

Rutgers Philosophy Newsletter

Fall 2009



The Department Moves to a New Home on College Avenue

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The department continues to attract top faculty and graduate students. Meet the newest members of the family.

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Undergraduates have the opportunity to work with faculty on research. Read about one recent project.

On August 11th the trucks pulled up to Davison, the boxes were packed, and the long-awaited day arrived. Rutgers Philosophy moved to its new home on the College Avenue Campus. The two new buildings on Seminary Place have been fondly nicknamed the Delta and Omega houses. Faculty and graduate student offices are finally set up, whiteboards are installed, and everyone is enjoying the view of the Raritan from our new lounge. Some were skeptical as to whether the department would survive the change. But all were relieved when, at the first colloquium in the new seminar room, Tim Maudlin served up one of his classic hardball questions. We're back to business!

Departmental assistants Mercedes Diaz, Ann Lipovski, Pauline Mitchell and Stacey Messing went above and beyond the call of duty coordinating movers and organizing the event. Asked to describe the undertaking for the newsletter, they quoted Einstein: "Only those who attempt the absurd can achieve the impossible."

Rutgers Philosophers in the Community and Around the World: From the Voorhees Mall to Budapest, Hungary.



Above: Scott Thompson explains Moore's anti-skeptical argument to visitors at Rutgers Day. Below: Brian Weatherson and Will Starr meet as boxes are unpacked in the new department



Philosophers make a splash at first annual Rutgers Day Celebration

On April 25th, faculty, graduate students and undergraduate majors in the department came together to host an exhibit at the first annual Rutgers Day celebration. Our Philosophical Café on the Voorhees Mall attracted thousands of passers-by who were challenged to evaluate thought experiments, solve logic puzzles, and ask “big questions.” Espresso, cappuccino, and sweets were on hand for visitors who stopped to talk, as were souvenir “brains in a vat.” We also debuted our official 2009-2010 departmental t-shirts, designed by Saba Bazargan and Janelle Derstine.

Conditionals Summer School in Budapest

This summer, from July 20-31, 2009, approximately fifty philosophers and linguists gathered at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary for a summer course on conditionals, run by our own Barry Loewer and Jason Stanley. Five Rutgers grad students joined grad

students and faculty from all corners of the world, from Australia to Kenya to Serbia, to study the philosophical and linguistic issues surrounding conditionals. The newsletter's Budapest field agent, Karen Lewis, reports: “We studied conditionals intensively for up to eight hours a day, listening to lectures by many who have made seminal contributions to the field, including Robert Stalnaker, Angelika Kratzer, Dorothy Edgington, Alan Hajek, Loewer and Stanley. In addition to thinking about conditionals, we enjoyed the Budapest nightlife, sampled Hungarian cuisine, took a boat ride on the Danube, and visited some of Budapest's many Turkish bathhouses. Though the conditionals course was challenging, I can safely say the most challenging part of the trip was learning how to say 'cheers' in Hungarian. Egészségedre!”

Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy Celebrates 15th Anniversary

This past July, fifteen promising undergraduate philosophers from around the country came to Rutgers to debate Cartesian

skepticism, legal theories of blame, and social epistemology. Students have the chance to meet with prominent faculty, debate papers, and learn the ins and outs of applying to PhD programs.

Howard McGary has organized the department's Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy since 1994. The program has been very successful in encouraging underrepresented groups in the field. McGary shares, "(The Institute) has inspired over sixty percent of past participants to pursue graduate degrees in philosophy."

Meet the Newest Members of the Department...

This Fall, two new faculty members and six new graduate students joined the Rutgers Philosophy community. We caught up with the new additions and asked them to answer three biographical questions: 1) Where were you before coming to Rutgers? 2) What are your areas of interest? And 3) Say you were about to be stranded on a desert island. What *one* philosophical article written in the last 100 years would you take with you? Here are their responses:

Andy Egan (Faculty)

Came From: Michigan
Areas of Interest: Language, Mind, Metaphysics, Metaethics
Desert Island Paper: "Something really long, with a lot going on... Maybe Darwall, Gibbard and Railton's "Toward Fin de Siecle Ethics"..."

