Change

Norvin Richards has resigned as Chair of the department, a post he has held since January of 1992. The new Chair is James Otteson, whose term will begin on August 15. Below are Professor Richards' reflections, and following are Professor Otteson's plans for the department's future.

It is tempting to begin by quoting Martin Luther King in the "I have a Dream" speech, when he said "In the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty I am free at last." It's tempting to do that, but it would also be tasteless and cheap, so I won't do it.

Besides, I've had some fun doing this job, and enough successes to provide a small sense of satisfaction. Scott Hestevold has helped me have both, with good advice on a wide range of matters. I think the philosophy department is now one of the university's best, with an excellent set of faculty, a very attractive array of course-offerings, and a healthy enrollment both in numbers and in the sheer brain-power of our majors. The trouble is, chairing a department has something important in common with teaching and with doing philosophy. All three are virtually boundless in their possibilities, so that it is up to you when you have done enough as a teacher, or in your research—or as chair of your department. Managing three such endeavors requires a certain harmony of the soul that I don't have. I always felt as if I was shorting something.

So I've chosen to return to the simpler life of a professor, and I do so with anticipation.

It has been thirty-five years since Janet and I drove to Tuscaloosa in what used to be called a panel truck, our worldly possessions packed inside. The truck was rented from U-Haul, and was emblazoned with their slogan: "Adventures in Moving." This particular adventure was a long one, since it took two days back then to drive from West Virginia to Alabama. That was time enough for my mind to make frequent cycles among three thoughts. The first was, "I'm going to be a professor of philosophy? Can I do this job? Can I have enough material to fill a whole hour, and do that three days a week? Will anyone publish what I write?" After a while, I would move on to the second thought: "Of course I can do this job. Wonder how long we'll have to stay at Alabama...?" Later, I would think "Wait—they are going to pay me to think about things I want to think about, write about what I come up with, and talk about it to people who are at least supposed to be paying attention? Gosh, what a great job!"

It has now been almost fifteen years since that was my job, which is long enough to have forgotten whatever used to be frustrating about it. I'm looking forward to doing all my thinking about philosophy and about my classes. Have a look at the piece by the new Chair, Jim Otteson, who has wonderful plans for the department and a seemingly boundless store of energy to devote to it. I'm also looking forward to watching us go the great places he is going to take us. Stay tuned—we'll keep you informed.

Prof. Norvin Richards
Let me begin by thanking Dr. Richards for his years of dedicated service to the Philosophy Department. The Department grew and strengthened considerably during his tenure as chairman, and we have all, students and faculty alike, benefited from his commitment to its welfare.

There are exciting things ahead for the Department. First and foremost, we are creating three new concentrations or “tracks” within the Department, each of which will eventually be converted into official minors. The first is called Mind and Brain. It will be directed by Chase Wrenn, and will comprise a series of six courses on the philosophy of mind and cognitive science—trying to figure out what the mind is, how it works, what consciousness is, and so on. Most of those courses will be taught by Dr. Chase Wrenn and Dr. Torin Alter.

The second new program is Pre-Law. It will be directed by Dr. Norvin Richards, and it will offer six courses, including the series of Philosophy of Law courses Dr. Richards has been teaching for some time, as well as logic, political philosophy, and possibly a new Critical Reasoning course. Its goal will be to introduce students to critical and philosophical thinking about various aspects of law and governance, and to prepare them for law school and careers in law, public policy, or related fields. The Pre-Law courses will be taught primarily by Dr. Richards, Dr. Wrenn, and me.

The final new track we are creating is Philosophical Foundations of Civil Society. This program aims to investigate questions at the confluence of philosophy, law, and economics, with an eye towards history and the American tradition in particular. It is designed for students who are thinking about careers in law or public policy, or who want to go to graduate school in philosophy, law, or economics. I will direct this new program, and we are now in the process of locating donor money to help fund a Speakers’ Series associated with it. We may even turn it into a master’s-degree program, but that’s still in the early stages—so don’t tell anyone. Its courses will be taught primarily by Dr. Norvin Richards, Dr. Richard Richards (who will teach science and public policy), and me. We are also hoping to hire a new faculty member to assist us with this program.

Another new project we’re working on is creating something called the Scotland Experience Summer Program. This will be a four-week summer program during which I will take 10–15 students to Scotland. We will spend most of our time in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews, traveling, learning Scotland’s history, taking in a few lectures from distinguished faculty at Scottish universities, exploring Scotland’s amazing castles, islands, and deep dark lochs, and of course sampling the haggis and the whisk—er, I mean, the Scottish culture. Students who participate in the program will get three credit hours in philosophy (also three in Blount, if they’re Blounties), in addition to having a gobsmackingly good time!

