Greetings to our Friends!

Eager to find ways to keep in touch with our alumni and friends, we are launching our new Philosophy and World Religions Newsletter. Lots of new things have been happening in our department in recent years. Among other things, our department has received a new name. The “Department of Philosophy and World Religions” has replaced the “Department of Philosophy and Religion.” The change has to do with the religious side of the department. The reason behind the change is that we wanted to clarify for others in the university and around Iowa that the scholars of religion in our department are engaged in the academic study of religion, with a special focus on the history of actual religious traditions around the world. This helps to set us apart from seminary studies where students focus on the doctrine and practice of a specific Christian denomination. We do hope that the new words, “World Religions,” convey more accurately the meaning and worth of what we actually do.

This past May, UNI was honored by the visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Our own Professor James Robinson has his academic specialty in Tibetan Buddhism, the specific religious tradition of the Dalai Lama. Consequently, he was asked to teach two courses on the “Religion of the Dalai Lama,” one honors course, last spring, and one summer course, in preparation for the visit to campus. Professor Robinson was also instrumental in the planning of this event.

As you’ll see in the Newsletter, Harry Brod has a new DVD presenting his lecture, “Asking for It: The Ethics and Erotics of Sexual Consent.” Our department recently had a faculty colloquium on this lecture, which focused on Professor Brod’s principle of “affirmative consent.” He argues that in initial encounters of a sexual nature, persons who initiate sexual activity should not assume that certain dress or gestures by a potential partner possess an implied consent to proceed with sexual engagement, since dress and gestures are easily misinterpreted. If they are misinterpreted and sexual acts are initiated, the result is abuse (if it is against the will of the partner), and if it goes far enough, rape. So it is the ethical obligation of those initiating sexual acts to receive affirmative, explicit consent from the partner before proceeding. In his DVD, Professor Brod develops this idea in a philosophically sophisticated but student friendly way. You might like to check it out.

Under the leadership of Professor Margaret Holland, our department has begun a new Philosophy Club. Our philosophy students have been very active, meeting at least twice a month. Once a month, they offer students pizza and soda, which as you can imagine, is a bit of a draw. A little while ago, I was amazed when I glanced into their meeting, for I saw over 25 students! This group occasionally invites a philosophy professor to talk about a specific issue with them. Last spring, the speaker was Carla Fehr, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Iowa State, and this fall, their guest will be Elliott Sober, Hans Reichenbach Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His specialty is the philosophy of biology, and he will be speaking on “Darwin and Intelligent Design.”

We hope this newsletter will be a way for you not only to follow some of the things we are doing in the department, but we also hope that it will be a vehicle for you to stay in touch with each other. At the end of the newsletter, we have a form that you can fill out to send to us to let us know what you are currently doing or have been doing in the recent past. In the next issue, we will print your news so other alums will be able to hear what you are up to. Also, you can find electronic versions of this and future newsletters on our department website (http://www.uni.edu/philrel/).

Next time you are in the area, we encourage you to stop by for a visit. We'd love to see you and hear in person about your own recent adventures.

Sincerely,

Jerry Soneson
Head of the Department
Jerry Soneson has experimented with a new course, “The Idea of the University.” He has designed and team-taught this course with Professor Scott Cawelti and Professor James Lubker. Last fall they taught this as an honors capstone course. They examined the history of the university during the first half of the course, and then looked more closely at issues that are most pressing for the university today and in the future, such as tenure and academic freedom, grade inflation, intercollegiate athletics, public support of the university, the role of the liberal arts in contrast to professional courses in business and education, and so on. This course is quite colorful for the students due to James Lubker, since he has many and varied stories about the university as an administrator, having been Dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts for many years and Acting Vice-President and Provost for four years.

Professor Harry Brod’s DVD, “Asking For It: The Ethics and Erotics of Sexual Consent,” was released in September by Media Education Foundation. In the DVD, Professor Brod discusses the importance of approaching our sexual interactions with great care and understanding the principle that consent must be given in every interaction and must never be assumed. Brod’s discussion “challenges young people to envision a model of sexual interaction that is most erotic precisely when it is most thoughtful and empathetic.” The DVD is “Ideal for classes in gender studies, communication, and sociology, and especially useful for extracurricular programs and workshops.”

