



APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
Philosophy and Religion

Winter 2024-25 Newsletter

Letter from the Chair

Reflecting on the fall semester, I am reminded of the remarkable perseverance of our students, faculty, and staff who weathered unexpected challenges brought about by Hurricane Helene. While the effects of Helene will remain with us for some time, we are fortified by mutual support and a spirit of resilience.

We are proud of our many recent accomplishments, some of which are detailed in this newsletter. We remain committed to [our mission](#), which we achieve through excellence in teaching, research, and service.

We are always grateful for donations in support of student-centered initiatives via our [department's general fund](#). We would also be happy to hear from alumni with job openings, internship opportunities, or other possible collaborations that would support our students. Email us at: philrel@appstate.edu

Wishing you all the best in the new year!

Dr. Mat Foust, Professor and Chair



Stay connected with the
Department of Philosophy and Religion!



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

Student Spotlight

Sabai Hartwiger '24 (Philosophy major) is a double major in Philosophy and East Asian Languages & Cultures. A Fall 2024 graduate, Sabai also fulfilled the requirements for [Departmental Honors](#).

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

“For me, philosophy has allowed me to cultivate different ways of seeing the world. Whether this be through rigorous theoretical undertaking in a variety of social and political, aesthetic, and ethical issues, or by simply taking a walk through campus, philosophy has helped me to critique my and expand my worldview into directions I didn’t know existed. Through the help of our expert faculty who are well versed in a wide-range of topics, I can speak on behalf of my peers when I say that they have breathed new life into our education and personal development. Without them, all of the students and faculty, I don’t know where I would be. Thus, after graduation I plan on continuing my studies in graduate school, where I will further hone, sharpen, and mature my knowledge in the fields of aesthetics and socio-political philosophy. These areas of interest will give me the opportunity to combine my interest in the different forms of aesthetic cultural productions around the world and the ways in which art challenges the organization of our societies and their systems of power. In the words of Goethe: ‘If you wish to approach the infinite, follow the finite in all directions.’”



Sabai and his mom in Japan

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Sandie Gravett (Professor of Religious Studies) was the recipient of the 2022-23 College of Arts & Sciences Jimmy Smith Outstanding Service Award.



The award honors a faculty member who has demonstrated meaningful and significant service to the College, the University and/or the faculty member's profession. Having joined App State in 1996, Dr. Gravett has maintained a significant track record of service to the Department of Philosophy & Religion, the College of Arts & Sciences, the university at large, the UNC system, and the field of religious studies.

At the department level, Dr. Gravett has frequently served as Chair of the Religious Studies Curriculum Committee, shepherding untold numbers of curricular proposals from early stages of discussion to fruition and publication in the undergraduate bulletin. Recent notable service at the university and system levels includes drafting the *Faculty Constitution* and collaborating on the drafting of a significantly revised *Faculty Handbook*.

A colleague who nominated Dr. Gravett for this award commented, “*Dr. Gravett’s contributions to service are staggering. That she does all this while maintaining a standard teaching load and research profile is astounding.*”

Congratulations to Dr. Gravett!

To learn more about Dr. Gravett’s work, visit her [faculty profile](#).

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Conrad “Ozzie” Ostwalt (Professor of Religious Studies) was the recipient of the 2023-24 College of Arts & Sciences Excellence in Engagement Award.



This award honors a faculty member in the College of Arts and Sciences with outstanding accomplishments in engagement, defined as representing the university to cultivate partnerships and initiatives that address community issues, enhance scholarship, research and creative activities, support curriculum, teaching and learning, and contribute to the public good.

Much of Dr. Ostwalt’s engagement has come in the form of “Religion in Life,” an award-winning television series that he produces and hosts. Recent guests have included community members associated with F.A.R.M. Café, the Islamic Center of Boone, and App State’s Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies.

A colleague who nominated Dr. Ostwalt for this award noted, “By building connections among people of many faith communities and secular audiences locally and regionally, Ozzie has enhanced the quality of life of citizens of North Carolina in tangible ways, promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and community-building.”

Congratulations to Dr. Ostwalt!

To learn more about Dr. Ostwalt’s work, visit his [faculty profile](#). To learn more about “Religion in Life,” visit the [“Religion in Life” AppTV site](#).

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Randy Reed (Professor of Religious Studies) was inducted in the College of Arts & Sciences Academy of Outstanding Teachers and was the recipient of the College's 2023-24 Tenure-Track Teacher of the Year Award.



Dr. Reed teaches a wide range of courses, in face-to-face and online formats. These include the department's most popularly enrolled course, REL 1010 Religion and Imaginary Worlds, as well as advanced specialized courses such as "AI, VR, and Ethics," co-taught with **Dr. Christopher Bartel (Professor of Philosophy)**. For several years, Dr. Reed has also co-lead a summer course abroad ("Love, Sex, and Power") in France and Italy with **Dr. Jack Kwong (Professor of Philosophy)**. Dr. Reed collaborates with students in research at the intersection of the humanities and digital technology, exploring implications of artificial intelligence for the future of religion. Students and colleagues alike appreciate his deep knowledge, passion for teaching, skill as an explainer and explorer of new technology and devotion to students' personal and intellectual growth.

A colleague who nominated Dr. Reed for these awards observed, *"He has never seen a wait list he didn't want to eliminate; if there are students who wish to learn from him, he will make every effort to bring them into the fold."*

Congratulations to Dr. Reed!

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

Congratulations on Retirement

Dr. Patrick Rardin (Associate Professor of Philosophy) retired in December 2024. A member of the Department of Philosophy & Religion since 1988, Dr. Rardin taught numerous students, and is perhaps best known for his courses in logic. We wish Dr. Rardin all the best in his retirement.

Alumni Spotlight

Richard ‘Tommy’ Guy ’07 was the recipient of the 2023-24 College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Alumni Award. The award honors alumni who have distinguished themselves through their remarkable contributions to a profession, through their ability to provide leadership, through public service activities, through outstanding creative endeavors or through other accomplishments.

Guy was a double major in Philosophy & Religion and Mathematics and is now a principal architect and data scientist at Microsoft, where he leads efforts in big data analytics and artificial intelligence. Guy connects his majors by their shared reliance upon logic: *“Both disciplines force learners to articulate and defend their thinking — whether constructing a geometric proof or justifying a worldview.”*

Guy has established multiple scholarships for students at App State, including the Richard T. Guy Scholarship for Philosophy majors.

Read more about Guy and his recent accomplishments [here](#) and [here](#).

