

## Department Head Hello

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Greetings PAR alumni! It's been another exciting year in the life of the Philosophy and Religion department here at Western Carolina. Shortly after bidding adieu to Dr. Kevin Schilbrack, who departed for another position last summer, we happily welcomed a new colleague, Dr. Michelle Sorensen, whom you'll find featured in this edition's faculty spotlight. We celebrated the seven PAR students who had research projects accepted to the National Conference for Undergraduate Research, in addition to the successful tenure and promotion of Dr. David Henderson. We were able to co-sponsor a number of prominent visiting scholars and professionals for lectures or colloquia on campus, including (among many others!) Ali Eshraghi (Iran project manager for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting); Stephanie Cobb (George and Sallie Cutchin Camp Professor of Bible at the University of Richmond); Richard Cohen (Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Institute of Jewish Thought and Heritage at Stony Brook University); and North Carolina's three women currently serving as Supreme Court Justices: Cheri Beasley, Robin Hudson, and Barbara Jackson. Our largest single class in the program's history (18 majors!) graduated last year, with some alumni going directly out into the vocational world, and others heading off to a variety of professional (law and seminary) and graduate schools (in Social Work, Public Administration, and Development Practice). And perhaps most excitingly, the department won the Center for Service Learning's highest honor –

the "Leading Light" award for exemplary integration of community engagement into our curriculum – while graduating senior Mackenzie Moody took home the Center's highest student award.

## Keeping in Touch

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The PAR office continues to serve as a lounge for a diverse set of majors and minors, and we want all of you to know that you're always welcome to stop in to the department for coffee or tea and to share with us all the exciting things you've been up to. I'd also like to encourage all of you to keep up with us on the web, via our [departmental Facebook page](#) and our [LinkedIn group, "Friends of WCU PAR"](#). We established the LinkedIn group not only as a networking tool for the over 300 major and minor alumni of the program, but as a way for you to help us with vital mentoring assistance going forward. I hope you'll be as excited to work with some of our exceptional current students and recent alumni as they will be to have your aid and support!

## CONTACT US!

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Write in to be included / correct misinformation printed  
here about yourself:

You can contact [any of our faculty](#),  
or write to departmental administrative support associate  
Amy McKenzie at [amckenzie@wcu.edu](mailto:amckenzie@wcu.edu) (828.227.3852)

# Congratulations to the Class of 2015!

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<b>Alice Bauman</b>	<b>Richie Carpenter</b>	<b>Katy Hopkins</b>	<b>Carter McDevitt</b>	<b>John Royal</b>	<b>Hunter Waldrop</b>
<b>Melissa Bradley</b>	<b>Walker Dorsett</b>	<b>Kaleb Kidwell</b>	<b>Esther Meeks</b>	<b>Michael Thames</b>	<b>Jack Williams</b>
<b>Justin Burnette</b>	<b>Jesse Fowler</b>	<b>Dalton Mautino</b>	<b>Mackenzie Moody</b>	<b>Tiffany Von Vitzthume</b>	

## News of Recent Graduates

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**Alice Baumann:** Working in Asheville, talking to strangers, and reading all the books I didn't have time to read in school.

**Melissa Bradley:** I'm still in the area shopping for graduate schools, while working in Cashiers.

**Justin Burnette:** Mostly I am missing the mountains, however my mind is kept off it by all the new opportunities that being near the beach offer and by beginning my first semester at Charleston School of Law in, believe it or not, Charleston, SC.

**Walker Dorsett:** Started a new software development job in D.C. with FDM Group as a Junior DevOps Engineer.

**Jesse Fowler:** Still just cooking in the kitchen and going to school, now studying public administration through Western's Master's program.

**Katy Hopkins:** Happily getting settled in Kansas City and at my new job as a Medical Office Specialist at Saint Luke's Hospital.

**Esther Meeks:** Is attending the Irish School of Ecumenics program of Trinity College, Dublin that focuses on conflict resolution and reconciliation in Belfast, Ireland.

**Mackenzie Moody:** is attending Emory University in Atlanta, in the Master of Development Practice Program.

**Michael Thames:** is working as the Project Manager for Do Good Farms in Winter Garden, Florida (sustainable permaculture and aquaponics).

