



APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
Philosophy and Religion

Summer 2025 Newsletter

Letter from the Chair

The Spring semester brings plenty of busyness and achievement.

This semester, we revived the [Philosophy and Religious Studies in the Contemporary World](#) colloquium series, with support from App State's [High Country Humanities](#). In April, we hosted the Blue Ridge Philosophy Symposium, a joint effort of our Philosophy Club and that of Kennesaw State University. We also hosted the 2nd Carolina Conference for Chinese Thought, with scholars from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Meanwhile, our graduating majors and minors received plenty of good news of admissions to graduate programs. Philosophy students will head off to programs at UNC-Chapel Hill (MS in Library Science), UNC-Charlotte (MA in Ethics and Applied Philosophy) and Villanova (PhD in Philosophy). Religious Studies students will head off to programs at Emory University Candler School of Theology (Master of Theological Studies) and the University of Chicago (Master of Arts in Divinity).

There is much to be proud of as Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion!

Wishing you an enjoyable end of spring and start of summer....

Dr. Mat Foust, Professor and Chair



Stay connected with the
Department of Philosophy and Religion!



<https://philrel.appstate.edu/>

2024-25 Outstanding Seniors

The Department of Philosophy and Religion recognized six Outstanding Seniors at the College of Arts and Sciences Senior Awards Ceremony on Friday, April 12, 2025. In addition to impressive grade point averages, these students stand out with extra achievements such as being awarded departmental scholarships, studying abroad, leading student organizations, delivering presentations at professional conferences, and winning awards for excellence in research.



2024-25 Department of Philosophy and Religion Outstanding Seniors: Chase Viscuse (Religious Studies), Claire Kennedy (Religious Studies), Claire Crane (Religious Studies), Sabai Hartwiger (Philosophy), Jones Graf (Philosophy), Meredith Mobley (Philosophy)

Alumni Spotlight

Haley Lee Chuor '22 majored in Religious Studies and minored in Public Health. She will complete the Master of Theological Studies program at Harvard University in May, with a focus on Religion, Ethics, and Politics.



Haley will be presenting at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Meeting in Boston in November. Haley will join the Latina/o Religion, Culture, and Society Unit to share her work titled, "Seed of Resistance: Maize in Mesoamerican Civilizations." Here is the abstract for Haley's presentation:

Across Latin America, indigenous and rural communities have been preserving over 138 distinct varieties of maize, each with its unique color and genetic makeup, for centuries. However, the Mesoamerican region, one of the world's surviving biodiversity hotspots and home to sophisticated agroecological knowledge systems, is irreversibly changing due to the encroachment of genetically modified corn, industrial monoculture, and environmental pressures, such as extreme heatwaves and droughts. "Seed of Resistance" takes a worm's-eye view of these shifts and invites audiences to reflect on the question: 'What is sustainability?'

Haley will soon commence work as a research assistant for Professor Teren Sevea via a partnership with Cambridge University.

Student Spotlight

Claire Kennedy '25 is a major in Religious Studies and double minor in Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies and Spanish. A Spring 2025 graduate, Claire also fulfilled the requirements for [Departmental Honors](#).



Claire presenting her research at the AAR Annual Meeting in San Diego

Asked to say a bit about studying religion at App State and her plans for the future, Claire responded:

"I've been interested in religious studies for a long time. I decided on this major years before college was even on the horizon. My experience in this department the past four years has only furthered my passion for this area, and in ways I never would have predicted. In my college career I have had the opportunity to participate in research, present at conferences, and co-publish in a book due to the overwhelming support and guidance of both faculty and students. I've learned a number of professional, academic, and personal skills in the wonderful environment our department provides. After graduation, I plan to further develop my skills at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, GA as I work towards my Master's in Theological Studies. With a primary focus in religion and technology and a secondary focus in religion and gender studies, I am curious about how our modern world will continue to shape religious communities and provide me with new points of analysis. I would not be where I am—nor where I will be in the fall—without this department's capable and enthusiastic community."

Student Spotlight

Meredith Mobley '25 is a major in Philosophy and minor in Art History. A Spring 2025 graduate, Meredith also fulfilled the requirements for [Departmental Honors](#).



Asked to say a bit about studying philosophy at App State and her plans for the future, Meredith responded:

"Studying philosophy is the best thing I could have done at Appalachian State. This department has given me a community (of both students and faculty) that values my input and holds me accountable. The friends I've made keep me on my toes, cultivate my wit, and never cease to remind me where my passion for philosophy comes from. Doing philosophy has given me a glimpse into the past and helped me to understand the way that people understood their world to work, and how those beliefs and worldviews have created the past and are creating the future. Trying to catch a phenomenological glimpse of the past also fuels my passion for historical photography (mainly documentary), which I'll be continuing to interact with as I study archives and records management in the School of Information and Library Science at UNC Chapel Hill starting in the Fall. Without the support and opportunities provided by the amazing folks in this department I wouldn't have been able to pursue and achieve my goals! Thank you for everything P&R!"

