

NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR



Dear Philosophy and Religion Alums,

If you have not visited your Alma Mater in a number of years, I'm not sure you would believe what is taking place here in Oxford. There is more than a *billion dollars* (that's not a misprint) of development underway.... and that only on the UM campus. The city is growing, we have a booming student population, and there is a daily whirlwind of academic, cultural, and athletic events. The Department of Philosophy and Religion is busy doing its part to contribute to all of this energy and excitement. We've hired a number of outstanding new professors, our forum lectures and workshops are now large and anticipated events, and we have an ever-growing number of majors, minors, and graduate students.

We hope to keep you informed about the Department of Philosophy and Religion through this annual newsletter. I encourage you to visit our new and improved website: phirel.olemiss.edu. With a few clicks, you will be able to read about our entire faculty and get a good sense of our current activities. Also, be sure to click on the "Alumni" menu tab. We'd love for you to keep in touch.

Please don't hesitate to call, email, or drop by Bryant Hall!

Sincerely,

Steven Skultety
Chair and Associate Professor
Department of Philosophy and Religion

PHILOSOPHY

Jordan Sacks*Juris Doctorate, Georgetown University Law Center***Present Occupation: Assistant State Attorney,
Miami-Dade County (Prosecutor for Greater Miami area)**

When I first arrived at Ole Miss I really had no clue what philosophy was about. After taking a few philosophy-esque classes through another department I realized how much I enjoyed both the readings and the lectures we had. I found quickly that I was more interested in, and growing more academically as a result of my philosophy classes than I was from any other topic. The discussions we had in class, and the thought experiments we walked through together helped me hone the reasoning, analytic and writing skills that later gave me a huge leg up when I arrived in law school. In fact, I have no doubt I wouldn't have been able to perform nearly as well on the LSAT without courses like analytic philosophy, logic, and symbolic logic, as well as the general reading comprehension and argument skills I learned in all my other classes.



I grew close early on with Dr. Westmoreland, who wrote me a great rec letter to law school, and when I first started I really enjoyed all the ethics courses I took with him. I only got to know Dr. Barnard and Dr. Manson later, but they were both great too. In fact in the end of my collegiate career I wished I'd taken more of their courses, and had more time to focus on topics in mathematics, logic, and aesthetics. I felt on the whole though that the faculty was tremendously responsive to the students desires and what they wanted to focus on. That wasn't something I experienced in any other department.

My only advice to present philosophy majors is to take courses you may not be familiar with, because you might realize you're really interested in topics you didn't think you would be. Philosophy is an amazing discipline and broadening your exposure to it makes you all the better at the study.

RELIGION

Janie Travis**The year you graduated from
UM with a Religion degree:**

2013 (class of 2012, but I took time off for two internships in Brussels and Chicago)

**Current Occupation:**

Development Manager, Distinguished Events with the American Cancer Society

**How has your religion degree contributed to your
career path and life since leaving the University:**

My degree in Religious Studies contributed to the foundation for my career. Through the encouragement of several Religious Studies professors, I chose to participate in an internship program with the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, IL. During this time I interacted with dozens of religious groups and had the opportunity to apply my academic studies in relationships in my workplace. Moreover, the internship built professional skills and connections that are invaluable in helping me succeed in my current career.

**Was there a particular class that you remember
from your time at the University?**

Religious Ethics taught by Dr. Sarah Moses was my favorite class at Ole Miss for several reasons.

First, the class was centered around readings of several religious thinkers including Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Abraham Heschel. While reading selections of their work and discussing themes of social justice, passive resistance, treatment of the elderly, etc., we completed community service hours in order to apply these themes to our cultural landscape. Through the (often passionate) class discussions, it was apparent that each student was not only impacted by the readings personally and academically, but we also applied these principles practically through our service. The result of that integration transformed the way that I viewed the relevancy of my education to every day life.

Second, I appreciated the structure of the class as it was capped in size and discussion based. Many of my close friends came from that class which I attribute that to both the content and structure as well as the leadership of Dr. Moses.

What advice do you have for current religion majors?

Do an internship. My experience with my undergraduate internships gave me skills and experience that impacted my job search post grad. In addition, internships help you define your career path, provide you with a new skill set, and create meaningful references in your job search. I never would have dreamed that I would be working in Chicago, but my Religious Studies internship paved my path and shaped my professional career.

PHILOSOPHY

Haley Clark

*2015 Recipient
of the Lawhead
Philosophy Award*



What made you decide to become a philosophy major?

I was relatively unfamiliar with philosophy as an area of study when I first chose it as a major, but ultimately chose philosophy because it seemed to be a place where all my questions about other courses might be addressed and attempted to be solved. Now, after having completed two years in the program, philosophy has made me a deeper thinker, a more open-minded student, and a cautious investigator in all kinds of situations.

What are your main philosophical interests?

Philosophy of mind has become my main area of interest, especially mind-body related puzzles. I also have interest in philosophy of science, as I believe the intersection between philosophy and science to be of utmost importance for anyone wishing to pursue either endeavor in the future.

What plans do you have for the future?