We’re also in the process now of creating a fancy new website, so make sure you check it out after the summer.

Last thing: let us know what you think! If you like our ideas, or don’t like them, send me a note. And of course whenever you’re in town, stop in and say hello.

With best wishes,

Prof. James Otteson
Norvin Richards has one article forthcoming and gave three presentations to scholarly societies. He was also one of four panelists at DCH Regional Medical Center, discussing ethical issues in the treatment of extremely premature babies. Work in progress includes The Ethics of Parenthood.

Max Hocutt, emeritus professor, published "Sunstein on Rights" in Independent Review and has "Was Bentham a Utilitarian?" forthcoming in Canadian Journal of Political Science.


James Otteson edited and wrote an introduction to Adam Smith: Selected Philosophical Writings, published this year by Imprint Academic, had his book Actual Ethics: Living a Good and Happy Life in the Real World accepted by Cambridge, and gave six scholarly presentations at other universities. He has also been named an Arts and Sciences Faculty Fellow for 2005-2008. (For details, see "Professor Named Faculty Fellow") Work in progress includes Protagoras Revisited: Social and Political Theory in the Scottish Enlightenment.

Scott Hestevold’s paper “Pity” was published this year. He has just finished a paper on whether the present is thick or instantaneously thin. Works in progress include an essay on compassion.

Chase Wrenn published two articles this past academic year. He also had four acceptances. Three of these are articles, to be published in leading journals. The other is far sweeter and far more important: for details, see “Chase and Michelle,” elsewhere in this newsletter. Work in progress includes “Epistemology as Engineering?”

Richard Richards published an article in aesthetics and had four other pieces accepted, one in aesthetics and three in philosophy of biology. He and Rita Snyder also gave dance performances at art festivals in Barcelona and Madrid, and continue as House Parents at the dormitory for students in the Blount Undergraduate Initiative. Work in progress includes “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Logical Structure of Evaluation.”

Stuart Rachels published one article co-authored with Torin Alter, has a second article co-authored with Torin forthcoming, and had an additional invited article appear in Philosophical Perspectives. In addition, Stuart is editing for McGraw-Hill the fifth edition of The Elements of Moral Philosophy and the fourth edition of The Right Thing to Do, previous editions of both of which were done by his father, the late James Rachels. Work in progress includes “On Three Alleged Theories of Rational Behavior.”
Teaching

With Professor Hestevold on sabbatical leave in the fall and Professor Otteson granted a one-course reduction in teaching for the spring, the department offered thirty-eight classes this past year. Twenty-three of those classes were at the 100 or 200 level. These had an average enrollment of 52, but the number is misleading. This past fall, one of our sections of Introduction to Philosophy was offered by lecture to a class of 181. Medical Ethics continues to be offered by lecture both semesters, to 162 in the fall and 173 in the spring. If those large sections are set aside, the average enrollment for our other classes at the 100 and 200 level is a much friendlier 32.5. Classes at this level included two sections of Honors Introduction to Philosophy, two of Honors Deductive Logic and one of Honors Ethics. They also included a new introductory course on philosophical issues in cognitive science.

Six of our classes were seminars, with an average enrollment of 15. In the fall, we offered one titled “Knowledge, Truth and Error,” another titled “Language, Mind and Reality,” and a third titled “Philosophy and Evolution.” In the spring, we offered Metaphysics, Philosophy of Cognitive Science, and Political Thought in the Scottish Enlightenment. Seminars for next fall will include Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Mind, and Truth and Its Value. Seminars for the spring are not yet set.

In addition to the twenty-nine classes that were taught as part of a professor’s assigned teaching load, we provided nine other courses gratis for students who needed something special, a tradition you might remember! These now include “Teaching Practicum in Philosophy,” a course by which our undergraduate teaching assistants in logic and honors logic can earn course-credit for their work and “Honors Thesis Research,” a course for those writing the Senior Honors Paper in hopes of earning the B.A. with Honors in Philosophy. Those enrolled in the latter course meet with a member of the faculty to discuss drafts and redrafts of their Senior Honors Paper.

Finally, philosophy faculty offered four classes in the Blount Undergraduate Initiative, a special enrichment program for students in Arts and Sciences.

Prof. Otteson Named Faculty Fellow

The College of Arts and Sciences is blessed with a Leadership Board of alumni and friends who support students and faculty in the college through their financial support, friendship and influence. Each year, the Board recognizes three faculty they judge to be the best in the college in all three dimensions of a professor’s job: teaching, research and service.