Thony Gillies (Faculty)

Came From: Michigan
Areas of Interest: Language, Epistemology, Decision/Game Theory
Desert Island Paper: "Something long but pretty. Maybe Montague's "The Proper Treatment of Quantification in Ordinary

English" or Kamp's "Formal properties of 'now'". I'd probably cheat and take Lewis's Counterfactuals book, though."

Bob Beddor (1st Year)

Came From: Brown
Areas of Interest: Epistemology, Mind, and Language
Desert Island Paper: "Elusive Knowledge" by David Lewis

Marco Dees (1st Year)

Came From: St. Andrews
Areas of Interest: Any problem that depends crucially in explanation— Metaphysics, Mind, Phil. Science, Epistemology and Ethics.
Desert Island Paper: "Rigid Designators and Mind-Brain Identity" (Maxwell)

Mark Lee (1st Year)

Came From: Toronto
Areas of Interest: Metaphysics, Language, Mind, Ethics
Desert Island Paper: "Famine, Affluence and Morality." (Singer)

Katy Meadows (1st Year)

Came From: Stanford
Areas of Interest: Ancient Philosophy (and Many Other Topics)
Desert Island Paper: "A month of graduate school has convinced me that I don't know nearly enough to answer this question. (And I'm hoping I learn enough in between now and when the newsletter comes out that any answer I came up with now wouldn't still be true then!)"

Lisa Miracchi (1st Year)

Came From: Harvard
Areas of Interest: Mind, Epistemology, and "Much Else Besides"
Desert Island Paper: "After two months here, I've absorbed so much new information that I've had to suspend all of my philosophical beliefs... Let's hope I don't get shipped off to a desert



Above: Participants in the Conditionals Workshop with Jason Stanley on the banks of the Danube. Below: Students and faculty mingle at the Summer Institute's opening reception.



island before I sort things out a little bit."

Ron Planer (1st Year)

Came From: Rutgers (A Double Knight!)
Areas of Interest: Mind, Language, Cognitive Science
Desert Island Paper: "This is really hard. Maybe "Sensations and Brain Processes" by J.J.C. Smart."



The Home Platos—The Philosophy grad student softball team.

What's Going on with the Graduate Students?

Grad Students Field Two Intramural Sports Teams

"What are we going to do? Win! What are we going to feel? Nothing! Why? We have no qualia!!!" Walk by the Douglass soccer fields on a Sunday night this Fall and you just might hear this cheer exclaimed by the Phenomenal Zombies, the Philosophy department's graduate and undergraduate intramural soccer team. This is the third consecutive year we've fielded a soccer team. Organized by Erik Hoverstein and Preston Greene, the Zombies have enjoyed several winning seasons. As of this newsletter, the Zombies are tied for second in the league.

And this past Spring, we added a new sport to the mix, fielding an intramural softball team called the Home Platos. The Platos were somewhat less successful than the Zombies. (On at least one occasion they invoked the league's "Mercy Rule.") But they enjoyed several epic showdowns with the Environmental Science graduate students, and the losing season didn't keep them from throwing some great post-game parties at On the Border.

Grad Talk Series Give Students a Forum for Testing Out Papers and Working Through Objections

On Thursdays when the department doesn't have a regular colloquium, the graduate students host a less formal speaker series drawing from their own ranks. Featuring pizza, beer, and lively debate, students present work in progress on a wide range of topics. This Ricardo Mena and Preston Greene are serving as official organizers and there are talks by seven graduate students. Nick Beckstead kicked the series off explaining Harsanyi's theorem and ways that it might be generalized to support arguments for utilitarianism. Luvell Anderson gave a theory of racist humor and the conditions under which it is morally objectionable. Visiting student Armin Schulz gave a theory on the evolution of beliefs

(Continued)

There are fifty-six graduate students in the department this year, representing five continents and working on a wide range of projects.

and desires. And Meghan Sullivan argued that four-dimensionalist theories of change entail unjustified skepticism about experience. Still to come are Preston Greene on rationality and Newcomb's puzzle, Jenn Wang on modal semantics, and a special guest appearance by Rutgers alum, Andrew Sepielli.

