring.

**Professor Jim Klagge** enjoyed a fall semester without teaching, which allowed him to catch up on research after being chair for 6 years. This led to two papers on Wittgenstein, and more research into Wittgenstein’s influences. In the Spring he was back to teaching, a large lecture of “Knowledge and Reality” and the class on Metaphysics. He used the latter to expose students to Sartre and Rorty, as well as Russell. That’s his contribution to breadth in the department. The day after Christmas, Jim began training for the Blue Ridge Marathon, in Roanoke—billed as “America’s Toughest Road Marathon.” We’ll hope for the best. Jim’s book *Wittgenstein in Exile* continues to get attention, as it is soon to be published in Persian translation!

**Visiting Assistant Professor Joanne Lau’s** paper “Voting in Bad Faith” is forthcoming in *Res Publica*. This spring, she taught Philosophy of Race and Gender as well as Jurisprudence. Our students have benefitted in particular from her occasional “tales from the front line” of legal practice, giving them insight as to what they might do with their legal careers. She still does roller derby and has a home bout (in Christiansburg) on May 18th. She got engaged in November last year.

## Awards

In the last year the VT Student Affairs Office has given “Favorite Faculty” awards to **Tristram McPherson** and TA **Derek Haderlie**.

**Benjamin Jantzen** won a College-wide grant-writing incentive grant, as well as a Virginia Tech mentoring microgrant.

**Michael Moehler** won a faculty mentoring grant as well as a College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Humanities Summer Stipend.

**Lydia Patton**, along with **Ashley Shew**, won a Virginia Tech Symposium Grant, supporting the colloquium series entitled “Scientific and Everyday Images.”

## Run with the Philosophers

For several years now Virginia Tech has commemorated the shootings of 2007 with positive events. One of them is the “3.2 Mile Run in Remembrance of 32,” held around the April 16th date. And each year Prof. Klagge has rallied the philosophers to run together. While the group of philosophers running this year was small, it was spirited.



John Waters, Jim Klagge, and Steve Mischler

# Faculty News

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Sadly (for us!), Professor Lau will be leaving Tech at the end of this semester and moving to Seattle in June.

**Visiting Assistant Professor Marc Lucht** has been traveling the world. In April, he gave the keynote address, entitled “Philosophy as a Way of Living,” at the conference “Philosophy as Inquiry and Way of Life,” held at Kazan State Power Engineering University, in Kazan, Russia. With one of the philosophy faculty from KSPEU, Elina Minnullina, he collaborated over the summer on a paper called “Tolerance, Dialogue, and Inter-confessional Harmony in Tatarstan.” They delivered that paper together at the Concerned Philosophers for Peace conference, held in October in Yosemite National Park. In the spring, Marc became Director of the CLAHS Undergraduate Research Institute.

**Professor Deborah Mayo** writes, “The biggest thing is having my “On the Birnbaum argument for the Strong Likelihood Principle” accepted for publication in *Statistical Science* with an extensive discussion along with my rejoinder. This disproves a theorem that has been at the heart of statistical foundations for over 50 years. (Some are still trying to adhere to it—Bayesians.) It’s very philosophical because the Likelihood Principle purports that all error probabilities, like p-values and confidence levels, are irrelevant to the evidential import of data.”

**Assistant Professor Tristram McPherson** returned to Blacksburg this year from a year as a research fellow in Melbourne, Australia. Since returning, he has published two papers: a defense of ethical veganism, and a discussion of the variety of metaphysical claims that moral realists might commit themselves to. He has presented work at conferences and colloquia at the University of Wisconsin, Bogazici University (Istanbul), Princeton, and Virginia Commonwealth University. He has

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*“This was my first winter in Blacksburg. I made the mistake of parking my truck on the street during one of the biggest snowstorms of recent history. It took me hours to dig it out, and I had to disassemble my mailbox in the process. Will I learn from my mistakes? I doubt it.”*