Those who are selected Leadership Board Faculty Fellows receive $3000 annually for three years to support their scholarship, research, and other academic expenses.

This year’s Faculty Fellows include Professor James Otteson, of the Department of Philosophy. The selection is extremely well-deserved.

We’re proud to have Jim in the Department.

Wedding Bells

Michelle Hurd (2003) and Chase Wrenn (1996) will be married this coming October 15, in the Harrison Galleries here in Tuscaloosa. It will be the department’s first all-philosophy wedding since August 18, 1979, when Nita DeBoer and Scott Hestevold were married.

Flair For Design

Elizabeth Alter has won a Gulf State Region Merit Award from the American Institute of Architects for her design of Harrison Galleries, once the University Boulevard location for a Harco Drug Store and then vacant for some fifteen years. Here is Elizabeth, quoted in Jubilation (Spring/Summer 2003): “I was very excited to be involved in this project because the building was a very historical ‘box.’ There was a lot of rot, no access to the second floor and there was foliage growing through the back wall. It was an architect’s dream come true. We were able to accommodate the new function, yet respect the old structure.” She did that beautifully, in part by employing an innovative staircase and a glass floor: Harrison Galleries might very well have the most striking interior in town.

New Arrival

Cora Mae Carver, born to Jaclyn and Brian Carver at 4:30 a.m. April 2, 2005, weighing an even 8 pounds and measuring 21 inches in length. According to the proud father, “Nearly 3 months later she’s now over 23 inches and probably a bit beyond 14 pounds! She was then and is now as healthy and as happy as can be. It was a bit of a rough birth for Jac, but she’s now fully recovered. (Although neither of us have had much sleep in 3 months so I don’t know if Jac would describe herself as ‘fully recovered’...)”
News of Philosophy Alums
The University of Alabama College of Arts & Sciences

Craig Alexander (1977) led two excellent discussions in my Philosophical Issues in Civil Law class. One of these concerned the choice between the doctrines of contributory negligence and comparative negligence; the other concerned the idea of an unconscionable contract. Craig has practiced as a civil defense attorney for twenty-three years, and what he brought to my classroom included a “real-world” quality and perspective that I just can’t provide. Plus I loved seeing my old student shine, and having my current ones see what they might aspire to become. Craig greatly enjoyed himself as well, and the plan is for him to appear regularly in the course.

William Harper (1978) and his family now live in Vidalia, Georgia, where Norma is teaching math at the local college. William has recently created on-line versions of the U of A’s courses in Medical Ethics and Intro to Philosophy.

Nita DeBoer Hestevold (1981) is now a Research Associate with Alabama’s Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR), serving on a team that is investigating ways to reduce risky driving (including DWI) among teenagers.

Russ Daw (1987) and Michelle have completed their first year of teaching at The American Embassy School in New Delhi. They have taken the opportunity to explore a great deal of Asia, with their next trip to involve some extensive hiking in the Himalayas before classes begin again in the fall.

Amy McManus (1993) is now Climenko/Thayer Lecturer on Law at Harvard School of Law, teaching first-years how to research, reason and write. Could it be she taught Brett Talley last fall, or will teach Jonathan Dunn this coming fall? The world is “very” small. She and Andrew live in an 1890s Victorian house in Arlington, MA, which they are restoring, and report that “The joys of horsehair plaster never end.” See, I wouldn’t have known that.

Brian Carver (1996) and wife Jaclyn are the proud parents of Cora Mae Carver, born April 2. Brian has completed his second year of law school at Boalt Hall (UC Berkeley), and is working this summer for the San Francisco office of the law firm Fenwick & West. Brian tells us the firm “represents technology companies almost exclusively, and so their practice closely matches my interests. (For instance, they defended Napster and also handled the ReplayTV cases, regarding a Tivo-like personal video recorder.)”

Shane Weldon (2001) finished law school at Cumberland and is now an Associate with Galeose and Ingram in Birmingham.

Robbie Newman (2001) has completed his M.A. in philosophy at Texas Tech. This fall, he will begin studies toward a PhD at Ohio State, having turned down opportunities to do so at Rice and at UMash Amherst.

Michelle Hurd (2003) is Assistant to the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Anthropology.

In October, she and Chase Wrenn (1996) will be married (see separate story).

J Brett Smith (2003) is now a biologist with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management in Montgomery, where he monitors the health of Alabama’s aquatic habitats through a combination of field biology, lab analysis, and report writing.