Students Discuss Their Research Interests

As in past newsletters, we again asked two upper-level graduate students to describe their dissertation research. Here's what some of the grads are up to...

Luvell Anderson Develops Theories of Racist Speech

"I have been working on two things over the past few months. One is a project about the offensiveness of racial slurs. Ernie Lepore and I have co-written a paper on slurs that attempts to explain why they are offensive. The basic story is that slurs are prohibited words whose power to offend need not be content-based. The second project I am working on is about racist humor. I argue that racial jokes are racist when the speaker aims to tease members of some perceived racial group in virtue of certain stereotypes associated with that group. Racial jokes are not racist when the speaker has as her aim the subverting of those stereotypes and there is a reasonable expectation her audience can pick up on this aim."

Alex Morgan Studies Processes of Concept and Language Acquisition

"I hope to shed light on the nature of mental representation by investigating how

representations are acquired. In my dissertation, I criticize -- and seek to improve upon -- the theories of learning that underly the work of three prominent cognitive scientists. First, I examine Randy Gallistel's claim that the neural mechanisms of learning in many animals have the functional architecture of Turing Machines. Second, I consider Jerry Fodor's view that concept learning is strictly impossible, since to learn a given concept we must already possess it. Finally, I evaluate Noam Chomsky's claim that language acquisition involves the fixation of a finite set of innate parameters, rather than genuine learning. I argue that these views, which are united in their rejection of empiricism, are undermined by contemporary computational theories of learning, which emphasize that learning is neither purely environmentally driven, nor driven solely by endogenous factors, but rather involves an interaction between prior information and incoming information from experience."

Job Market Corner

In Spring 2009, six Rutgers graduate students finished their PhDs and began post-docs or tenure track jobs. Here's a look at their destinations and dissertation titles:

Saba Bazargan- UCSD (TT), "Individual Responsibility for Collectively Committed Harms".

Carlos Montemayor- San Francisco State University (TT), "The Psychology of Time and its Philosophical Implications."

Josh Orozco- Whitworth College (TT), "Knowledge and Intellectual Skill."



Above: Angela Harper and Jenn Wang are excited about a departmental colloquium! Below: Rutgers grad students with Dean Zimmerman at LaGuardia Airport on their way to Notre Dame.



Iris Oved- University of Arizona (Post-Doc, Computer Science), "The Coining of Mental Terms."

Andrew Sepielli- Toronto (TT), "Along an Imperfectly-Lighted Path: Practical Rationality and Normative Uncertainty."

Stephanie Wykstra- Stonehill College (TT), "A Defense of Cartesian Certainty."



Kimberley Johnson, Eitan Kagedan and Holly Smith meet for their research project on moral agency and cognition.

Aresty Grants Enable Students to Conduct Original Research with Faculty

Kimberley Johnson and Eitan Kagedan were disappointed with their Honors ethics seminar last spring finally came to an end. "I'd never been so excited about writing papers before.", Kimberley reports. Both undergraduate second years were looking for a way to build upon their interest in Philosophy, when they found out that their professor, Holly Smith, was working on a book on moral cognition and looking for research assistants. Specifically, she needed students to help develop a theory on the moral agency of cognitively disabled individuals. When they heard the Aresty Center would fund a research project pairing them with Holly, they knew "instantly" that they wanted to pursue it. Both Eitan and Kimberley had significant personal experiences to bring to the project. Eitan worked at a camp for special needs children, and Kimberley's father is a special education teacher in New York. Kimberley shares, "I got so excited about the

pitch. My dad shares stories everyday about encounters with students struggling to control themselves and work out problems with each other." Eitan could relate: "It was tough interacting at camp with kids who cannot understand or empathize with one another." How can children and adults with these disabilities be accommodated in a moral system, especially when traditional approaches to moral philosophy assume moral agents are fully rational? Working together over the course of the next year, these three hope to find out.