Faculty (and Alumni) Spotlight

Dr. Rick Elmore '03 (Associate Professor of Philosophy) is also an alumnus, having graduated with a BA in Philosophy and Religion from App State in 2003.



A native of North Carolina, Dr. Elmore joined Appalachian State's Department of Philosophy and Religion in 2014. One of the guiding questions of his work is how political, ethical, environmental, and conceptual systems situate themselves in relation to issues of inclusion, exclusion, power, stability, law, policing, and normativity. He teaches courses such as PHIL 2010 Animal Philosophy and Ethics, PHIL 3040 Social and Political Philosophy, PHIL 3060 Philosophy and Mass Incarceration, and PHIL 3400 Contemporary Continental Philosophy.

Dr. Elmore also maintains a research interest in philosophy of literature and particularly the works of Cormac McCarthy. He has collaborated with his twin brother, Dr. Jonathan Elmore (Associate Professor of English at Louisiana Tech University), on a number of publications in this area.

Dr. Elmore was inducted in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Academy of Outstanding Teachers in 2020-21, and named the Student Government Association (SGA) Outstanding Teacher for CAS in 2016-17.

To learn more about Dr. Elmore's work, visit his [faculty profile](#).

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Davis Hankins (Associate Professor of Religious Studies) was appointed as the Director of the [Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies](#) in Fall 2024. The JHPS Center works to strengthen tolerance, understanding and remembrance by increasing the knowledge of Jewish culture and history, teaching the history and meaning of the Holocaust and utilizing these experiences to explore peaceful avenues for human improvement and the prevention of further genocides.



A native of North Carolina, Dr. Hankins joined Appalachian State's Department of Philosophy and Religion in 2011. He teaches courses such as REL 2010 Old Testament: Jewish Scripture, REL 2020 New Testament, REL 2110 Judaism, REL 3735 Gender, Sexuality, and Biblical Interpretation, and REL 4115 Religion and the Arts. In 2019, he completed the Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Jewish Civilization at Northwestern University's Holocaust Educational Foundation.

Dr. Hankins was the recipient of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) William C. Strickland Outstanding Junior Faculty Award for 2016-17, honoring a pre-tenured member of the faculty demonstrating the highest standards of excellence in research, scholarship, and contributions to their academic field.

To learn more about Dr. Hankins' work, visit his [faculty profile](#).

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Cuong Mai (Associate Professor of Religious Studies) was awarded the 2025 Wayne D. Duncan Appalachian State University Faculty Enrichment and Teaching Fellowship. This award recognizes innovative and successful teaching in the General Education program. In the nineteen-year history of this award, Dr. Mai is the first recipient affiliated with the Department of Philosophy and Religion.



Dr. Mai joined Appalachian State's Department of Philosophy and Religion in 2015. He teaches courses such as REL 1120 Confronting Death, REL 2150 Buddhism, REL 2210 Religions of China, and REL 2220 Religions of Japan.

Dr. Mai's research focuses on the emergence of mortuary practices and paradise beliefs surrounding the Buddha figures Amitabha and Maitreya in early medieval China. Describing the connection of his research to his teaching, he states, "My approach to the study of religion is multidisciplinary, and my courses frequently incorporate the study of funerary customs, traditions of asceticism, religious festivals, beliefs concerning the afterlife, spirit mediumship, cults of saints and divine beings, and aspects of material culture."

To learn more about Dr. Mai's work, visit his [faculty profile](#).

Congratulations on Retirement

Alice Fisher is retiring in June 2025. Alice served as Administrative Assistant for the Department of Philosophy & Religion from 2011-2018, and has been the Business Office for the College of Arts and Sciences since 2018. We wish Alice all the best in her retirement.



A Note to Alumni 😊

We greatly enjoy keeping connected with alumni via this newsletter and other means. To update the contact information on file for you, [please do so here](#). We would also be happy to send you a P&R bumper sticker or P&R bookmarks.

We would like to host an event next academic year, in which alumni describe to current students their paths from majoring in Philosophy and/or Religious Studies at App State to their current careers. If you are interested in participating, please email us at: philrel@appstate.edu

Of course, we are always grateful for donations in support via our [department's general fund](#). Donations to this fund can be applied to a broad range of purposes, including support of events promoting and celebrating student success.