Nathan Bruner (2003) and Faith Owens were married July 17, 2004. Nathan finished his first year of law school at Regent University ranked first in his class, and he has been accepted onto the Regent University Law Review.

Katie Terry (2003), has finished her second year of law school at Virginia. She is now doing a second year summer clerkship with a firm in New Orleans, for whom she researches issues and observes depositions, "enjoying my experience and learning a lot." Earlier, she reported from Charlottesville that she had "won a medal in the 5K race I ran last weekend...3rd place female law student! A prize goes to the person who can guest how many female law students were actually entered in the race..."

Robin Preussel (2003), finishing her second year at the Yale School of Law, wrote that she “will be working at three law firms this summer—Fulbright and Jaworski in Houston, Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan in Atlanta, and Wyche, Burgess, Freeman & Parham in Greensboro, North Carolina.” She is also in the process of applying for judicial clerkships for the term 2006-2007, hoping in particular to land one in the northern District of Alabama.

Zac Dover (2003), is here in Tuscaloosa, working as an assistant to the Computer-lab Coordinator in the College of Arts & Sciences.

Gabriel Walvatne (2003) has finished his first year of law school at the University of Maryland: “Life has slowed down as I have procured a rather stress-free 9-5 job. I’m working at a nonprofit here in Baltimore that helps poor people with nearly all aspects of housing. This summer, we are focusing on how to sue mortgage lenders who take advantage of people who don’t know much about the home buying process. I really enjoy the people I work with. The average age at this place is probably 55, with a handful of us under 30 and most of them over 60. At lunch the other day, they were discussing string theory and how it related to the resurrection (the place is affiliated with the Catholic church, however, many of the people who work there are not churchgoers at all).

Jonathan Dunn (2003) worked this past year as a runner at Lloyd Gray and Whitehead in Birmingham, and is now headed for Harvard Law in the fall, having chosen it over a full-tuition scholarship at Columbia. If all your choices are fabulous ones, should you still be described as having a dilemma?

Jessica Kesler (2003) wrote just after starting at LSU’s Law Center. “I must say, I couldn’t be
happier at this time about my decision to enroll here. I think I may have had to go through a lot of doubts and soul-searching before figuring out what my next step in life needed to be. But I was led here, to law school, and I feel right at home in its environment."

Parker Sweet (2004) has completed his first year of law school at Alabama, and is working this summer for the law office of Gene T. Moore here in Tuscaloosa. Asked to provide something for our website’s page on philosophy as a major for pre-law, Parker sent this: “I spent the first two weeks of law school thanking myself for having majored in Philosophy. Not only had my philosophy background helped me tremendously in preparing for the LSAT, but also the reading and analysis skills I developed put me way ahead of the game when it came to reading cases. The greatest benefit my Philosophy training has given me in law school, however, has been the ability to quickly analyze arguments and respond to them on my feet in an openly confrontational environment. Many first-years are intimidated by the dreaded Socratic Method, but after four years of philosophy classes I was perfectly comfortable making and defending arguments to my professors in class and so far that ability has greatly enhanced the quality and enjoyment of my legal education.[and of course, lucky me was the first person in my class to get called on last August]."

Annie Donaldson (2004) is Scheduler for the Honorable Mitt Romney, Governor of Massachusetts. “Basically, I coordinate the Governor’s travels outside the State House—including scheduling, advance people, staff, briefing and logistical considerations. My position is constantly evolving within the Governor’s office depending on the needs of the day, but it is always certain to be challenging, fast-paced and rewarding behind the scenes.”

Grant Hiatt (2004) sent Scott Hestevold this news: “I’m currently in western Oregon. I got a job with an environmental company dredging paper plant waste out of a polluted lagoon. It’s not as bad as it sounds. In addition to paying an ample wage, they provide a quaint little beach house for me to stay in. I’ve gone from never before having seen the Pacific to seeing it every day out my window. And when this contract ends in six months, I’ll be able to put myself through one year of graduate school...expect a postcard from me quite soon. I can’t fully re-create the smell of industrial paper waste, but I’ll try to describe it in vivid detail.”

Christine Scott will begin graduate studies this fall at Georgia State. She will work toward an M.A. in philosophy, with special emphasis on philosophy of religion.

Derek Tokaz will begin studies this fall at the New York University School of Law, having chosen NYU over Virginia and Columbia.
Students

Two students completed requirements for a B.A. with High Honors in Philosophy. The Honors B.A. requires 36 hours in philosophy rather than the 30 for the standard B.A., 18 or more of those hours at or above 300 rather than 12, a grade-point average of at least 3.5 in all philosophy classes and at least 3.3 overall, completion of a senior essay and oral defense of that essay before a committee of the faculty. The examining committees for these students marked the especially high level of their senior essays and of their defenses of those essays by awarding the degree with High Honors. We applaud them.

