

2011 Graduates

Philosophy Majors:

Todd Ares
Anna Betzel
Edan Blevins
Alex Edelstein
Farah Egal
Alex Fenton
Jamie Flynn
Nathan Oseroff
Rhett-Alexander Parany
Taylor Rogers
Ronald Rupard
Elaine Sylvester
Arielle Usher
Jeffrey Wedgeworth
Max Zahn

Philosophy Minors:

Samuel Berger
Elin Rummel

News from Alumni

In response to an e-mail request for news and the announcement of the department's new Facebook page, we received several fascinating updates from alumni. In future years, we hope to expand this section of the newsletter. We would love to include your "life-after-Oberlin" stories, important news, and photos. Please keep in touch on our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Oberlin-Philosophy-Department/116124061781395>) or via email (kthomson@oberlin.edu).

Lloyd Morrisett '51 offered a synopsis of his impressive career since leaving Oberlin: He earned his PhD in psychol-

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A Note from the Editor

by Katherine Thomson-Jones

Welcome to the first issue of the Oberlin Philosophy Alumni Newsletter! We look forward to providing an annual update on departmental events as well as a forum for you to exchange news about life after Oberlin.

This past year was as busy and productive as ever, with a full schedule of courses and a lively speaker series. The most momentous event of the year, however, came at the very end with festivities to mark the distinguished career of Al MacKay upon his retirement. Having given 44 years of exceptional service to the students and faculty of Oberlin, Al is an inspiration to us all. Read on for a description of the retirement festivities and a tribute to Al from our chair, Tim Hall.

Since this was a year without the biennial Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy, we had a series of eight departmental talks, two in the fall semester and four in the spring. As usual, Martin Thomson-Jones put together an impressive line-up: students and faculty alike thoroughly enjoyed the visits of Arthur Fine from the University of Washington, Nick Huggett from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Peter Railton from the University of Michigan, Elizabeth Harman from Princeton University, Sherri Irvin from the University of Oklahoma, and Alex Byrne from MIT. Descriptions of their talks on our website (<http://new.oberlin.edu/philosophy>) show the diversity of topics in the series: the metaphysics of science, time, rationality and action, moral ignorance, the ontology of contemporary art, and anti-skepticism.

Next year, our focus will be on the philosophy of mind for the 40th Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy. Todd Ganson has put together an outstanding program, with papers to be given by Christopher Peacocke, Michael Tye, Frances Egan, Susanna Schellenberg, and Peter Carruthers. Their commentators will be Michael Martin, Jeff Speaks, Mohan Matthen, Alex Byrne, and Wayne Wu. The colloquium will take place in May 2012, and so we look forward to telling you all about it in next year's newsletter.

If we have not heard from you recently, please send us your news. Whether by e-mail, paper mail, or on Facebook, we'd love to hear from you. Have a wonderful year.

Al MacKay's Retirement

by Tim Hall

The weekend of May 6-7, 2011, saw the bittersweet occasion of Al MacKay's retirement festivities. Al has been at Oberlin for 44 years, a period, we note, that is nearly exactly one quarter of the history of Oberlin College. Not only has Al been a member of the philosophy department, but he also served as dean from 1984-95, provost from 2005-08, and acting president from July 1991 to January 1992.

Fittingly then, the department, the dean's office, and the president's office co-sponsored a two-day retirement celebration. On Friday, May 6, Oberlin alumnus

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AL MACKAY'S RETIREMENT, continued

and Morehead Alumni Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Geoffrey Sayre-McCord '75 gave the talk, "A Moral Argument against Moral Dilemmas." Perhaps equally notable to Geoffrey's comments on moral dilemmas was his recollection of spending a summer rebuilding a car with Al when he was a student. Following the talk was Al's last departmental dinner as an active member of the teaching faculty, an occasion for which we were joined by emeritus philosophers Robert Grimm, Dan Merrill, and Ira Steinberg. Philosophical conversation and good wine flowed for quite some time at Weia Teia that evening.

On Saturday, another Oberlin alumnus, Dorit Silbert Professor of the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy at Smith College Jay Garfield '74 gave the talk, "What



Dorit Ganson addresses guests at Al MacKay's retirement dinner.

I learned from Al MacKay: Meaning, Synonymy, and Translation. A Valedictory Vote of Thanks." Introducing Jay was Dorit Ganson, which was fitting not only given Dorit's role as co-organizer of the weekend's festivities, but because Jay taught Dorit in a math camp when Dorit was in high school. (There is no word yet on exactly how long ago that was.)

