Welcome
Welcome to the newest edition of the Department of Philosophy newsletter. We appreciate the many opportunities to get acquainted or reacquainted that resulted from last year’s newsletter. This year’s edition reflects some of those opportunities: current student Kate Goodpaster writes about 1999 grad Josh Preiss, who is now an assistant professor at Loyola University in Chicago; Rhea Muchalla writes about 1997 grad Jen Pleuss, who went on the study at Oxford and is now serving at the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia; recent grad Adam Tehle writes about his experience connecting with 1967 grad John Biewen, who has won many awards for his distinguished career in documentary journalism and currently works at Duke University. One of the most important reasons for choosing a small liberal arts college like Gustavus is that no one is an “anonymous number” on a grade sheet, or a list of alumni. It’s especially rewarding for those of us on the faculty, all of whom have been here for “a few years,” to be able to facilitate new friendships across generations of students.

Let me especially thank my esteemed colleague, Lisa Heldke, who continues to be the gentle force behind these newsletters. This year’s academic assistants, Andi Twiton and Rhea Muchalla, were the editors whose hard work we appreciate, especially since the editing of all things culminated during finals week. As always, please let us know what you’re thinking about, what you’re committed to, and how life is treating you.-- Deane Curtin, Department Chair

New Department Website and Blog
Everyone should check out the updated philosophy website. The website now includes faculty profiles and a blog for everyone involved with the department.

www.gustavus.edu/academics/philosophy

Tilde, the Office Dog
Since April of 2007, the philosophy department has been the second home of Tilde, the big loveable mutt who was adopted by Peg and Lisa. Also known as ~, she can be found most days in the department, sprawled full-length in front of whatever office doors are open. (She has an uncanny ability to position herself in such a way that whoever is exiting their office must stop to pet her—a kind of exercise in applied geometry.) Tilde specializes in the Philosophies of Eating, Sniffing, Walkies, and Being Scratched. She also possesses a strong interest in the budding field of Philosophical Counseling, and is well equipped to offer inspiration and comfort to philosophers in search of a thesis for the paper they have to write by tomorrow or to those gnawing on a particular difficult proof in logic.

Rumors that the department got a dog in order to upstage the Classics Department, which had a mural of the Parthenon painted on its wall, are greatly exaggerated. Classicists were heard to mutter about “getting an elephant,” however.

Seniors Present Papers
On Saturday April 14th, 2007 several senior philosophy majors presented their papers at the 2007 Minnesota Philosophical Society Student Conference. Doug Huff drove the group early Saturday morning for a full day of philosophical hijinks.

The Gustavus students presented the following (Continued on page 3)

Welcome to the newest edition of the Department of Philosophy newsletter. We appreciate the many opportunities to get acquainted or reacquainted that resulted from last year’s newsletter. This year’s edition reflects some of those opportunities: current student Kate Goodpaster writes about 1999 grad Josh Preiss, who is now an assistant professor at Loyola University in Chicago; Rhea Muchalla writes about 1997 grad Jen Pleuss, who went on the study at Oxford and is now serving at the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia; recent grad Adam Tehle writes about his experience connecting with 1967 grad John Biewen, who has won many awards for his distinguished career in documentary journalism and currently works at Duke University. One of the most important reasons for choosing a small liberal arts college like Gustavus is that no one is an “anonymous number” on a grade sheet, or a list of alumni. It’s especially rewarding for those of us on the faculty, all of whom have been here for “a few years,” to be able to facilitate new friendships across generations of students.

Let me especially thank my esteemed colleague, Lisa Heldke, who continues to be the gentle force behind these newsletters. This year’s academic assistants, Andi Twiton and Rhea Muchalla, were the editors whose hard work we appreciate, especially since the editing, like all things, culminated during finals week. As always, please let us know what you’re thinking about, what you’re committed to, and how life is treating you.-- Deane Curtin, Department Chair

New Department Website and Blog
Everyone should check out the updated philosophy website. The website now includes faculty profiles and a blog for everyone involved with the department.

www.gustavus.edu/academics/philosophy

Tilde, the Office Dog
Since April of 2007, the philosophy department has been the second home of Tilde, the big loveable mutt who was adopted by Peg and Lisa. Also known as ~, she can be found most days in the department, sprawled full-length in front of whatever office doors are open. (She has an uncanny ability to position herself in such a way that whoever is exiting their office must stop to pet her—a kind of exercise in applied geometry.) Tilde specializes in the Philosophies of Eating, Sniffing, Walkies, and Being Scratched. She also possesses a strong interest in the budding field of Philosophical Counseling, and is well equipped to offer inspiration and comfort to philosophers in search of a thesis for the paper they have to write by tomorrow or to those gnawing on a particular difficult proof in logic.