For the past six years, Betty DeBerg has been a member of the American Academy of Religion’s (AAR) Task force on Religion in the Schools. The Task Force recently completed work on a set of guidelines for how to include material about religion in a constitutional and academic way in K-12 curricula. The AAR is the nation’s largest association of scholars of religion, and its Board of Directors approved the guidelines last spring and will be responsible for dissemination of them. See them yourself at aarweb.org. You may print this in PDF form, and disseminate it yourself as you’d like. It is not copyrighted.

Kenneth Atkinson, Associate Professor of Religion presented the paper, “Pompey the Great in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Jewish Texts: How the Romans Used Religion to Conquer Jerusalem in 63 BCE,” at the Judaism in the Mediterranean Context congress in Ravenna, Italy, this summer. Atkinson and Jodi Magness also published an article, “Josephus’s Essenes and the Qumran Community,” in the Journal of Biblical Literature. Atkinson was nominated and elected for membership in the European Association for Jewish Studies. He also received permission from the Vatican to visit the Roman cemetery and traditional tomb and bones of St. Peter underneath St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. This semester Atkinson was awarded the Commander’s Award for Public Service medal from the government for his work educating ROTC students about Islam and religious and cultural tolerance. This medal is the fourth highest honor the United States Department of the Army can bestow upon a civilian.
Martie Reineke

Professor Martie Reineke did not meet David Schwimmer (“Ross” on Friends) in April; however, she was invited to make three contributions to his most recent creative achievement: Trust. Trust, a play that Schwimmer wrote and directed, had its world premiere at the Lookingglass Theatre in Chicago where Schwimmer is a member of the repertory company. It is a play about an internet sexual predator. Professor Reineke wrote a short essay, “House of Mirrors: Predatory Violence in Trust,” which was published in Trust: Study Guide. The guide is posted on the website of the Lookingglass Theatre. Prior to one performance, Professor Reineke also offered a pre-play lecture, “Moral Panic, Mimetic Theory, and Trust,” which was hosted by the Raven Foundation. After the performance, Professor Reineke joined the actors on the stage for a “talk back” with the audience about issues raised by the play. The film version of Schwimmer’s play, also titled Trust and starring Clive Owen, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival recently.

Dr. Harry Brod

Dr. Harry Brod is one of six professors at the University of Northern Iowa to receive the Regents’ Award for Faculty Excellence last academic school year. He was chosen for this award because of his excellent record of achievements in the professional areas of teaching, scholarship, and service.

He has personally influenced and inspired many in his role as a public educator, delivering many lectures on community-relative topics such as “The Ethics and Erotics of Sexual Consent” (concerning gender violence prevention) as well as relaying his experiences as a child of Holocaust survivors. At UNI, Professor Brod has contributed greatly to the development of our Humanities courses.

Professor Brod’s distinguished record of scholarly achievement and contributions to the field are numerous. He has often posed and answered critical methodological and epistemological questions that demand to be answered in any field seeking recognition in the academy. Brod’s leadership is recognized in moving the field away from the common concept of “masculinity” to embracing diversity. This concept is illuminated in his first book, The Making of Masculinities: The New Men’s Studies.

Previous Department Members Recognized

Other members of the Philosophy and World Religions Department have previously received the Regents’ Award. They are recognized by their services to UNI, their ability to go above and beyond their administrative responsibilities, and their excellence in teaching, research, professional practice and service.