Following Jay's talk was a dinner in the Root Room with more than 150 of Al's former students, college colleagues, friends, and family. A panel of speakers helped commemorate the occasion appropriately. Leading off was President Marvin Krislov, who noted that he has known no one in academic life who has been as successful in all three areas of areas of scholarship, teaching, and administration. Co-organizer and department chair Tim Hall played



Front row from right: Karen Barnes (AA), Katherine Thomson-Jones (faculty), Peter McInerney (faculty), Al MacKay (faculty), Dorit Ganson (faculty), Martin Thomson-Jones (faculty), Jay Garfield (Class of '75, Professor of Philosophy at Smith College). Back row from right: Geoff Sayre-McCord (Class of '79, Professor of Philosophy at UNC Chapel Hill), Ira Steinberg (emeritus faculty), Daniel Merrill (emeritus faculty), Robert Grimm (emeritus faculty), Timothy Hall (faculty), Todd Ganson (faculty).

master of ceremonies and also spoke about Al's importance in our department. Dorit Ganson read touching letters from alumni who were unable to attend. Al's former colleague on the faculty and in the dean's office, Emeritus Professor of Classics Jim Helm, spoke with great irreverence about Al's years as an administrator. Professor of Violin Marilyn McDonald played her adaptation of *Fascination*, rewritten specially for the occasion. Al's son, Doug MacKay, shared his thoughts about his father. Our invited speakers, Geoffrey and Jay, each offered high praise of Al, praise all the more impressive given their unique positions as former students of Al's and current profes-

sional colleagues.

No one set of events can do justice to a professional career, much less one that helped shape many different areas of college life. Even those of us who have known Al for many years were moved by what we learned about his life and career. We are all sorry to see Al leave regular teaching, but we are happy for his upcoming freedom and wish him well in the next phase of his life.

Thanks to all of Al's former students who helped make his career what it has been. The department is happy to pass along good wishes on behalf of you, and also invites you to drop a line to Al at al.mackay@oberlin.edu.



Al and Ann MacKay with President Marvin Krislov.

FACULTY NEWS

Dorit Ganson's various professional activities in the academic year 2010-11 included serving as a reviewer for the journals *Mind* and *Erkenntnis*, working on a book review of *Knowledge in an Uncertain World* for the journal *ProtoSociology*, and completing "The Probabilistic Coherence of Dogmatist and Explanationist Responses to Skepticism," which she plans to submit this summer. An essay she coauthored with her husband and fellow philosopher, Todd Ganson, "Everyday Thinking about Bodily Sensations," was published in September 2010 in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. She enjoyed attending the Pacific APA in San Diego this past spring with Todd as well as her two cooperative children, Julia and Katrina. She was able to learn about some new developments and trends in epistemology, the area of philosophy in which she is currently working, and see real Pandas for the first time.

Todd Ganson is preoccupied with making a complete shift in his research from history of philosophy to contemporary philosophy of mind. He has recently completed four articles. The first, coauthored by Dorit Ganson, has to do with our everyday concept of pain and other bodily sensations. The second is about the nature of color perception. The third, coauthored by Oberlin student Ben Bronner, is about the effects attention has on visual phenomenology. The fourth is coauthored by Ben Bronner and former Oberlin student Alex Kerr. This last paper explores a recent attempt to show that some sensory states are genuinely representational (have non-trivial accuracy conditions). Todd's focus now turns to the issue of how perception differs from perceptual belief. After a long break from teaching Early Modern Philosophy (Descartes to Kant), Todd returns to the topic this coming fall semester. He continues to teach Ancient Philosophy and Philosophy of Mind on a regular basis. With two daughters and two cats, Todd only rarely finds time for his hobbies: playing difficult Japanese video games (turn-based tactical

games and arcade shooters) and listening to difficult music.

Tim Hall had an extended introduction to the Class of 2014 this past school year, teaching two sections of introductory philosophy and a first-year seminar. He is happy to report that all seems well with the future of philosophical study at the college. This coming year, Tim will be offering another section of his first-year seminar, Moral Persons and Moral Value. His Social, Legal, and Political Philosophy course, also in the fall, will include new material on statutory interpretation, including constitutional interpretation. This material seems a timely anticipation of another outbreak of controversy over judicial review likely to follow a Supreme Court ruling on the Affordable Health Care Act. In addition to a full set of responsibilities as department chair, Tim is directing his research efforts toward hedonism—the philosophical doctrine that the sole intrinsic good is pleasure and the absence of pain, not the dissolute lifestyle—and further commentaries on doing and allowing harm. Tim welcomes correspondence from all of our former majors on matters legal and ethical, as well as inquiries after his housemate and sometime lecture partner, African Grey Parrot Madeline Hall. Madeline, Tim reports, continues to flourish in her various avian pursuits.