Rumors that the department got a dog in order to upstage the Classics Department, which had a mural of the Parthenon painted on its wall, are greatly exaggerated. Classicists were heard to mutter about “getting an elephant,” however.

Seniors Present Papers
On Saturday April 14th, 2007 several senior philosophy majors presented their papers at the 2007 Minnesota Philosophical Society Student Conference. Doug Huff drove the group early Saturday morning for a full day of philosophical hijinks.

The Gustavus students presented the following (Continued on page 3)
In the spring of 2006, I was honored to be named to the Sponberg Chair in Ethics, an endowed position made possible through the generosity of the Florence and Raymond Sponberg Foundation. I am the second member of the department so honored; Deane Curtin held the chair prior to me. One duty of the Sponberg Chair is to carry out a project that

**Professor Lisa Heldke on Her Sponberg Project**

If you could ask Gustavus Philosophy Professors anything, what would you ask? A few majors thought up some questions. If you think of more, you should be sure to stop by to ask.

1) What is one book you would recommend to Gustavus Philosophy students?
2) If you were a cartoon character, who would you be?
3) How can we turn the United States back toward democracy?
4) If you think of more, you should be sure to stop by to ask.
5) I’m a curious human being.

**Lisa Heldke**

1) *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones
2) Well, it’s a little obscure, but I’d probably be Mo, from the strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*.
3) Some recent topics include “radical listening;” food democracy; the role food in the philosophy classroom; and whiteness.
4) In general, I want to say something like “reweaving the fabric of democracy, which has suffered serious erosion due to the diminishment of our civil rights.” More narrowly, I would say the “war on terror,” health care, and immigration reform.
5) Philosophy is the subject that enables me to ask the kinds of questions that I find most compelling, the questions that enable one to get far enough out to really reflect on matters of meaning and value.

**Peg O’Connor**

1) *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonders* by Lawrence Weschler
2) I already exist in several cartoon forms. (The image to the right appears on Peg’s business card. Can you decode the imagery? Remember: Peg is a Wittgenstein scholar).
3) My most recent interest is a training program aimed at faculty, staff, administrators, and students that helps identify and engage with students who may struggle with alcohol use and abuse. The training program should
4) Health care. We need universal health care.
5) It enables me to engage with questions of meaning and value. It teaches me to pay attention to the smallest details and see their moral significance.

**George Georgakarakos**

1) *The Great Chain of Being* by Lovejoy
2) Flash Gordon. He advocated intergalactic justice.
3) Solving the problem of consciousness. That’s very unlikely in my lifetime.
4) Global Warming, universal healthcare, global economy, campaign reform, ending the War in Iraq.
5) It’s exciting, adventurous, and intellectually liberating. Above all, I love the passion and fascination with new ideas that our majors and minors express in my classes.

**Peter Shea**

1) *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell
2) Wonder Woman. It seems a shame not to take advantage of the opportunity you offer, to try something really different. Also, she gets to use gadgets.
3) I am interested in how (and what) we learn as we come to understand the lives of other people. In particular, I am curious what we can learn by listening to scholars talk about what got them into scholarship and what keeps them engaged.
4) Torture, confinement without trial, and extraordinary rendition.
5) Because I am more alive when I do philosophy than when I do anything else.
will be of benefit or interest to the campus community. I decided to focus my attentions on exploring the question “how does the College use food as a tool through which to realize its mission—and how might it do so more fully?” Since the fall of 2006, I have been addressing that question through a variety of activities and events.

I’ve hosted, or served as a primary committee member, for two public events that have focused community attention on food and agriculture. The first, MAYDAY! 2007, addressed the theme of “community food security.” The daylong conference featured Janet Poppendieck, author of *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*; and Mike Hamm, C.S. Mott Chair of Sustainable Agriculture at Michigan State University. A highlight of the day’s conference was the “locavore meal” during which, the entire Dining Service turned itself into a “local foods zone,” serving only foods grown and processed within a 300 mile radius of campus for four hours. (Yep, four hours without coffee or chocolate!) The Dining Service has been cultivating a list of local suppliers for many years, so they were well prepared to present a delicious array of foods that day. Check out more details about the conference in the College’s web archive, at http://gustavus.edu/news/2918.

October of this year I hosted a visit to campus by Verlyn Klinkenborg, New York Times editorial writer, professor, and author of a number of books on rural life, including *Making Hay*. Klinkenborg came to campus for two days of class visits, group meals, and a public lecture, “The De-Democratization of the American Landscape.” (Check out http://gustavus.edu/news/3269 for more about Klinkenborg’s work and his visit to campus.)

