



Philosophy News

Orono, Maine • Spring 2010 • Volume 1, Issue 1



Greetings from Dean Hecker

As the largest college at UMaine, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is at the center of the university. Our 18 departments offer 33 undergraduate majors, 12 masters, and five Ph.D. programs. Typically about a third of UMaine's undergraduate students are CLAS majors and about half of all student credit hours are taught through our college.

The CLAS faculty members are productive scholars. In the last academic year they produced nearly 500 scholarly publications, presented more than 200 performances and exhibits, and brought in more than \$5 million in grant funding.

"The excellence of our faculty was recognized in 2009 when two of three Presidential Achievement awards went to CLAS professors: Kathy Olmstead, professor of journalism, was recognized for public service, and Owen Smith, professor of art and new media, was hailed for research and creative achievement. Receiving the highest honor was James Acheson, professor of anthropology, named 2009 Distinguished Maine Professor."

Growth and change present both challenges and opportunities. As dean, I have asked our faculty to find innovative ways to make the necessary transitions. Recently, I announced five action items that summarize the ways in which I would like to see our college grow:

- Create opportunities for active learning and problem solving that are cost-effective and sustainable
- Increase opportunities for students to participate in research
- Support and promote innovative interdisciplinary education and scholarship
- Increase funding from external sources to support teaching, research, and outreach missions
- Increase graduate offerings by taking advantage of areas of existing strengths and developing unique interdisciplinary opportunities

We already have begun a concentrated effort to explore ways that we can use new technologies to engage students in active learning. Over the next years we will be developing more detailed plans on how we will move ahead on the action items. The phrase we like to use when talking about students' experiences in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is "learning that lasts a lifetime." Our commitment is to create the opportunities that allow students to develop the skills that prepare them for a lifetime of learning.

Miller Serves as Clinical Ethicist at Eastern Maine Medical Center

Life is complicated, but a background in philosophy can help provide the tools to sort it all out, says University of Maine Associate Professor of Philosophy Jessica Miller.

Philosophy students are encouraged to ask questions about important issues like capital punishment, abortion, end of life care, stem cell research, animal rights, racism, same sex marriage, cloning, and sexuality. In the process, they develop their critical thinking and reasoning skills, better understand various positions and perspectives, hone their ability to articulate those positions and defend their viewpoints, become more confident about their own decisions and conclusions, and engage in thoughtful dialogue.

"In my classes, I try to stimulate interesting discussions and communicate theories developed by philosophers over the last 2,000 years about how to live a good life and be the best person you can be," says Professor Miller, who teaches ethics and bioethics, which deals with ethical issues in healthcare.

"My job is not to answer those questions for students, but to encourage them to ask the questions and to provide the materials, tools, content, and format to help them find the answers."

Professor Miller, who has been a member of the University of Maine philosophy faculty since 2000, deals with tough questions outside the classroom, too. She is a clinical ethicist at Eastern Maine Medical Center and a member of the Ethics Advisory Committee, a group composed of doctors, nurses, attorneys, psychiatrists, physical therapists and social workers who meet regularly to analyze the ethical aspects of contemporary issues in medicine and advise families, patients, and care teams when ethical questions arise.

continued on page 3

“The questions that young people ask themselves are often fundamentally philosophical questions.”

—Professor Jacobson

Jacobson Creates Orono High School Philosophy Program

University of Maine Assistant Professor of Philosophy Kirsten Jacobson and her students are helping Orono High School students realize that philosophy is a relevant and important part of their everyday lives.

As part of a five-session program started by Professor Jacobson in March, UMaine philosophy students are leading after-school discussions of core philosophical texts with OHS juniors and seniors.

“Philosophy Across the Ages” aims to provide UMaine undergraduates with a unique opportunity to lead a seminar-style discussion and even to consider whether they want to teach philosophy. The program also exposes high school students to what is arguably the oldest academic discipline, showing them that philosophy can help them explore important questions such as how we ought to live and what is right and wrong.

“For all, the program aims to

develop an active and lasting engagement with key philosophical texts and questions, especially in a way that connects students to real-world issues,” Professor Jacobson said.

This year, the hour-and-a-half discussions are based on writings by Plato, Descartes, and Simone de Beauvoir.

“The questions that young people ask themselves are often fundamentally philosophical questions,” Professor Jacobson said. “I want high school students to see that philosophy is something that belongs to everyone, not just something done by people in academia.”

The program is supported by UMaine’s Center for Teaching Excellence through a \$700 Active Student Micro-Learning Grant. Successful completion of the program can also help the high school students secure a spot in UMaine’s Honors College through Orono High School’s Graduation With Distinction program.



Bob Kennedy

A Note from the President

Since enrolling at the University of Minnesota as a liberal arts major more than 40 years ago, I’ve spent virtually every day of my professional life studying or working at public universities. My extensive experiences at these institutions have fortified my belief that the liberal arts provide a vital and important foundation for educational attainment and fulfilling careers. UMaine’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is larger than all of Maine’s private liberal arts colleges combined and it is home to many internationally recognized faculty. We are pleased to share these stories of both faculty and student accomplishments.



PhilosophyNews is published by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Jeff Hecker, Dean
Edited by Ruth-Ellen Cohen

Students, faculty and alumni are encouraged to submit information by contacting
Department Chair Roger King (Roger.King@umit.maine.edu)

Layout and design by Val Williams, University Relations • Printed by University of Maine Printing Services.

visit us online at www.umaine.edu/philosophy

In complying with the letter and spirit of applicable laws and in pursuing its own goals of diversity, the University of Maine System shall not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin or citizenship status, age, disability, or veterans status in employment, education, and all other areas of the University. The University provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request.