Kenneth Atkinson
Associate Professor of Religion
Recognized in Fall 2008

William W. Clohesy
Professor of Philosophy
Recognized in Fall 2002

Martha J. Reineke
Professor of Religion
Recognized in Fall 1997

Look for UNI Department of Philosophy & World Religions on Facebook to stay updated with department news and upcoming events.
Susan Hill is a religion professor and has been at UNI since 1994. Prior to coming to UNI, Professor Hill did her graduate work at the Divinity School at the University of Chicago before teaching at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine for one year and then teaching for a year and a half at Macalester in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Professor Hill says it was hard to get used to living in Iowa when she came to UNI. Having grown up in St. Paul, Minnesota, and going to graduate school in Chicago, it was hard for her to get used to a small town. She had enjoyed going to lots of events and “fabulous restaurants” that big cities had to offer, but after moving here she found that, at the time, this area was lacking in those features, especially restaurants that were not chains. Thankfully, Cup of Joe, a coffee shop in downtown Cedar Falls, was just opening, and was able to get her through those first few years in this area. Hill did, of course, find many things to love about the area, including always finding a parking spot, not having rush hour, getting through the grocery store quickly -- all things she did not find in the big cities she previously lived in.

Professor Hill says one of her favorite things about UNI is the people in general, especially her colleagues. She also truly enjoys her students, particularly the ones who are open to different perspectives, willing to really think about things and work hard. She loves “watching the light bulb go off.” “There is nothing better than having a conversation and seeing the look of ‘Oh, I get this.’” She feels that sudden discovery is an amazing thing.

The major in The Study of Religion at UNI has much to offer students, according to Professor Hill. “The people who are going to be the most successful getting jobs can write, think well, be creative, and have a sense of what matters.” The classes in this major are able to help students to do this. “Understanding religion allows people to learn how to think and write. They can think about what they are presented with.”

The classes in the major that Professor Hill teaches are Myth and Symbol, Women and Christianity, Religion and Sexuality, and Food in Religious Perspective. Even though she enjoys the upper level classes that she teaches, she still says her favorite class to teach is Humanities I. Professor Hill enjoys being able to teach all sorts of things in Humanities I, not just religion. She feels it is great for students to take Humanities, even though they don’t have a choice, because it gives a sense of western history that is important for people to have. That way they can see the context from which contemporary ideas come.

Professor Hill has been working on completing her first book Eating to Excess: The Meaning of Gluttony and the Fat Body in the Ancient World. Hill started working on this project awhile ago. With the growth of the so-called “obesity epidemic,” she noticed a lot of moral talk about the fat body. “We talk about fat people being lazy and having no self-control, but I wondered where that came from.” In her research, Hill looked into gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, and realized that the way people thought about gluttony in the ancient world was different than what people think now. Her research led Hill to believe this topic is important in our contemporary culture, so she decided to write a book about it. Professor Hill plans to complete her book by November this year.

Not only is Professor Hill excited to complete her book during this school year, but also she is excited to teach her courses this year and interact with her students. She wants to encourage UNI students to see that curiosity goes a long way, and that it is important to be interested in the world around you.
Edgar Boedeker can hardly believe he is beginning his eleventh year as a philosophy professor at UNI. Professor Boedeker completed his graduate work at Northwestern University, as he felt it was the best school at the time to study both major branches of contemporary philosophy: “Continental” and “analytic” philosophy. In his fourth and fifth years of his graduate study, he did research and took a number of courses at the University of Freiburg, Germany, on a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service. While he was there, he studied with Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, the main editor of the collected works of Martin Heidegger. Following this, Boedeker did post-doctoral research at the Edmund Husserl Archive at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, located in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. For the next year he taught at Northern Illinois University, outside of Chicago, before coming to UNI.

Born in St. Louis, Boedeker was familiar and comfortable with the Midwest, so it was not hard for him to get used to living in Iowa. One thing that was different was being far from a large metropolis, since he had spent much of his time in cities on the East Coast and in Chicago. Upon moving to Iowa, Professor Boedeker was pleasantly surprised to learn “how relatively politically progressive it is, how much interesting music is going on here, and how many truly excellent students I’ve been able to teach over the years. By no means is Iowa just ‘corn and beans!’”