Jonathan Murray
Senior Essay: "Vanishing Qualia: a thought-experiment supporting a psychophysical view of personal identity and survival"
Advisor: Professor Torin Alter
Committee: Professor Alter, Professor Stuart Rachels and Professor Chase Wrenn

Matthew Satcher
Senior Essay: "Proper Function Theory, Religious Exclusivism and the Challenge of Religious Diversity"
Advisor: Professor Chase Wrenn
Committee: Professor Wrenn, Professor Scott Hestevold and Professor Richard Richards

Matthew Satcher won the annual award offered by the state society for professors of philosophy for the single best paper submitted by an undergraduate. This carried a cash stipend and a place on the society’s program, where Mr. Satcher defended his paper very ably indeed in philosophers’ version of hand-to-hand combat.

Matthew Satcher also tied for first place in the Humanities and Fine Arts Division at the second annual University of Alabama System Honors Research Day. The competition is among Honors students at Alabama, UAB and UA.

Departmental Awards

Iredell Jenkins Scholarship
Winner: Matthew Satcher

Second Place: A. Breck Ballard
Jonathan Murray

Honorable Mention: Bryant Mehaffey
Derek Tokaz

Ten Hoor Prize
Winner: Matthew Satcher

Faculty

Professor James Otteson was invited to be a Research Associate of the Centre for the Study of Scottish Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen, as someone "whose published work has contributed substantially to the study of Scottish philosophy."

Professor James Otteson was also named an A & S Leadership Board Faculty Fellow for 2005-2008. (For details, see “Professor Otteson Named Faculty Fellow.”)

Professor Richard Richards was selected an Honorary member of the Anderson Society. Selection is by the student members of the Society, an Honorary devoted to recognizing those who excel both academically and in leadership.
Breaking News: UA Professor Receives Atlas Economic Research Foundation Award—Tuscaloosa, AL. ...

Dr. James Otteson, Chair of the Philosophy Department at The University of Alabama, will be awarded the seventh in a series of prizes from the Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Orders at the Atlas Economic Research Foundation. The $10,000 prize is for scholars working outside the traditional areas of economic study whose work is informed by an Austrian economic perspective.

Atlas's Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Order, supported by an anonymous donor, rewards and promotes the work of scholars that study the relevance of the spontaneous order to disciplines other than economics. "The 'spontaneous order' social theory of Austrian economics holds that large-scale human social institutions like law, language, and even morality are the unintentional result of numberless decisions made by individual actors," Otteson said. "The individuals were not intending to create larger institutions, but their localized actions nevertheless did so." In his book Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life, Otteson argues that spontaneous order social theory's first systematic treatment was by Adam Smith in the 18th century, then went on to become a central theoretical tool in Austrian economics. He is working on a book in which he argues that the spontaneous order theories developed during the Scottish Enlightenment shaped the Darwinian theory of evolution and some current research in linguistics, evolutionary psychology, and experimental economics.

The award will be presented to Otteson in September at the George Mason University School of Law in Arlington, VA. Otteson is a College of Arts and Sciences Leadership Board Faculty Fellow. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and his master's and doctoral degrees in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin and the University of Chicago, respectively.
THANKS TO...

Craig Alexander for his gift of $200.

Anonymous for adding $300 to the corpus for the ten Hoor Prize.

Beverly and Steve Davis for their gift of stock worth $2733.54. Beverly and Steve intend this to be an installment toward an endowment that will help fund scholarly travel by faculty in our department.

Can I Help?

You bet. You can bring us great pleasure by sending us news of you. We’d love to know what you are doing and how things are going. We will brag shamelessly about you to the Dean, and we will pretend your successes are all our doing when we talk to him and to prospective majors. We will pass your news on to others via this newsletter.

You could also send us money. We would use it in any way you like. If you’d rather we choose how it is spent, here is what we might do:

• Increase The ten Hoor Award (A hundred dollar prize isn’t what it used to be!)
• Help fund outside speakers
• Support a worthy undergraduate

The e-mail address is nrichard@bama.ua.edu, or write to:
Prof. Norvin Richards, Dept. of Philosophy, The University of Alabama
Box 870218, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0218

Donations for any of these purposes would be very welcome, as would unrestricted gifts. Really big ones would make it the (Your name here) Lecture, Fellowship, or Lecture Series. Don’t allow modesty to get in your way; please fill-in and return the card below.

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