Last spring’s MAYDAY! catalyzed conversations across campus about food, locality, and justice. Over the summer, in response to that heightened interest, I invited interested members of the campus to join a reading group devoted to food books. Interest was so high that we actually formed two groups this fall. One group read *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, the blockbuster work by Michael Pollan, while the other read *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, by the acclaimed novelist Barbara Kingsolver.

With Dining Services Director Steve Kjellgren, this fall I convened a group we’re calling the “Kitchen Cabinet,” a panel of students, faculty and staff who serve as advisors to the Dining Service. The Cabinet has thrown itself into the work with enthusiasm, exploring everything from how to reduce the use of take-out containers, to the ethical policies of corporations with which the Dining Service does business. The group has created an internship, “Choices at the Table,” which will enable two students to undertake a community education project focusing on choice and responsibility in our dining choices. James Dontje, our new director for the Johnson Center for Environmental Sustainability, will supervise the internship.

The final project I’ll mention takes me into the classroom. For a year I have been conducting a small qualitative research project, aimed at discovering how food plays a role in the curriculum of this liberal arts college. Aided by two student assistants, Andi Twiton (editor of this August publication, senior philosophy major and departmental assistant), and Adam Tehle (2006 graduate), I have been interviewing my colleagues about when, where and how food appears in their classes, either as subject or as substance. The interviews have revealed a banquet of ideas; several colleagues have observed that food is the “quintessential liberal arts topic,” the “perfect interdisciplinary subject,” and, well, “a great community builder.”

I welcome your observations about the role food played in your life while you were a student at Gustavus, and your ideas for how I can continue to explore the roles it might play in a liberal arts college.

---

**PAPERS (CONT’D FROM PAGE 1)**


The Gusties were a decidedly different mix of philosophers at this year’s conference adding to the diversity of topics presented by philosophy students all over the state. All of the students that presented received honors for for their papers after the hard work and poise with which each student demonstrated their philosophical skills. -- Elizabeth Harri

**JOSH PRIESS’S RETURN TO CAMPUS**

The Philosophy department was pleased to welcome Josh Priess (Class of ’99) to speak this April. After graduating from Gustavus with a Philosophy major, Josh earned his doctorate in Philosophy at the University of Chicago. He studied under renowned philosopher Martha Nussbaum. He is now an assistant professor at Loyola University Chicago.

Josh presented his paper on "Equal Treatment for Cultural Minorities." The room was jam-packed with students and faculty (an encouraging turnout for a philosophy event!). Josh’s fascinating paper discussed different perspectives on cultivating multiculturalism in today’s society, the importance of multicultural dialogue. The topic spurred great discussion with important questions coming from the audience.

Thanks to Josh for generously spending his time with students and faculty and sharing his impressive work! -- Kate Goodpastor
The Gustavus philosophy department has continued to hold “Mom, Dad… I’m a Philosophy Major” events this year. These events bring philosophy department alumni back to campus to speak with current students and faculty.

**Spring 2007**

On the night of Wednesday, April 11th the philosophy event “Mom, Dad… I’m a Philosophy Major” had befallen students again in an effort to aid undergrads in explaining to loved ones that a Philosophy Major gives more to students than traditionally understood. Of course the night started off as any happy philosophy event should…with good food and good conversation with fellow philosophers, students and faculty alike. After adequate mouth stuffing and mouth yapping time had been allotted, the much anticipated presentations began with three distinguished alumni all focusing their talk around what they did after graduating from Gustavus with a Philosophy Major.

The night began with Ward Moberg, a now retired teacher. Mr. Moberg explained how he had started off in the corporate world, a job that he was not only good at, but could also pay all of his bills with ease. He eventually came to the conclusion that he was not happy in the corporate world, however. Teaching, then, was Mr. Moberg next step and a step he has stuck with for around 26 years. One of the most moving parts of the speech was the fact that this Gustavus grad after a lifetime professed his continuous use of philosophy in everyday life. Mr. Moberg eloquently showed that one, he landed a job and two, he still philosophical examines life and is happy about that…and he did it all with a Philosophy Major!

Next to speak was a more recent graduate of Gustavus, with a college tale of switching majors. Now this tale ends good for the Philosophy department, as Tyson Acker chose to be a Philosophy Major instead of another majoring in another department, whose name I will leave out! After decided to go into Philosophy Tyson Acker was pushed by a professor of our own Philosophy Department, Deane Curtain to apply for a certain internship in an agricultural company. Although Tyson Acker did not right away land the exact internship he wanted he got in with the company and has happily been employed by them since. How did Tyson Acker accomplish this…with a Philosophy Major!