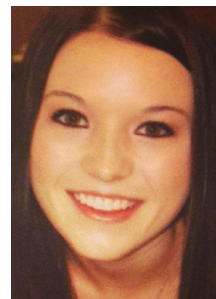
Philosophy has broadened my interests and led me to areas of study that I never thought I would be interested in. Neuroscience is one such area. Since neuroscience is an integrated science to which philosophy, psychology, biology, chemistry, and other sectors contribute, there are more than a few opportunities in the field. I hope to attend either graduate or medical school after graduation and further my studies and interests in pressing questions about the mind.

RELIGION

Hannah Switzer

*Recipient of the 2015 Blass
Religious Studies Award*

I decided to be a religion major because religion is incredibly important to so many people, cultures, and even nations. It is interesting to learn the history, beliefs and practices of people all around the world. Religion permeates almost every aspect of the world, both in the past and present. Religion is something that will always be relevant, something that will always be a part of who people are and what they stand for. Religious studies is a great major for any student who is interested in learning about different people and cultures. Students who choose to be in religion will definitely be constantly intrigued!



My main area of interest in religious studies is New Testament studies. I am also studying Greek, so I can study and evaluate the New Testament in its original language. The New Testament of the Bible is interesting to me not only because of its incredible history, but because of its incredible impact on so many people for centuries.

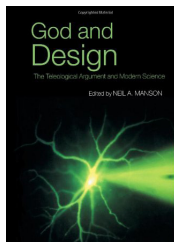
In the future, I hope to teach religious studies (specifically the New Testament) at either the university or high school level. I am currently a religious studies Sunday School teacher at my church, and I love to teach others so they learn and grow. I want to be able to help others learn in fun and interesting ways about the importance of religion.



F A C U L T Y F O C U S

PHILOSOPHY

Associate Professor Neil Manson has been writing and thinking about the fine-tuning argument for almost 20 years. “Cosmic fine-tuning is the idea that the basic physical parameters of the universe—the masses of the fundamental particles, the strengths of the fundamental forces, the rate of expansion of the early universe—all need to be just right if the universe is to have any life in it anywhere,” says Manson. “If those cosmic numbers were just the least bit different, it seems there would be no stars, no galaxies, and no life anywhere in the universe. The fine-tuning argument says cosmic fine-tuning for life is powerful evidence of the existence of God.”



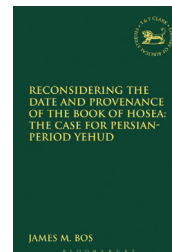
Manson edited one of the central anthologies on the fine-tuning argument—*God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (Routledge, 2003). He has also written numerous papers on the topic, including on the concept of fine-tuning, the theology underlying the argument, and the multiverse hypothesis. “According to the multiverse hypothesis, there are many (perhaps infinitely many) other physical universes, each with varying basic physical parameters,” says Manson. “If the hypothesis is true, it is not surprising that at least one of the universes is, like ours, just right for life. That is supposed to explain why we observe our universe to be fine-tuned.” He recently completed a major survey of physicists and cosmologists, probing them about the multiverse hypothesis and the philosophical implications of it. This June, Manson went to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota to serve as one of four leaders of a three-day seminar for advanced doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers. They got a crash course in the fine-tuning argument. “There were so many smart young philosophers there,” said Manson. “I learned a lot from them.” This September, he traveled to Chicago to speak about the fine-tuning argument to the Zygon Center’s Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science. The seminar meets weekly, attracting faculty and doctoral students from the University of Chicago, Northwestern, and other colleges and universities in the area. “I’m lucky I chose to write my dissertation on the fine-tuning argument,” says Manson. “Whether pro or con, it seems everyone takes an interest in it.”

RELIGION



James M. Bos, assistant professor of religion (with a research specialty in the early history of Judaism), is the most recent tenure-track hire in the Department of Philosophy and Religion (Fall 2013).

He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan in 2011. In 2013, a revised version of his dissertation, titled *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian-Period Yehud*, appeared in the highly reputable series Library of Hebrew Bible and Old Testament Studies (Bloomsbury Publishing). In this book, he argues that the traditional understanding of the composition and transmission of the biblical prophetic text known as Hosea must be re-evaluated. Bos concludes that large portions of this text were first written some two centuries later than many scholars have assumed.



His first essay published as a University of Mississippi faculty member appeared in print recently in an edited volume titled *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production* (Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2015). Bos’ contribution, “The ‘Literarization’ of the Biblical Prophecy of Doom,” continues his re-evaluation of the origins and development of the biblical prophetic corpus. A second article is forthcoming in an edited volume titled *Leadership in Biblical Memory and Judean Discourse in the 5th-2nd Centuries BCE* (Equinox Press). Bos’ essay is titled “Memories of Judah’s Past Leaders Utilized as Propaganda in Yehud.” He is currently working on an essay in which he examines the narrative in Jeremiah 26 and puts forward additional evidence for a later dating of the prophetic books than is generally supposed.

In the classroom, Bos enjoys teaching both the upper-level courses that are closely related to his research specialty (such as Hebrew Bible/Old Testament; New Testament and Early Christianity; and Judaism) as well as lower-level courses such as Introduction to Religion and Introduction to the Abrahamic Traditions. He is looking forward to teaching the first iteration of a course titled Advanced Seminar in Religious Studies (to be offered in Fall 2016). He will have students examine the development of early Jewish monotheism from a variety of perspectives and lines of evidence.

Bos has put together a Study Abroad program that will provide students the opportunity to participate in an archaeological excavation of the ancient Israelite city of Megiddo. This program will be offered in Summer 2016.