Professor Boedeker specializes in two main areas: the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who focused on exploring language and logic; and that of Martin Heidegger, who developed the “phenomenological” method of philosophy to explore human nature and the nature of modernity. These topics are important to Boedeker and are the reason he teaches in this subject. He says that “instead of trying to ‘solve’ tired old philosophical debates by arguing for one side or another, they both employ very careful descriptions of the phenomena that we experience to reveal the faulty assumptions that have given rise to many of these so-called ‘problems of philosophy.’”

In addition to classes on philosophy of language, phenomenology, and contemporary “nihilism,” some of the other classes that Professor Boedeker teaches in this major are “Philosophy: The Art of Thinking,” “Elementary Logic,” and “History of Philosophy: Renaissance through Enlightenment.” He said he could not pick a favorite class that he teaches, however, for “that’s like asking a parent which is their favorite child. I can honestly say that I enjoy teaching all of my courses and try to keep things interesting both for me and my students by rethinking and revising them almost every time I teach them.”

Professor Boedeker feels the philosophy major at UNI offers students the opportunity to develop their abilities to think critically, read challenging texts, write clearly, understand our current socio-political-historical situation, and be trained in leadership — all abilities needed after graduating. “In my own classes,” he says, “I try to help students think critically about the kinds of lives we ought to pursue.” When asked about what he would most like UNI students to know about the Philosophy major, he replied: “both the President of the Northern Iowa Student Government and the chief editor of the Northern Iowan student newspaper are Philosophy majors. What better ‘advertisement’ could there be for the value of a Philosophy major, both during and after college, than this?”

For several years, Professor Boedeker has been working on two main projects. One is a book entitled Wittgenstein’s Basic Demand, which offers a radically new interpretation of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. The other project is a translation of Heidegger’s major early work, Being and Time. He says that “although there are already two English translations of this book, I’ve had to spend so much time pointing out problems with them in my teaching and publications that I decided it would be easier just to do another one from scratch!”

Professor Boedeker is enjoying this school year this far and is specifically looking forward to continuing to teach the class on philosophy in the Renaissance and Enlightenment. He has been enjoying delving deeply with his students into the theological and political contexts out of which modern science and philosophy arose.
Katie Berge is a senior pursuing the majors of world religion, biology and biochemistry. She graduated from Iowa City West High School in Iowa City in 2006 and started at UNI in the fall of 2006. She is currently in her fifth year at UNI. Katie decided to pursue a major in world religion after she took Dr. Reineke’s Religions of the World class as a liberal arts class. She was intrigued by the differences she saw in religious cultures and traditions found around the world.

Katie is undecided on her favorite philosopher, but she did say, however, that she has recently enjoyed reading a variety of texts from the theologians of the Reformation period. Katie is interested in this period because she feels it has shaped the structure and evolution of modern Christianity. “Theologically, it changed the understanding of God in a huge way, which has affected millions of Christians throughout the world, then and now.”

Of all of the religion classes she has taken, Katie’s favorite class was Dr. Reineke’s course “Why We Believe.” “I really enjoyed using Psychoanalytic Theory to examine the ‘God perception’ and examining the role of scapegoats and monsters within today’s society.” Katie also enjoyed Dr. DeBerg’s “Religion in America” class because it spoke about the “religious traditions unique to the United States with regard to Constitutional Law.”

Her advice to incoming religion majors is to “take a variety of classes from the Department of Philosophy & World Religions because religion is such a diverse category that there is a lot to learn in a relatively short amount of time. Making sure to take advantage of the variety of classes offered here is essential to having a well rounded understanding of the study of religions.”
Last year, Zach Paige graduated with a psychology and philosophy major from UNI. Prior to attending UNI, he graduated from high school in Grundy Center. As an underclassman he signed up for Philosophy: Basic Questions (now entitled Philosophy: The Art of Thinking), a class taught by Dr. Holland. In Dr. Holland’s class he was assigned John Stuart Mill’s book, “On Liberty.” After studying Mill’s book, Zack decided to become a Philosophy major. Zach states that “(Mill’s) arguments about the importance of freedom of thought and expression will stick with me throughout my life.”