Miller *from page 1*

This interdisciplinary team deals with topics such as end-of-life care, withdrawal of life sustaining treatment, decision-making capacity, surrogate decision-making, decision-making by adolescent patients, privacy and confidentiality, and pre-natal diagnoses.

Bioethical issues began to arise in the 1960s when new technologies such as ventilators and kidney transplants came on the scene, Professor Miller explains.

"Once we developed the new technologies, all sorts of questions began to arise. How do we allocate organs fairly and justly when there's a long list of people who need them and not enough to go around? How long do we maintain a patient on a ventilator when there's no hope of recovery?"

Professor Miller sees her role as a bioethicist as a way to be visible in the community and to call attention to the importance of philosophy.

"I like being a living example of the relevance of philosophy in the real world," she says. "Some people may have an image of philosophy as being out of touch and no longer necessary for today's complex world. In fact, philosophy is more important than ever simply because the world has become so complicated.

"All my colleagues are very socially engaged and want to bring philosophy outside the ivory tower and into the



community," she says. "It's a hallmark of this department and something for us to be proud of. And we all have stories of students coming to us after they graduate and telling us how their philosophy studies affected their lives."

Her interest in bioethics has also contributed to Professor Miller's scholarly enthusiasm for popular culture. She has become an aficionado of vampire literature and has published and presented her work at national conferences. She says its recent explosion in popularity among people of

all ages can be linked to "cultural anxiety and uncertainty about when life begins and ends.

"We have an unprecedented amount of control over when life begins and ends, but, paradoxically, that has blurred the line between life and death. Vampires represent the undead, the space between the living and the dead. They are a literary manifestation of our anxieties."

Professor Miller lives with her husband, UMaine history Professor Stephen Miller, and their two young boys.

Philosophy Major Prompts Tzovarras '02 to Enter Law



Hunter Tzovarras

What do you want to do after you graduate? As a University of Maine student, Hunter Tzovarras had a hard time coming up with the answer to that question.

He majored in history and then journalism. But it wasn't until he began taking philosophy courses that something clicked.

"Professor Roger King's environmental philosophy class grabbed me," says Tzovarras, who graduated in 2002. "It had a lot to do with how we treat the natural world and about the ethics surrounding pollution and consumption. It all seemed very relevant. So I decided to major in philosophy.

"I took lots of classes in contemporary ethics and political philosophy. I took a seminar with Professor Doug Allen about Gandhi that was quite interesting. Then I took an independent study course called "Philosophy and Punishment in Film" with Professor King about how death penalty issues and philosophic thoughts are depicted in movies like *Dead Man Walking*, *Clockwork Orange*, and *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. I wrote an essay on the death penalty based on my interest in the subject from other philosophy courses. The essay received the 2002 Rezendes Ethics Essay Award. After I took Professor Jeff White's class on the philosophy of law I got thinking about law school."

Now a criminal attorney in Bangor, Tzovarras says his major in philosophy stood him in good stead both during his undergraduate years and at Quinnipiac Law School in Connecticut where he earned his law degree.

continued on page 4

www.umaine.edu/philosophy

"The Philosophy Department doesn't have a rigid curriculum and so you can explore the topics you want to explore. My philosophy classes helped me develop intellectually and academically and enabled me to hone my research and critical thinking skills. I liked all the independent thinking that's involved with philosophy - you have to come up with your own solutions to a problem. There are no right or wrong answers. It's all about whether you can make a good argument that makes sense to other people."

After graduating from UMaine, Tzovarras became a field organizer with the Maine People's Alliance, a citizen action group in Portland. He helped organize door-to-door canvassing on issues involving health care and environmental clean-up. He also worked for the Disability Rights Center of Maine.

"Philosophy got me interested in working for social justice issues," he says.

A solo practitioner in downtown Bangor, Tzovarras often hearkens back to the skills and training he received at UMaine.

"A lot of philosophical study deals with free will and responsibility. These are also issues regularly encountered in criminal defense when it comes to establishing intent to commit a crime and what a just punishment is for those convicted."

Tzovarras lives in Hampden with his wife Pamela, also a University of Maine graduate, and their three small children.

Greetings from the Chair!

The Philosophy Department, housed as always in The Maples, is currently home to 57 majors, 15 minors, and six faculty members. Our courses attract students from many disciplines, and recent alumni are pursuing educational opportunities at such schools as the University of Oregon, Duquesne University, St. John's College in Annapolis and Santa Fe, Purdue, the University of Rhode Island, Louisiana State University, Penn State University Law School, and the University of Maine.

Our big news is that Professor Jefferson White retires this summer. After some 37 years, he will leave Orono to enjoy Boston's philosophical and cultural opportunities and to be closer to family. For all these years, Jeff has been our resident specialist in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, informal logic, and the philosophy of law. We regret losing such a distinguished colleague, but celebrate with him as he sets off in an exciting, new direction!

In other news, Professor Doug Allen was awarded a five-month Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship to India where he studied and spoke on Mahatma Gandhi and the theme of "Violence, Terrorism, and the Contemporary World." Michael Howard is teaching a new course on Global Justice that complements his research into how countries might share more equitably in the global costs of climate change. And I have begun another five years as chair of the department, having recently advanced my work in environmental ethics with an online publication, "Feral Animals and the Restoration of Nature."

Many thanks to those who returned our alumni survey. We enjoyed reading about your activities and are gratified to know that you continue to value your philosophical education at the University of Maine. We will continue our efforts to stay in touch with you and other alumni. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter which includes profiles of alumnus Hunter Tzovarras '02 and Associate Professor Jessica Miller, as well as a story about a new outreach program, "Philosophy Across the Ages," created by Assistant Professor Kirsten Jacobson. Let us know what you think of this format!

— Roger King, *Chair, Department of Philosophy*