Last, but certainly not least came Don McNeil a lawyer from the Twin Cities. In his last year of Law School Don McNeal described how he, like all others his age in Law School, was focused on getting the best clerical position he could. Not only did Don McNeil get the clerical position he had been hoping for, this position just happened to be the highest circuit courts in the state! Interestingly enough the judge that decided to bring Don McNeil on board was thoroughly impressed and interested in Don McNeil’s background in philosophy. Upon graduation Don McNeil had a quick stint with a firm in defending Asbestos farmers before settling into law with more of a social impact and fulfilling to himself as a person. This was all accomplished…with a Philosophy Major!

The night ended with unanimous conclusion, Philosopher majors are special. Special people who are not afraid to examine everything, life included and are thus more than capable to handle most anything, again, life included. So with that, I have something to say…Mom, Dad I’m a Philosopher Major…and I love it! -- Rhea Muchalla

**Fall 2007**

Philosophy students have been attempting to ease parents into understanding the virtues of our studies since the beginning. Recently the Gustavus philosophy faculty have taken the field to dispel whatever negative charges still be lurking out there. Their most recent technique has been the Mom, Dad…I’m a Philosophy Major event. It was devised few years ago as a way to connect philosophy graduates with the department and students over food and drink, and hasn’t ceased to flourish since. This semester’s gathering on October 24th was no exception.

Tony Kienitz, a graduate of ’89, was first to speak. He relayed to us how he and companion had made a pact to explore Europe if neither had been more pressing plans after graduating, and they followed through. He ended up working on a farm in Germany, falling in love with the language, and now teaches German to high school students. The pleasure he takes in teaching was visible as he described how skills he learned while studying philosophy give him the ability to handle the ever-changing demands of teaching. He claimed that he never encounters a dull moment and wouldn’t have it any other way. His time at Gustavus enabled him to contribute to discussion amongst his colleagues about educational form and the dynamism of the classroom. The examples of the faculty here played their part as well, no doubt.

Next, Gabe Ormsby, of ’93, described his impressively multifaceted activity set. He is a "techie" for Friends of the Mississippi, a non-profit organization based in St. Paul that works to maintain and restore the river’s health, biologically and aesthetically. He also offers his services to Amnesty International’s human rights work and has been exploring potential roles of open source software. All are noble pursuits, and enviable. In fact, Caleb Phillips, a junior major, has successfully set up an internship with Friends of the Mississippi through contact with Gabe that evening. I may have given the impression that parents are the only one’s uneasy about philosophy, even if it is only because they love us, but, as a senior, I can assure readers that students are not always fearless when we feel the future approaching, even after we’ve been training with such a faculty for four years. All of us appreciate the company and wisdom graduates have to offer and the cunning of the faculty in constructing such an event. We and our parents are more able to face the unknown with courageous eyes for it. --Danny George
On April 17, 2007, I had the experience to converse with an outstanding individual. John Biewen, a 1967 Graduate of Gustavus returned to campus to communicate his life story. Along with a featured presentation, John had the opportunity to ‘meet and greet’ with fellow philosophy students in classrooms as well as small group gatherings. I was one of the lucky few. As a graduating senior, lacking a plan or a purpose, and for that matter any direction, I listened attentively to John and his story. To my relief, John expressed his confusion and sporadic tendencies as a fresh college graduate. More importantly, John’s visit and conversation brought some comfort. The comfort John brought was that you really can do anything and go anywhere in this world with a philosophy major.

Later, John specifically spoke at an organized campus event. In his line of work, radio, John has exposed many listeners to the socio-economic inequality of the world. That is, John’s talents have allowed him to produce heartfelt radio documentaries that are often associated with the unequal treatment of specific individuals. Throughout his life, John has been employed by MPR, NPR, American Radio Works and others. John is currently employed at DUKE University as a teacher in the documentary studies program. Overall, John’s projects often look at the mistreatment of socio-economic groups as well as the injustice that exists in the world. With this injustice, one must turn to the sympathetic powers of an individual. That is exactly what John Biewen is; a sympathetic, motivated and driven individual. In my opinion, John’s stories are slowly turning many individuals into a collective and social conscious unit. John’s presence on campus encouraged hope, motivation, and confidence. Additionally, John’s time at Gustavus brought me hope and conviction that in choosing to explore philosophy as a major, one can truly make a difference! -- Adam Tehle