When asked who his favorite philosophers are, Zach explained that he enjoys the teachings of John Stuart Mill and Socrates. Socrates is a favorite for Zack because “he is basically the grandfather of philosophy as we know it. His presence in the Platonic dialogues is a great way to begin to understand some of the ‘big questions’ in philosophy…”

In his spare time, he puts on magic performances because he feels that it is a unique way to apply his studies outside the classroom. Zach’s psychological training has given him insight into the various ways that our brains can be deceived, where his study of philosophy has helped to develop his creativity and critical thinking skills which are invaluable for entertaining audiences.

In order to enrich their experiences at UNI, Zach suggested that if students are thinking about a philosophy or religion major, they should take a couple classes with a variety of professors and communicate with them during their office hours to learn even more. He said that there are many specialties in the department and so there will be at least one professor that is fluent in a topic that could be especially fascinating to different people.

In his last semester at UNI, Zach took Behavior Modification, Psychology & Law, Human Origins, and Personal Wellness. He said that “a light course load my final semester gave me the opportunity to spend more time on the research projects I’ll be working on in the masters program in Psychology here at UNI.

Year: Graduated in May of 2010.

Major: Double Major in Psychology and Philosophy, Minor in Ethics.

Favorite Classes:
- Ethics (Holland, 650:142)
- The Human Person (Not currently being offered this semester)
- Philosophy of Language: Wittgenstein (Boedeker, 650:166g)

Most Important Things Learned: Self-Awareness and Critical Thinking

ZACH PAIGE
On April 7 Dr. Carla Fehr, an Associate Professor at Iowa State University, was invited to UNI by the UNI Philosophy Student Club to present a lecture about her current topic of research and interest—The Philosophy of Science: The Evolution of Sex and Pragmatic Mechanism.

As Dr. Fehr said, this lecture was not about the “fun stuff;” rather, she focused on the question of pluralism in the evolution of sexual reproduction—why sexual reproduction was not eliminated by evolution eons ago due to its inefficiency and why asexual reproduction did not take its place. She argued that this is a philosophical question as well as a scientific one, and she presented three different theories regarding the reason sexual reproduction won out over asexual reproduction on earth.

In her lecture, Dr. Fehr presented the view of “Pragmatic Mechanism, which ameliorates [the] conflict between pluralism and mechanism by demonstrating that explanations are descriptions of mechanisms that are consistent with the research traditions and scientific values of a given research community and that different communities can have different research traditions and different sets of values.” More information about this is found on her website (www.public.iastate.edu/~cfehr).

Approximately 30 people came to listen to Dr. Fehr’s lecture in the University Room at Maucker Union, including professors and students from several disciplines. This lecture was just one of the several events that the philosophy club sponsors throughout the year.

Dr. Fehr received her Ph.D from Duke University and currently specializes in Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Biology, and Feminist Science Studies. She has published several articles and is currently writing a book on pragmatic mechanism and explanatory pluralism.
The UNI Philosophy Students Club hosted a discussion and lecture about Darwinism and Intelligent Design by guest lecturer Elliott Sober on Oct. 29. The acclaimed professor from University of Wisconsin - Madison has published several papers on the Philosophy of Science, and his book *Evidence and Evolution - The Logic Behind the Science* was published by the Cambridge University Press in 2008. The day’s events kicked off with a small-group discussion at 2 p.m. in Baker 161, which was followed by a lecture in the Center for Multicultural Education at 3:30. The events were a perfect chance to learn about a hotly-debated topic from one of its experts in a field that isn’t taught on campus.