Al MacKay taught two courses last fall—Ethics and British Empiricism—and a private reading course on Evolutionary Ethics in the spring. The philosophy department (with support from President Krislov and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Sean Decatur) organized a retirement celebration for Al featuring philosophy talks by two of Al's former students: Jay Garfield '75 and Geoffrey Sayre-McCord '79, followed by a dinner held in the Root Room of the Carnegie Building. Attending were former philosophy professors Robert Grimm, Daniel Merrill, and Ira Steinberg, as well as former college president Nancy Dye and

former dean and provost Clayton Koppes. A good time was had by all. Al and Ann intend to live in Oberlin after Al's retirement.

Peter McInerney taught a full set of courses in 2010-11, including Philosophy of Mind, 20th-Century Continental Philosophy, and Human Nature (a relatively new course that concerns recent scientific data about topics such as sexual and mating tendencies, moral thinking, and conscious agency). He continues to do research on conceptions of rationality and of personal identity in light of recent scientific data, mostly from various branches of psychology and neuroscience. He has focused on issues about the rationality of various reflective activities, such as trying to improve the adjustment of one's emotional state with a person's activities at a time. Peter stopped flying small planes a number of years ago, but still plays basketball and tennis. His wife and daughter are doing well, and he and his daughter play tennis frequently (when she is not playing on a tennis team).

Kate Thomson-Jones enjoyed teaching three courses this year: in the fall, a new seminar on the theory of emotions, and in the spring, Philosophy of Art along with an introductory course, The Nature of Value. Since she is coming up for tenure this fall, Kate has been working hard on expanding her list of publications. She submitted two articles to journals, one on our imaginative engagement with films and the other on the ethical criticism of art. Last fall, she presented versions of the second paper at the annual meeting of the American Society of Aesthetics and at the London Aesthetics Forum. Kate is also very excited about her new book project on the philosophy of the digital arts. Beyond philosophy, she continues to enjoy parenting with Martin, who seems to have produced a mini version of himself in the recently-turned-2 Orla.

This year **Martin Thomson-Jones** taught Philosophy of Science, Deductive Logic,

FACULTY NEWS, continued

and two sections of Knowledge and Reality, an introductory course that focuses on metaphysics and epistemology. He looks forward to teaching a new seminar this fall, titled Recent Work on Scientific Realism, partly because it will tie in nicely with ideas he has for a book project. Martin published a paper, "Structuralism about Scientific Representation," in the latest volume of the *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* series this year, and he finished work on a review of Bas van Fraassen's *Scientific Representation* that will appear in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* later this summer. He also gave papers at the biennial Philosophy of Science Association meetings in Montreal in November and at a conference on the relationship between metaphysics, science, and the philosophy of science in Toronto in May. On balance, then, there seems to have been a particular call for his work in the Commonwealth recently. At home, Martin continues work on his plan to surround Kate with variously sized versions of himself.



Clockwise from left, front row: Karen Barnes, Kate Thomson-Jones, Doris Ganson, Martin Thomson-Jones, Todd Ganson, Tim Hall, Peter McInerney.

FUTURE PLANS OF SOME OF OUR 2011 GRADUATES

Todd Ares will be preparing for the GRE before applying to graduate programs in either architecture or computer science. He is also researching the feasibility of starting a business in hardware manufacturing for municipal area networks.

Anna Betzel is waiting to hear back about CityYear in Washington, D.C., a program through which she will tutor and mentor in the public schools. In the long term, she is considering pursuing teaching middle school or high school.

Edan Blevins will work at home in Indianapolis while applying to graduate programs in either philosophy or religious studies.

Farah Egal graduated in December 2010. In January, he moved to New York City, where he works as a paralegal to a divorce lawyer and an editorial assistant at a

"politically progressive" book publishing company, OR Books. www.orbooks.com.

Taylor Rogers will stay in Oberlin for another year to continue working with OBJUMP, Oberlin's competitive and demonstrative jump rope team. She is applying to graduate programs in philosophy, and says she's particularly interested in the program at the University of Washington.

Ron Rupard returned home to Waynesfield, Ohio, for the summer and fall. He will work at his parent's golf course, coach high school football, take the MCAT, and prepare to apply to medical school.

Jeff Wedgeworth is applying to Ohio University's environmental studies graduate program. He intends to study civil engineering and environmental policy with a focus on the coal mining industry.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Every year, we hold competitions for two essay prizes. **The Christopher P. Dahl Essay Prize** is given for the best undergraduate essay in any area of philosophy, and the **Rhoden Essay Prize** is given for the best undergraduate essay in the areas of ethics, medical ethics, or the philosophy of law. This year, both prizes went to **Ben Bronner**.

Taylor Rogers was awarded High Honors for her thesis, titled "The Ethical Significance of the Aesthetic Experience of Non-representational Art."