John Biewen Returns to Campus Pleuss Wins Alumni Award

This fall Gustavus Alumni Jennifer Pleuss returned to Gustavus to receive the 2007 Gustavus Alumni Association’s First Decade Award for early career achievement among women. Graduating in ’97 with a double major in Philosophy and Political Science, Jennifer has since risen to a position in international diplomacy after acquiring a master’s degree at Oxford. In 2002 she joined the United States Foreign Service and was posted to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. Today she is apart of the political and economic section of the American Embassy in Phnom Penh. Gustavus Professors describe remembering Jennifer as a more than memorable student, always engaged and passionate in her studies. Her time as an undergrad earned Jennifer the Truman Scholarship and the even more competitive Marshall Scholarship. Jennifer took time out of her weekend at Gustavus to visit with students from both the Philosophy and Political Science department, describing life after Gustavus and sharing a world of experience with us all.— Rhea Muchalla
The department is lucky to have a wonderful group of seniors this year. Here is a bit about a few of them:

1) Major (if you have a double) and Minors. 2) How and/or why you chose to study philosophy. 3) The best thing you learned from philosophy or your favorite part of studying philosophy. 4) If you were stranded on an island and were able to have a lifelong supply of one food or dish and only one food or dish, what would it be? 5) Future plans. 6) What you’ll miss most about GAC Philosophy.

Chris deLaubenfels 1) Philosophy & Political Science 2) I took Great Philosophers first, just because it sounded like a fun class. Then I realized that philosophy made me think more than any other subjects I was taking at GAC. 3) I used to be good at arguing with friends and family, but now I can do it on a logical basis. 4) If it can be a drink… Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. Otherwise I will go with Pad Thai. 5) The plan for the next 2 years as of now is to do Teach for America. Most likely I would be in NYC, Denver, or the Bay Area for that. Eventually, I would like to get into Collegiate distance running coaching and maybe teaching. 6) Discussions in Lisa’s classes.

Mark Wirbisky 1) Philosophy and Music major 2) It seemed the most relevant subject at the time… 3) I’ve learned how to be flexible in my own ideas, and how to give and accept criticism. 4) I’ll take dish to mean a meal. So, I would have a spinach salad, coffee ice cream, and beer. And bacon. 5) Graduate study in Viola Performance, and someday I hope to earn a living playing in an orchestra. 6) The freedom to be wrong.

Andi Twiton 1) Philosophy Major (yup, just philosophy) 2) When I came to school I was interested in absolutely every course and major in the course catalog. Philosophy allowed me to remain curious about many, many things. 3) One of the best things I’ve learned in my years at Gustavus is that there is room for creativity in philosophy. This may sound strange, but I had some doubt after studying certain Modern philosophers. 4) Lefse. 5) Lutheran Volunteer Corps 6) The professors and the majors.

Daniel Philip George 1) Peace Studies minor 2) I thought the word sounded mysterious when I was younger. 3) I learned that non-human beings want to have a good time too and that whales evolved from land animals (this last piece was incidental, but philosophy was responsible, really.) 4) Grainy bread and garlic hummus and grapefruit juice. 5) I’ll likely be teaching English in South Korea if they’ll have have me. 6) I’ll miss having pseudo-parents that take care of me and know what I’m thinking by my non-verbal communication and non-English noises.

Rhea Muchalla 1) Philosophy Major, Political Science and Gender, Women & Sexuality Minors 2) Coming to Gustavus I was sure I wanted to do Political Science, but after taking a couple classes with Doug (the first one was forced through CII, but it was great) I started to realize how much I loved the contemplating the philosophy of everything. I, then decided to double major in Political Science and Philosophy, but fell in love with Philosophy so much that I decided majoring in it alone was more than enough! 3) How to communicate effectively, especially when I’m arguing, and how to see past all the fluff into what is really being said. 4) Homemade yogurt. 5) Graduate Study in Feminist Philosophy, and eventually taking over the world (only to make it a better place of course!) 6) Learning, learning, learning! Being challenged all the time. The fantastic professors, and the other super cool philosophy majors.

Contact Us
The department would really appreciate hearing from you. What have you been up to lately? Any news for future Alumni Notes? Stop by the office if you can or contact us at:
Deane Curtin
800 W College Ave
St. Peter, MN 56082
curtin@gustavus.edu

THANK YOU FOR READING

GUSTAVUS
GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

Mom, Dad I’m a Philosophy Major
We are always looking for willing alumni to meet current students. These events have been largely successful and fun. Come tell us what philosophy has meant to you since leaving Gustavus.
If you are interested please contact the philosophy department.
heldke@gustavus.edu