**Tiffany Elizabeth VonVitzthume:** is attending law school at Touro Law Center in NY.

## News of Other Alumni

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**William Buddenberg (2014)** is still employed at the Asheville area Department of Veterans Affairs as an IT Specialist.

**Bill Duncan (1995)** started a new position at the Regenstrief Institute as a research scientist in May 2015.

**Tara Fleck (2014)** is attending Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, SC.

**Luke Kohrman (2014)** started a job at Labcorp as a Lab Assistant.

**Mandy Long (minor, 2014)** is in the philosophy M.A. program at Georgia State University.

**Bob McNeil (2014)** is in the Urban Politics and Administration M.A. program at City University of New York, Brooklyn College.

**Clare Murray (2013)** is in the Rhetoric and Composition M.A. program at Texas State.

**Andrew Sexton (2011)** has a job as Health Information Systems Analyst at Harris Regional Hospital.

### In Memoriam

**Joy Cagle (2012)** Joy, a PAR alumni, was employed on campus in the WCU Registrar's Office. A link to her obituary can be found at: [http://appalachianfuneralservices.com/tribute/details/757/Joy\\_Cagle/obituary.html](http://appalachianfuneralservices.com/tribute/details/757/Joy_Cagle/obituary.html)

## Alumni Spotlight: Katie Rath, Class of 2008

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As a freshman at WCU, I quickly declared a Communications major. Both of my parents possessed strong skills interacting with people around them, and made a difference in the community by being active, good citizens. I knew I wanted that for myself, and I saw the solution in studying Communications and eventually working with a nonprofit.

I was an Honors College student and required to take a freshman seminar my first semester. I didn't appreciate the interruption in my regular course of study, but I decided on a Philosophy 101 seminar with Dr. John Whitmire. My introduction to philosophy was both intimidating and thrilling. I examined ethics versus morals, wrestled with critical thought over conflicting religious tenets, reasoned my way through political debates, and formed every learned morsel into my own worldview. I learned how to write and speak with better clarity and conviction; I began searching for unique solutions to common problems. My fellow classmates and professors alike opened the door to a new way of thinking and applying what I'd learned, and I knew in the long run, I'd benefit from walking through it.

I began to see the learned theory from philosophy and practical principles from communications as mutually supportive. I pursued the degrees simultaneously, and graduated in the winter of '08. The economic downturn pushed me into the unexpected direction of youth ministry at a church in my hometown; I spent the next few years serving at multiple churches and an international publishing company.

A few years ago, I accepted an opportunity at Forshaw Inc, a national chemical distributor for the pest management industry (from ministry to pest control, that's another story). The pest management industry is a complicated and competitive one. Although it's rapidly changing, the industry's nature hasn't had much call for sophisticated technology. Equipment, definitely, but no one's vying for search engine optimization spots or offering business solutions by way of native mobile apps. Forshaw sees a different plan for the industry, one that embraces, catches up to, and then creates new pathways for technology. Through customer experience and account management options, we've developed technology tools for our customers. Bugs or no bugs, Forshaw offers business solutions that can be translated across many industries, and fits perfectly in ours.

Our efforts to push our industry forward have not gone unnoticed. I'll never forget a compliment from the VP of the international division of a well-known chemical conglomerate; he praised us for dedicating time to and accomplishing what our competitors and vendors were ignoring. In three years, I've reached back to what I learned in my PAR classes, uncovering creative solutions to our customer's challenges, such as inventory tracking, e-commerce, and comprehensive account management.

I don't doubt that the lessons I gleaned from being a philosophy student gave me a leg up in my position, and life in general. Maybe I would have become a fine speaker, a diligent worker, and a committed world citizen, but I may have also lacked the creativity, confidence, and worldview to really succeed. My peers, professors, and classes at WCU taught me that the only thing more valuable than learning is application, and in my career and life after Cullowhee, I've held that to be a foundational truth. I believe everyone can benefit from studying philosophy, but even more so, applying those lessons at every opportunity.