Congratulations Ben and Taylor!

ALUMNI NEWS, continued

ogy in 1956. He taught at U.C. Berkeley for 12 years, then spent a year at the Social Science Research Council and 10 years at the Carnegie Foundation. He served as president of the Markle Foundation in New York for 28 years. He also cofounded the Children's Television Workshop (now Sesame Workshop) and *Sesame Street*. While ostensibly retired, Lloyd is still active with Sesame Workshop and several other organizations. He writes that he always found his grounding in philosophy highly valuable for thinking about problems in other fields.

Bob Tredwell '55 sent us a detailed review of his rich life after Oberlin: He earned his PhD in philosophy at Yale University in 1960. He taught at Hollins College in Virginia and then at Amherst College, where he was a colleague of Bill Kennick, his principal teacher at Oberlin. He then accepted the challenge of rebuilding the philosophy department at the University of Maine—as he puts it, the challenge was “to build a department that would make a difference to the minds of people who were not going to be philosophers.” From all accounts, Bob had great success. Wherever he has taught, he has been a dedicated volunteer firefighter, and, for six years in the 1980s, he organized the EMS program for the state of Maine. Bob wrote the state's first EMS law and lobbied it and its budget through the legislature. He also saw Maine license its first paramedics and take its EMS system from one based on Red Cross first aid to fully professional training. While at EMS Bob taught himself to write computer software. He then went on to write software for a company that specialized in alcohol and drug-abuse clinics, including the Betty Ford Center in California, and to write grants at the intersection between data management, government, and health care. For several years, he managed a large federal project to upgrade the Saudi Red Crescent Society's national ambulance service, which included training Saudi Arabia's first paramedics in Portland, Maine.

For 30 years, Bob and his wife owned a small island in Passamaquoddy Bay, at the eastern end of the Maine coast. Now they live in a town with a population of 1,002, surrounded by a tidal river. He writes, “Islands seem to be my fate and hers (she was born on Manhattan). Since the last election, we're seriously considering Newfoundland.” For the past 10 years, Bob has worked part time for a small hospital in Blue Hill, Maine. He digs information out of its databases, writes custom software and web pages, and generally tries to promote rational use of information. His latest work in philosophy can be found at <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~rbombard/RB/Spinoza/tredwell.html>. He is also working on a paper on the identity of indiscernibles.

Katharine Cook '59 describes where her philosophy major has taken her—“basically into creative writing, environmental journalism, and the theory of knowledge and the power of transformation according to Thich Nhat Hanh.”

Julie Macfie Sobol '59 writes: “In *Looking for Lake Erie*, a book I wrote with my husband Ken '59, we speak of our first meeting in an Oberlin philosophy class called Introspection and Observation, Philosophical Aspects of Psychoanalysis. Since Ken died this year of Lewy Body Dementia, a cruel and little known disease that combines the worst symptoms of Parkinson's and Alzheimers, I've been thinking again about that early class. In working on a piece about the close-up experience of living with LBD, I've had to apply lots of introspection and observation. How exactly is the self affected by this kind of illness? I mention this because, as you know, philosophy isn't just something you read about in books; for me, anyway, it's always been part of everyday life.”

Stephen E. Braude '67 is a professor of philosophy and chair of the department at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

You can find out what he's been up to on either of his websites: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~braude> <http://JazzPhilosopher.com/>

Dan Wikler '67 serves on the faculty of the Harvard School of Public Health. He writes about his recently renewed contact with another '67 philosophy honors candidate: “Chris Boorse is the single most influential theorist on the definition of health and disease. His work is read with respect around the world and has been influential at WHO (as I know, since I was a staff member there from 1999 to 2001). His theory is still the one to shoot at. Five months ago, we invited a young Dutch scholar to speak at Harvard on her critique of Chris's work, and I've corresponded with Chris since then about it.” Dan goes on to say, “my own work permits me to combine my interest in philosophy that I owe entirely to Oberlin with my political interests that were nurtured there.”

Jeff Dean '91 thinks the new departmental Facebook page is a great idea. He was back in Oberlin during commencement weekend for his 20th reunion: “20th: Yikes!”

Mark Engleson '03 is graduating from the University of Maryland with an MA in philosophy. He was pleased with the chance to work with some great philosophers there.

Matt Carlson '05 is completing his PhD in philosophy at the University of Indiana. His dissertation is on the epistemology of logic, and he plans on entering the job market this fall. Matt served as a commentator on a paper presented at the central meeting of the American Philosophical Association this past spring. He and his wife, Brea (another Oberlin alum), have two sons, 3 and eight months.

OBERLIN PHILOSOPHY

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