*- Kelly Trogdon*

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also begun a large new project: co-editing the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, which aims to provide a comprehensive but accessible introduction to contemporary research in more than forty topics in the foundations of ethics. This year, Tristram has been delighted to be back teaching at Tech, offering a steady diet of ethics, ethics, and ethics, at introductory, advanced, and graduate levels. When not working, Tristram can often be found making delicious vegan food. He has also made the transition from singing to his son, Finn (now two years old), to often singing with him. Mercifully, they are usually their own only audience. Last, but *definitely* not least, Tristram is overwhelmingly grateful to be celebrating ten years with his partner Amy Shuster in April.

**Assistant Professor Michael Moehler’s** “The Scope of Instrumental Morality” was published in *Philosophical Studies*. Currently, he is working on a new project in political philosophy that defends a democratic productivist welfare state. Dr. Moehler recently presented a paper at the Chicago APA and gave talks to the Departments of Philosophy at the University of York (UK), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Arizona. At Virginia Tech, Dr. Moehler presented a paper for the ASPECT working papers series and the ‘brown bag’ seminar series in the Department of Economics. On World Philosophy Day, he gave a lecture entitled the “Price of Inequality” at the Public Library in Christiansburg. Also this academic year, Dr. Moehler taught for the first time a new interdisciplinary cross-

listed undergraduate course in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Virginia Tech.

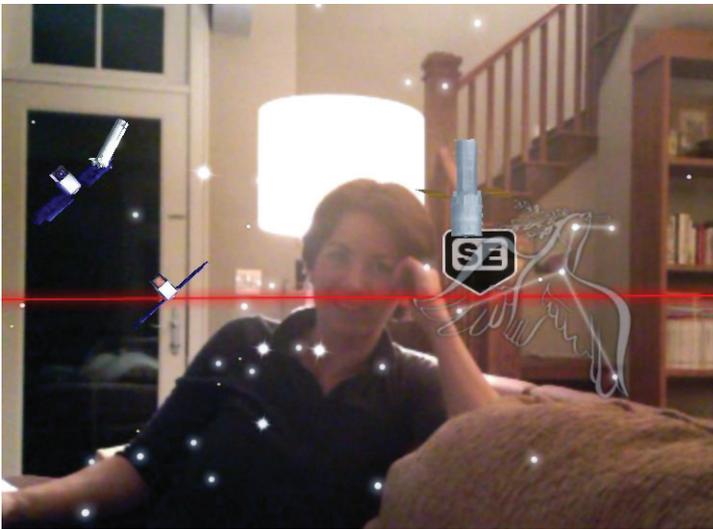
**Associate Professor Walter Ott** presented ‘Archetypes without Patterns: Locke on Relations and Mixed Modes’ in a symposium at the Central APA in February. He continues to work on a book on sensory representation in early modern philosophy. Alongside Brian Ellis and Howard Sankey, he will be one of three keynote speakers at this year’s Rotman Summer Institute, whose theme is “Causal Powers in Science: Blending Historical and Conceptual Perspectives.” In the fall, he will take up a tenured position at the University of Virginia. He’ll especially miss working with such fine colleagues and graduate students, not to mention our outstanding staff. He will not, however, miss working on this newsletter.

**Visiting Assistant Professor Ted Parent’s** paper “Ontic Terms and Metaontology — or, On What There Actually Is,” will be published in *Philosophical Studies*. Recent papers include “Knowing-Wh and Embedded Questions” (*Philosophy Compass*) and “In the Mental Fiction, Mental Fictionalism is Fictitious” (*The Monist*). Ted is currently at work on a book entitled *Philosophical Method for the Self-Blind*, which attempts to solve a new problem about critical reflection. Psychological studies show that we are often ignorant of even our own/ordinary/ beliefs - including reasons for our moral judgments, and even mundane reasons for buying one pair of socks over another! Still, critical reflection on one’s beliefs presupposes knowledge of what one’s beliefs are. So if self-blindness is ubiquitous, why attempt critical reflection? While granting all the data, he argues that, remarkably, we are infallible about a (limited) range of self-discerning judgments. Ted is also co-authoring a paper with graduate student Dan Linford, on some striking similarities between the

## Donations

science vs. religion debate, and the science vs. contemporary metaphysics debate.