The Dalai Lama has come to be seen as an embodiment of compassion and devotion to world peace. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his non-violent struggle for peace and justice in Tibet, his home country that has been absorbed into China. As both the head of state and the spiritual leader of Tibet, he, and the 13 previous Dalai Lamas, are believed to be manifestations of . . . the Bodhisattva of Compassion and patron saint of Tibet. The 14th Dalai Lama assumed political power in 1950, the year after China invaded Tibet. It was not long after that that he had to flee Tibet into India. Since that time, he has worked for the democratization and liberation of Tibet by initiating a variety of peace proposals. His spiritual emphasis on compassion and overcoming suffering has led him also to work for global peace, which includes significant emphasis on the global development of environmental justice. We were very fortunate to receive him at UNI and to hear him talk about his vision of the role of education in the development of both peace and justice in the world today.
Adrianne Hallett is a Philosophy and Study of Religion alumni, who also received minors in Ethics and Women’s Studies. She is currently working as Professional Staff for an individual senator’s legislative assistant, specifically part of the appropriations subcommittee on Labor and Health and Human Services and Education.

When asked why she chose UNI, Adrianne admitted that she had received scholarships in the Provost Scholar program. While at UNI she was active with the Speech Team and participated in many public speaking tournaments which allowed her to travel a lot. Eventually, however, the traveling got to be too much to handle with the bigger workload as an upper-classman, so she began to focus on working within the department and working in conference and visitors’ services.

Adrianne is confident that UNI was a good choice for her because it provided her a great education. She was particularly happy with philosophy since it interested and challenged her, allowing her to feel engaged in what she was learning. Adrianne also stresses that while at UNI she sharpened her decision-making skills, and is now able to use that logic in her current profession. She said that “Learning how to participate in strategic thinking came from my degree from UNI. It also allowed me to listen for assumptions behind the talking points. Being a good listener is just as important as being a good thinker.”

Advice for Majors: “Take the opportunities presented to you as an undergrad, such as internships and study abroad opportunities.”

Favorite Professors or Classes while at UNI:
• Martie Reineke’s classes
• Susan Hill’s Women and Religion and
• Bill Clohesy’s Greek Democracy

Hometown: Cedar Rapids

Favorite Philosopher: Aristotle, for the idea that we are always drawn toward our perfect self. “He makes me feel that every day is a new possibility and a new choice.”

“Find a subject matter that you are curious about, because curiosity is the best thing you have going for you.”
Rick Grisel is a UNI alumni from the Department of Philosophy and World Religions. He currently lives in San Francisco and is the Executive Director of College Buzz, a non-profit website geared towards “Comprehensive, Expert College Counseling… For Free!” www.collegebuzz.org. He is going to Law School this fall to study Environmental Law.

At UNI Rick majored in both the Study of Religion and Philosophy. He actively participated in tennis and the Greek community as well as student politics. He believes that these activities were important to have as social outlets to feel connected and be involved. He admits that participating in these and other activities while as an undergrad helped with his personal development and assisted with understanding and interacting in a world full of people.

When asked if UNI was the right choice, Rick is unsure, but he believes that it was a good choice because of how his studies fueled his love for philosophy. He also appreciated how his BA assisted in his intellectual development, especially in learning how to be a good, clear thinker. He stated that “it [being able to think well] is relevant to everything and prepares you for the world.”

After attending UNI, Rick pursued a masters degree in theology and philosophy at Yale, since he initially wanted to be a professor. Yet during grad school his goals changed and he wanted his work to truly have a direct influence on the world. This drive is what eventually brought him to his current position as the Executive Director of CollegeBuzz.org, where he assists students going into college for the first time.

“Be prepared to write, and open to advice about how you write. Be prepared to completely change how you write. Improvements can always be made.”
In order to keep us and your UNI colleagues informed of your activities, please complete the form below and return to “Department of Philosophy & World Religions,” UNI, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0501, or send an e-mail to Helen.Harrington@uni.edu. We are particularly interested in the current career paths of our alumni.

last name  
first name  
middle/maiden name

UNI degree(s)-years

address

city  
state  
zip-code

Is this a new address?  yes  no

E-mail address

spouse’s name  
Is spouse a UNI alum?  yes  no

Your position and employer

New items of interest:

The University of Northern Iowa is an equal opportunity educator and employer with a comprehensive plan for affirmative action.