

APPSTATE

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Philosophy and Religion

Winter 2025-26 Newsletter

Letter from the Chair

As I write, the Fall semester has come to a close and the Spring semester is not quite near. It is a good time to pause and reflect on our recent successes.

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

- Ozzie Ostwalt (Religious Studies) was awarded the 2024-25 College of Arts & Sciences [Jimmy Smith Outstanding Service Award](#).
- Randall Reed (Religious Studies) published *Understanding Religion and Artificial Intelligence: Meaning-Making in the Digital Age* (Routledge).

As always, we appreciate your donations to our [department's general fund](#). Donations to this fund support events promoting and celebrating student success.

Wishing you all the best in the new year!

Dr. Mat Foust, Professor and Chair



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[**https://philrel.appstate.edu/**](https://philrel.appstate.edu/)

Student Spotlight

Mad Pilione '25 (Religious Studies major, Philosophy minor) is a Fall 2025 graduate. Mad is the first student to graduate from the department's new Religion and Public Health BA Concentration.



In addition to a wide range of coursework in the department, Mad has kept active with professional presentations at meetings of the North Carolina Religious Studies Association (NCRSA) at UNC-Pembroke (2024) and UNC-Chapel Hill (2025). Presentations have drawn on research conducted in “AI, VR, and Ethics,” a course co-taught by Chris Bartel (Philosophy) and Randall Reed (Religious Studies) and participation in focus groups as part of Dr. Reed’s student research team. Mad is also a contributing author on a forthcoming publication with the NIH Pragmatic Trials Collaboratory, examining artificial intelligence usage in pragmatic clinical trials, examining relevant challenges, successes, and ethical considerations.

Mad hopes to pursue graduate study in public health, stating:

I plan to contribute to research in the field and feel very inspired by the project leaders on my current NIH Pragmatic Trials Collaboratory internship. I hope to one day do the kind of work they do, leading research that meaningfully improves health outcomes.

To learn more about Mad, see Mad’s [CAS Senior Spotlight](#).

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Chris Bartel (Professor of Philosophy) was the recipient of the 2024-25 College of Arts & Sciences Donald W. Sink Family Outstanding Scholar Award.



The award honors a tenured faculty in the College who has made outstanding scholarly contributions throughout their career.

Dr. Bartel joined the Department of Philosophy and Religion in 2007, as a specialist in the philosophy of art and aesthetics. Since then, he has broadened the scope of his research to include cutting-edge work in the philosophy of technology, attracting a broad and interdisciplinary readership.

Among Dr. Bartel's most notable publications are his monographs, *Video Games, Violence, and the Ethics of Fantasy* (2020, Bloomsbury) and *Aesthetics and Video Games* (Bloomsbury, 2024). He has also published over 25 journal articles and chapters, as well as numerous public philosophy articles in widely read outlets. Moreover, Dr. Bartel has delivered over 20 refereed conference presentations and nearly as many invited presentations, including keynote addresses at international scholarly conferences.

Students who enroll in Dr. Bartel's popular classes, such as PHL 1502 Philosophy and Popular Culture and PHL 2013 Philosophy of Art, are given a semester-long look at some of the philosophical topics that animate his research.

Congratulations to Dr. Bartel!

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

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Anna Cremaldi (Associate Professor of Philosophy) was the recipient of the 2024-25 Undergraduate Advising Council Excellence in Academic Advising Award.



Each year, this award is presented to one faculty advisor across the university who best exemplifies excellence in academic advising. Recipients of the Faculty Advising Award are recognized according to the following criteria:

1. Consistently demonstrating a caring and helpful attitude toward advisees
2. Delivering accurate information regarding program requirements, including General Education
3. Providing guidance for semester and career planning
4. Informing advisees of available university resources
5. Staying up to date on App State's regulations, policies, and procedures
6. Supporting student development through academic, social, and professional engagement
7. Monitoring and communicating student progress toward graduation

Dr. Cremaldi received multiple nominations for this award, from colleagues and from student advisees—both currently enrolled and alumni. Advisees described Dr. Cremaldi as “one-of-a-kind,” a “singular and monumental figure” and “more than an advisor [...] a lifeline.”

Congratulations to Dr. Cremaldi!

To learn about Dr. Cremaldi's teaching and research, visit her [faculty profile](#).

Alumni Spotlight

Jeremy Caudle '09 (Philosophy), '11 (Master of Public Administration) is the city manager for a small but growing city in the heart of Oregon's wine country.



Describing the role of the study of Philosophy in his career path, Jeremy states:

Political philosophy interested me at an early age. So, it was natural for me to study philosophy at App State. Like all philosophy majors, I had to figure out how to make a living after graduating. App State's MPA program appealed to me. As an undergraduate, I studied politics in theory; as an MPA student, I studied politics in practice. I've worked in county and city government in various roles. Writing has been the dominant activity of my career: memos, research reports, program evaluations, grant applications, press releases, policies, and contracts. Philosophy honed my writing skills. It helps me organize my thoughts, synthesize information, and communicate with elected officials and the public. It helps me evaluate arguments and form arguments of my own. To this day, my training in philosophy helps me grapple with the big issues of governance. These issues span aesthetics, ethics, justice, democracy, power, how we think, what motivates us. Philosophy has given me the tools to serve my community as we confront the issues that matter most.

Jeremy can be contacted [via LinkedIn](#). Learn about Dayton, OR [here](#).

Alumni Spotlight

Claire Watson '18 (Religious Studies) earned a Master of Divinity from Duke University following graduation from App State. She later served two congregations in San Diego, California, one as an Associate Pastor and the other as a Family Minister. During her time in San Diego, she also helped produce, edit, and co-host The [Collective Table](#) podcast.



Claire currently serves as the Pastor of Youth Ministry at Hayes Barton United Methodist Church in Raleigh, NC. In her role, she guides students through their formative years by cultivating spaces for spiritual growth, belonging, and service.

Describing the role of Religious Studies in her career path, Claire states:

Religious Studies broadened my understanding of diverse religious traditions and worldviews, deepened my empathy, and strengthened my ability to listen across differences—skills that I draw on daily in ministry. I credit the Religious Studies program at App State with fostering my curiosity, commitment to lifelong learning, and capacity to approach complex questions with humility and openness, all of which continue to ground my work with youth and families today.