Graduating Majors Enter Top Philosophy Graduate Programs

At this past summer's Departmental Honors reception, faculty recognized graduating students who had exceptional performance in their Philosophy courses and completed independent thesis research projects. Several graduates are moving on to top-ranked Philosophy PhD programs. Many of these students participated in the department's active

Undergrads Dive Into Philosophical Research

undergraduate Philosophy Club and worked on the club's journal. Here are a few quick highlights of graduates and their destinations:

Zach Perry (NYU Philosophy PhD Program)

Ron Planer (Rutgers Philosophy PhD Program)

Cory Nichols (Princeton Philosophy PhD Program)

Derek Anderson (UT Austin Philosophy PhD Program)

Brandi Bernoskie (UCSD Philosophy and Science PhD Program)

Ryan McKendrick (Working in cognitive science lab at Yale)

Paul Chiariello (Fulbright Grant for research in Africa)

Where else can a Philosophy BA take you? Other 2009 graduates are currently working in business consulting, attending law school, serving as facilitators for Americorps, and working toward masters degrees in library science.

A Letter from the Chair:

Greetings: I am writing this from my office in Philosophy's new home in Seminary 1 on College Avenue. For years the philosophy department has been hoping to move to the College Avenue Campus. Most of us thought this would never happen. Jerry Fodor predicted that the move would occur only after the world ended (an event he often predicts). But in spring 2008 vice President Furmanski arranged the leasing of two houses owned by the New Brunswick Seminary and announced that Philosophy would move into them by the end of 2008. The two houses needed major renovations since they consisted mostly of apartments for seminarians. Ruth Chang and I spent many hours with architects, Rutgers contractors and facilities, information technologists, furniture suppliers etc. planning the renovations and the offices of our new home. Then came the "economic downturn of 2008". The move was off. Fodor was right. But in June 2009 Dean Greenberg gave the go-ahead for a less costly renovation and at the end of August the department moved. At first there was chaos. Boxes were everywhere, bees in the offices, no lights, leaky pipes, and so on. But slowly things have been taking shape. I think I speak for all of us that we are very happy in our new quarters. And the world has not ended (Fodor says that I just haven't noticed). The move would have been impossible without the immense work put in by our staff and SAS. We all owe many thanks to Pauline, Mercedes, Ann, and Stacey and to Dean Greenberg and vice dean Bristol.

The move is not the only big

news. We have added two superb young philosophers to our faculty, Andy Egan and Thony Gillies. Thony works on philosophy of language and formal epistemology and Andy works on almost everything in analytic philosophy. Thony adds to our already top ranked program in philosophy of language. Andy helps strengthen us in mind and metaphysics (also right at the top). Andy will also be teaching a "signature" course on the ethics of food. It is likely we will be making some further blockbuster appointments in the near future.

The seminary buildings *feel* like a place to do philosophy. We still need to furnish our library and seminar room, fix the porches, paint the front doors, set up equipment to broadcast our colloquia and so on. When all this is done our home will rival some of the storied philosophy departments at Harvard, Michigan, and Princeton. Some of these projects will require money that the department will need to raise. We would also like to raise funds to establish fellowships, scholarships and a chair in philosophy. We have begun working on fund raising with the Rutgers Foundation. If any readers would like to know more [click here](#).

By our next newsletter we will have completely settled into our new home. I will be able to report to you about the exciting seminars, colloquia, and conferences that are scheduled for the next few months.

Cheers,

Barry

The Department's new home on College Avenue



Newsletter Credits, Etc.

Photos: All photos by Meghan Sullivan except (p.2-bottom): Jason Stanley, (p.3-top): Will Starr.

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