

# APPSTATE

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

## Philosophy and Religion

Summer 2026 Newsletter

### Letter from the Chair

As I write, faculty are busily packing their books into boxes, as the department readies for its relocation from I.G. Greer Hall. Many fond memories were made in our historic home of I.G. Greer; we will miss it dearly. We look forward to settling in to our new space on the third floor of the [recently renovated](#) Sanford Hall.

In addition to achievements spotlighted in this newsletter, the following faculty members have recently made significant accomplishments:

- Dr. Michael Eng (Philosophy), Dr. Sandie Gravett (Religious Studies), and Dr. Kevin Schilbrack (Religious Studies) kept busy with research/creative activities supported by Reassigned Time Leaves within the academic year.
- Dr. Kirstin Waldkoenig (Philosophy) was awarded a 2026 [College of Arts & Sciences Research/Proposal Development Summer Grant](#)
- Dr. Rick Elmore (Philosophy) and Dr. Davis Hankins (Religious Studies) were promoted from Associate Professor to Professor

Wishing you all the best this summer!

Dr. Mat Foust, Professor and Chair



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

## Internship Spotlight

**Hayden Gala** is an Interior Design major and Religious Studies minor, who completed an internship focused on cultural exploration and the development of educational materials via the Suwandi Foundation in Bali, Indonesia.



*Hayden (far left) at her summer internship in Bali, Indonesia.*

Reflecting on the value of her internship experience, Hayden states:

*"Having the opportunity to fully immerse myself in Balinese Hinduism opened my eyes to a way of life deeply rooted in harmony, acceptance, and peace. In the West, we are not always exposed to perspectives outside of our own, which is why experiences like this are so important. Stepping away from my own background and beliefs to embrace an entirely different way of thinking allowed me to understand humanity through a much broader lens.*

*One of the most impactful ideas I encountered was Tri Hita Karana, the belief that well-being comes from harmony among people, nature, and the divine. There is an intentionality and peace woven into everyday life in Bali that is difficult to describe unless experienced firsthand. This experience deepened not only my understanding of religion and culture, but also my appreciation for empathy, openness, and human connection. I hope to carry that understanding into the way I interact with and design for others."*

## *Student Spotlight*

Congratulations to **Sydney Hudson '26 (Double major: Religious Studies and Spanish & Hispanic Studies)**, the Department's Outstanding Senior for 2025-26.



*Sydney Hudson '26*

In addition to taking a wide range of courses in Religious Studies, Sydney graduated with Departmental Honors. Her thesis, directed by Dr. Ozzie Ostwalt (with second reader, Dr. Cuong Mai), is titled, "Sacred Transition and Medical Intervention: Buddhist Approaches to End-of-Life Ethics." Sydney examines how religious bioethical frameworks approach end-of-life decision-making, with particular attention to euthanasia, withdrawal of treatment, and organ donation.

While double majoring at App State, Sydney has also been enrolled as a Paramedic Student at Caldwell Community College and will graduate from that program this June. Moreover, Sydney has been serving as a Sergeant with [Mountaineer Medics](#) (App State's team of students and employees who are licensed EMT's) and currently works for Caldwell County EMS.

Following graduation, Sydney will relocate to work as a Wildland Firefighter-Paramedic with Adventure Medics in Bend, Oregon.

## Student Spotlight

Congratulations to **Kaitlyn Kitchen '26 (Double major: Philosophy and Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies)**, who has accepted admission to the MA program in Ethics and Applied Philosophy at UNC-Charlotte.



*Alf and Katie Kitchen '26*

During her time at App State, Katie took major coursework focused on topics such as critical animal studies, feminist studies, ethical and political philosophy, and activism and advocacy. Occupying leadership roles, she served as President of the Philosophy Club and as President of the Zeta Theta chapter of the Iota Iota Iota Honor Society. She also presented her research at multiple academic conferences. These include “The Liberatory Power of Shared Utopias in the Works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, and Friedrich Nietzsche” at the Blue Ridge Philosophy Symposium at Kennesaw State University and “Rolling in the Mud: Intersections and Cleavages in Animal Rights and Feminist Activism” at the WGS South Conference at Wake Forest University. Crediting faculty who served as mentors to her, notably Dr. Rick Elmore and Dr. Joe Weiss, Katie states:

*“It means a lot that the professors in this department are always happy to help in any ways they can. I am going to miss this department dearly when I graduate!”*

## *Faculty (and Alumni) Spotlight*

**Dr. Matt Ruble '94** and '97 is also an alumnus, having graduated with a BA in Philosophy and Religion from App State in 1994 and an MA in Human Development and Psychological Counseling in 1997. Dr. Ruble joined App State as a faculty member in 2003. Some of our alumni may recognize his name—Dr. Ruble is the son of Dr. Raymond Ruble, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy.



*Dr. Matt Ruble '94 and '97*

Dr. Ruble's expertise at the intersection of philosophy and psychology informs several of his courses, such as Medical Ethics, Neuroethics, Philosophy of Mental Health, and Philosophy of Mind. Dr. Ruble also routinely teaches Philosophy, Society, and Ethics and Introduction to Philosophy. In addition, Dr. Ruble serves as faculty advisor to the Ethics Bowl, which meets most Tuesday evenings.

Students have taken especial interest in Dr. Ruble's focus on philosophy of mental health, a topic which has historically been untreated in the discipline. His and Dr. Mai's [symposium on "Mindfulness and Mental Health"](#) met with rave reviews.

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

## Alumni Spotlight

**Stacie Walker '99** was a double major in Philosophy & Religion and Sociology with a minor in Business. After completing a one-year internship in collegiate athletics, she started at State Employees' Credit Union (SECU) in Boone, which evolved into her career. She currently serves as the Chief Credit and Revenue Officer for SECU, which is the second largest credit union in the United States. She oversees all functions of origination, servicing and loss mitigation for all lending products which include credit cards, auto and consumer loans, mortgages and home equity lines of credit. In addition, she oversees SECU's Financial Advisory Services, which offers Insurance, Investment and Trust Services as part of its Retirement and Investment Planning Services.



*Stacie Walker '99*

Stacie credits the Department of Philosophy and Religion for preparing her for her professional role:

*"Many of the philosophy courses required thorough reviews, analytical thinking and effective challenges when discussing topics. I have carried those skills with me throughout much of my work, especially when evaluating current products and solutions for our membership. We want to ensure we are meeting the needs of our members with the right offerings of lending products and financial services solutions. With constant analytical reviews and effective challenges, we are able to ensure that all possible angles have been thoroughly evaluated prior to implementation of a new product or changes to the services. Overall, my studies provided me a strong foundation for working in the financial world with analytical thinking, ethical reasoning, evaluating risk and communication skills."*

## P&R Puzzle

The surnames of the department's Emeritus Faculty appear below. Names may be hidden horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, including backwards. Find them all!



DAVIS

DUKE

HAUSER

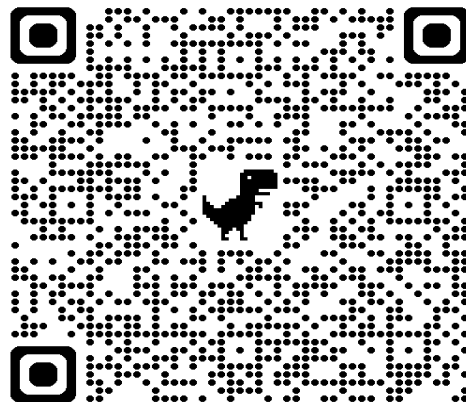
HUTCHINS

PARK

RUBLE

SPENCER

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