## Faculty News

**Dr. Daryl Hale:** Last fall (2014), I spent the semester in Cologne Germany on Scholarly Development Leave. While staying with my wife Camilla there, I wrote 8 chapters of my book on Kant. Over the summer, I added on another chapter on Kant's view of the natural sciences, and will finish the final chapter on his theory of education this fall. I hope to send it out early this fall and find a publisher for it this academic year. Also, while in Europe, I got to visit Estonia – amazing architecture: my wife played in a Gothic cathedral from the year 1234 – and spent my birthday in Switzerland, and then we visited Tübingen University (southern Germany), where we saw Melancthon's residence (from the 1520s) on the return from Zürich. All in all, a great way to spend my sabbatical. Oh yes, I now have a fine Bavarian sport jacket from a visit with friends in Regensburg.

Our environmental philosopher, **Dr. David Henderson**, persists in taking the students out of doors. This May he co-taught a class on Southern Appalachian Landscapes, which canoed to an historical Cherokee town and mound, examined the impact of mining and timbering on the local economy and environment and explored the ecological communities in the National Park and wilderness areas. He also earned tenure and promotion to Associate Professor this year.

**Dr. Christopher Hoyt** was lucky to travel a fair amount last summer. He delivered a talk at an international Wittgenstein conference in Norway in June, and then went on to see friends in Germany and Iceland. All the while, he did a great job teaching an online version of his popular class, "The Philosophy of Love and Sex." (Thanks, internet!) Last spring he published an essay about the television show *Orange is the New Black* in the Open Court pop culture series, and he has an essay about Wittgenstein and education forthcoming. Oh, and he finally muscled his way through Charles Taylor's 900-page *A Secular Age*, and highly recommends it.

**Dr. Jim McLachlan** was a finalist for the WCU University Scholar award in spring 2015, and was granted scholarly leave for academic year 2015-16. He will be spending the year as a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Process Studies of the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California, working on his book, *Hell is Not Others: The Abyss and the Relation in Heterodox Religious Thought*. He also plans to spend time in Utah (utilizing the archives of BYU, Utah, and the LDS Church) as well as Buffalo (consulting with Richard Cohen).

**Dr. Jeffrey Vickery** teaches courses in all three of the Abrahamic faith traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Having served as an Adjunct in this department for 11 years, he is taking on a full-time position during the sabbatical leave of the inimitable Jim McLachlan. Vickery recently gave a two-part lecture to the Highlands Center

for Life Enrichment entitled "A Brief History of Islam and Politics" and "What Sustains Radical Islamists." He was also invited to write a clustered book review on *Interreligious Dialogue for Perspectives in Religious Studies* to be published later this year. To keep his scholarship grounded, he continues to serve alongside his wife, Rev. Tonya Vickery, as co-pastor of Cullowhee Baptist Church.

**Dr. John F. Whitmire, Jr.** celebrated the birth of his second daughter (Allie) and happily completed his two-year term as President of the NC Philosophical Society (preceded by two years of running the Society's conference). He was again a finalist for the College of Arts and Sciences' Teaching Award, and was able to take his fifth group of students to Washington, D.C. in the spring to do citizen advocacy at the national conference of the international humanitarian organization CARE ([www.care.org](http://www.care.org)).

## Faculty Spotlight

### Dr. Michelle J. Sorensen

is thrilled to have joined the Department last Fall! She graduated from the University of Calgary, Canada with an undergraduate double major in Philosophy and Religious Studies. A nearly two-year backpacking trip through Asia (with a single change of clothes and a trusty sidekick)

developed her interest in Asian cultures. Her knowledge was deepened through her Ph.D. studies in Buddhist Studies at Columbia University and years of research in Asia. Michelle is excited to be teaching courses on Asian philosophical and religious worldviews, women, gender and sexuality in religion, philosophy of religion, and theory and method in the study of religion. Michelle has published articles on biographies of women in Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy and praxis, and translation theory. She is currently working on a book project about the 12th-century Tibetan female philosopher Machik Labdrön and the development of the Buddhist Chöd tradition in Tibet. Michelle also looks forward to exploring the land of mountains, music, and tempeh in WNC!