**Associate Professor Lydia Patton** recently gave a talk at the Boston Colloquium for Philosophy of Science, “Sympathetic Resonance,” in a symposium in honor of the 150th anniversary of the publication of Hermann von Helmholtz’s *On the Sensations of Tone*. She has two papers about to appear: “Hilbert’s Objectivity,” forthcoming in *Historia Mathematica*, and “Methodology of the Sciences,” forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook for Nineteenth Century German Philosophy*. In Spring of 2014, her textbook *Philosophy, Science, and History: A Guide and Reader* will appear, from Routledge Press. She gave two guest lectures in a course on “Bio-Ethics” in her hometown, Huntington, West Virginia, at Marshall University. It was an excellent opportunity to get to know the university, and to teach a subject she doesn’t often get to teach. She collaborated with a professor there who does medical research into cancer prevention and treatment, Dr. Menashi Cohenford, and got to see his laboratory and meet some of his graduate students. Lydia was just elected Director of Graduate Studies for the next three years and looks forward to working with the graduate students, faculty, and staff.



Lydia Patton with the Hubble Space Telescope, taken with the SkyView app

**Professor and Interim Chair Joe Pitt** received the 2013 Alumni Award for Excellence in Research. At the 2013 meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Technology in Lisbon, Portugal, he presented “Friend’ versus ‘Friend.” A revised version of “Space Telescopes” appears in the second edition of *Ethics, Science, Technology and Engineering*. Other papers focus on David Hume’s moral theory and the moral status of artifacts. And despite being Chair and caring for his wolfhounds, he has two books on philosophy of technology in the works: *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Technology*, edited with Ashley Shew and *Seeing Near and Far: technological innovation and scientific change*.

**Assistant Professor Kelly Trogdon’s** recent work includes “Grounding: Necessary or Contingent?” in the Pacific Philosophical Quarterly. His paper, “The Complete Work,” co-authored with Paisley Livingston, is forthcoming in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Kelly has given a number of talks of late, including “Grounding and Explanation,” at the Central APA in Chicago and the Western Michigan Metaphysics Workshop. Kelly is slowly adjusting to life in Virginia. He writes, “this was my first winter in Blacks-

burg. I made the mistake of parking my truck on the street during one of the biggest snowstorms of recent history. It took me hours to dig it out, and I had to disassemble my mailbox in the process. Will I learn from my mistakes? I doubt it.” ☎

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 times of tight budgets, donations like these can be put to many imaginative uses. They support student travel to conferences, student awards, and conference events. We’d like to acknowledge our most recent donors:

**Anonymous**

**Dr. George Adams, III**

**Eric and Elizabeth Hulett**

**Dale Jones**

**Dominion Foundation (matching gift)**

To make a donation, please contact our Chair, Professor Joe Pitt (jcpitt@vt.edu). If you are interested in making bequests or other special gifts, please contact John King (jhking@vt.edu, or 540-231-8734). ☎

### Philosophy at Tech on Facebook

Want to meet up with other philosophers, VT philosophy alumni, and people with an interest in philosophy at VT?

The VT Philosophy Department Facebook group is up and running:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups.php#/group.php?gid=78145381226>

Click on the link, send us a request to join the group, and you can see pictures of our annual department trip to Floyd, watch the Monty Python philosophy football game (Germans vs. Greeks), and meet with your philosophy peeps.

If you have questions, email Lydia Patton at [critique@vt.edu](mailto:critique@vt.edu)

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Address correction requested



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