We hope you had a great spring semester! We enjoyed working with you on your spring classes, and we’re looking forward to Fall 2023.

Big news for August 2023: We’re looking for volunteers to help design a new Philosophy and Religious Studies student lounge for PHRE majors, minors, and friends!

Meanwhile, we’ve added a fifth minor that begins in Fall 2023 (Science & Values), we’ve revised the major to cover both “A” and “E” REAL designations, and we’ve expanded our other minors: Ethics, Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Religious-Cultural Literacy for Healthcare Professions.

Watch for the 2023-2024 Undergraduate Catalog to see the streamlined course options that we’ve made available.

–Dr. Steven Fesmire, Chair of Philosophy and Religious Studies

**Faculty Spotlight on Research**

*Oxford University Press will publish Dr. Steven Fesmire’s new book* Beyond Moral Fundamentalism: Toward a Pragmatic Pluralism. *Jots and Tittles asked him to share a bit about the book.*

**What originally inspired you to write this book?**

In 2016 my family and I were in Edinburgh, Scotland during Brexit, then we returned to...
the U.S. in time for President Trump’s election. During that political turmoil, and its aftermath in the coming years, I struggled for a coherent philosophical response both to right wing rancor and to rising fury among progressives, on and off campuses. To many, including many of my students at Green Mountain College and Middlebury College in Vermont, what I’m calling moral fundamentalism seemed the best way to show moral backbone. Professional philosophers and public intellectuals worried about rising illiberalism on the political right as well as on the left. But in the main ethicists and political theorists continued to debate the single Right way to reason about ethics and politics, even as (to my mind) evidence mounted that the “single right way” mentality itself was a remediable part of the problem.

**RU's Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies celebrates its applied and practical orientation. Is that on display in this new book?**

Yes, the book focuses on “wickedly” complex problems in ethics, education, and politics. Even as we confront increasingly complex global problems that demand greater awareness, moral sensitivity, and responsibility, a more popular approach beckons: a stark one-way mentality that assumes those going the right way (“us”) are constantly endangered by others (“them”) going the wrong way. I call this approach “moral fundamentalism,” the habit of assuming that there is an exclusively right way to diagnose problems, along with a single practical solution to any problem.

**What’s wrong with moral fundamentalism? Taking a moral stand is still important, right?**

Yes, we need moral backbone, but without the closed-mindedness. Moral fundamentalism causes us to oversimplify situations, neglect broader context, take refuge in dogmatic absolutes, ignore possibilities for finding common

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**Student Honors**

On **Wednesday, April 24**, Dr. Paul Thomas inducted Taylor Hill, Kaitlyn Faircloth, and Jonathan Heinitz into Theta Alpha Kappa, the national honors society for religious studies. Not pictured, Meagan Smith (December 2022) who will be inducted this summer. PHRE congratulates these students for their exemplary work in religious studies!
ground, assume privileged access to the right way to proceed, and shut off honest inquiry. In this way, moral fundamentalism—exacerbated by social media silos—also makes the worst of native impulses toward social bonding and antagonism. This depletes social capital and makes it impossible to debate and achieve social goals that we can only achieve together, such as public health, justice, security, sustainability, peace, and democracy.

**Department Events**

From May 15- May 28 Paul Thomas will be supervising students on RARE: Appalachia.

RARE: Appalachia is a domestic study abroad program taking ten students on a multi-week research trip to Southwest Virginia. In addition to conducting their own research projects, students will be introduced to the diversity of Appalachian cultures, geology, and geography.

On April 4, as part of Humanities Days, Dr. Geoff Pollick led a walking tour of campus and Radford City, assisted by history department chair Dr. Sharon Roger Hepburn and senior history major Demiah Smith, entitled “Religion, Race, and the Building of Radford: A Walking Tour of Selected Sites.” The tour explored the present-day spaces of Radford University’s campus and its immediate vicinity in Radford City as a window through time into the complex and interrelated processes of religio-racial institution building. Through the area’s development from a remote frontier hamlet called Lovely Mount, to the railroad boomtown of Central Depot, to the regional center of Radford City, religion and race continuously informed social and cultural patterns. Along the tour, participants paused at significant

**Department Events Continued**

sites where the dynamics of religion and race intersected with institution-building processes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some locations included the former location of Lovely Mount Baptist Church on what is now the site of Peters Hall, and Arnhem, the house commissioned by John Blair Radford in the 1830s, and the place where he enslaved some of the congregants of Lovely Mount Baptist Church, who established that community as an independent African American institution after emancipation. Around 18 students and faculty members joined the tour.

**5 MINORS WITH WIDE RELEVANCE**

While you’re completing the REAL Curriculum, our minors can round out programs in R, A, or L.

After you’ve completed the REAL Curriculum, our minors can add work- and life-ready skills and knowledge to enhance any major.

**PHILOSOPHY**

Minor E

Start with PHIL 112 or PHIL 216 or 217

Build skills in critical thinking, written and verbal communication, moral and ethical reasoning and how to analyze and understand arguments.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

Minor E

Start with RELN 112 or RELN 208, 209, or 210

Develop deeper understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures and learn to examine problems from many different perspectives.

**ETHICS**

Minor E

Start with PHIL 112 or PHIL 115

Add career-ready and life-enhancing skills in problem-solving, empathy, critical thinking, moral and ethical reasoning, and cultural competence to your portfolio.

**RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

for CARE PROFESSIONS

Minor E

Start with RELN 113 or 112

Improve your cultural competence with an enhanced understanding of religion’s role in experiences and expectations of care and religion’s influence on the healthcare system and care services.

**SCIENCE & VALUES**

Minor R,E

Start with PHIL 115 or ANSC 101, ASTR 120, BIOL 111, CHEM 111, or GEOL 120

Examine social and ethical values that arise from issues in science and technology, and analyze problems such as using A.I. responsibly, climate change, and ethical implications of research.