

# PHILOSOPHY

Department of Philosophy | Rochester Institute of Technology

## Philosophy Program News

Philosophy Program Director Evelyn Brister shares information about Fall 2020 courses, a new student research course, and upcoming events. *Page 2*

## Philosophy Student Spotlight: Anna Murphy

Inside we talk to Anna Murphy, a 3rd year Philosophy/Computer Science double major. Anna's also Vice President of RIT's student philosophy club. *Page 3*

## Philosophy Majors Crush the GRE

Data shows once again that Philosophy Majors do extremely well on the GRE—the test used for graduate school. In fact, the most recent results show that Philosophy Majors score better across all three sections of the GRE—measured by standard deviations above the mean—than any other major! *Page 3*

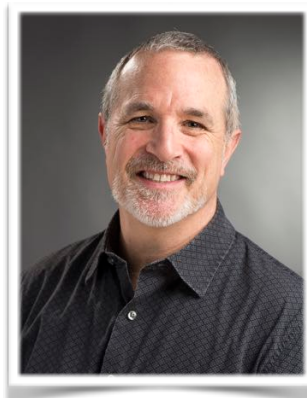
## Greetings From the Chair

*Brian Schroeder*

GREETINGS, fellow lovers of wisdom!

WE find ourselves in uncharted waters and trying times. I know that many of you are under duress as you try to navigate your way between needs and responsibilities, anxiety and confusion, fear and doubt. I want you to know that we faculty in the Philosophy Department understand what you are going through. We have been in continual communication among ourselves and with the university administration about how to best proceed to make the rest of the academic year move as smoothly possible for you. Your professors have already been in touch with you about how to reconfigure your courses. This is a new experience for us all, moving to online teaching; but I am confident, as I know they are, that we will succeed in this transition.

Please know that we in the Philosophy Department are here to help you in whatever way we can. We all regard teaching as our highest priority. This is why we became philosophy professors in the first place. But our responsibilities extend beyond the classroom. Especially during a time like this, *(continued on p. 5)*



## Fall 2020 Upper-Level Philosophy Courses

PHIL 201 (Benso)	<b>Ancient Philosophy</b> TR 11:00-12:15
PHIL 202 (Mathers)	<b>Foundations of Moral Phil.</b> TR 12:30-1:45
PHIL 205 (Capps)	<b>Symbolic Logic</b> MWF 10:00-10:50
PHIL 306 (Sanders)	<b>Professional Ethics</b> Online
PHIL 308 (Brister)	<b>Environmental Phil.</b> TR 9:30-10:45
PHIL 312 (Engström)	<b>American Philosophy</b> TR 9:30-10:45
PHIL 402 (Sanders)	<b>Philosophy of Science</b> Online
PHIL 403 (Torcello)	<b>Social/Political Phil.</b> TR 11:00-12:15
PHIL 411 (Aguilar)	<b>Metaphysics</b> MW 3:30-4:45
PHIL 412 (Schroeder)	<b>19th Century Phil.</b> TR 12:30-1:45
PHIL 416 (Sanders)	<b>Seminar: Appearance and Reality</b> TR 3:30-4:45
PHIL 449 (Robison)	<b>Topics in Philosophy: Bullshit and Banter</b> T 5:00-7:50

## Philosophy Program News

*Evelyn Brister*



JUST a few days ago we learned that RIT would be suspending in-person classes this semester. It will take some time for the dust to settle but in spite (or perhaps because) of the current uncertainty we're already anticipating Fall semester. We will miss seeing you in person these next few weeks but will look forward to seeing many of you in the Fall. In the meantime we are available to talk or e-mail with you if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions.

As of now, enrollment for Fall semester is set to begin on Monday, March 30 (this date may change). We have a slate of great classes coming up in the Fall, and there's sure to be a class that will grab your interest or complement your other studies. At left is a list of classes offered next Fall.

This has been a year of strong growth for the Philosophy program. We have a couple of students who are writing a senior thesis this term, and a couple more who are planning to write a thesis next term. And we've added a course to our curriculum called "Advanced Research in Philosophy" that will make it easier for undergraduate students to pursue independent research or collaborate with faculty members on research while earning course credit. The planned lecture by Ronald Sandler of Northeastern University on "Should We Engineer Species in Order to Save Them?" has been postponed to the fall semester. And we've been contributing to plans to integrate philosophical approaches in RIT's teaching and research strengths in Cognitive Science, Artificial Intelligence, Applied Math, and Environmental Science.

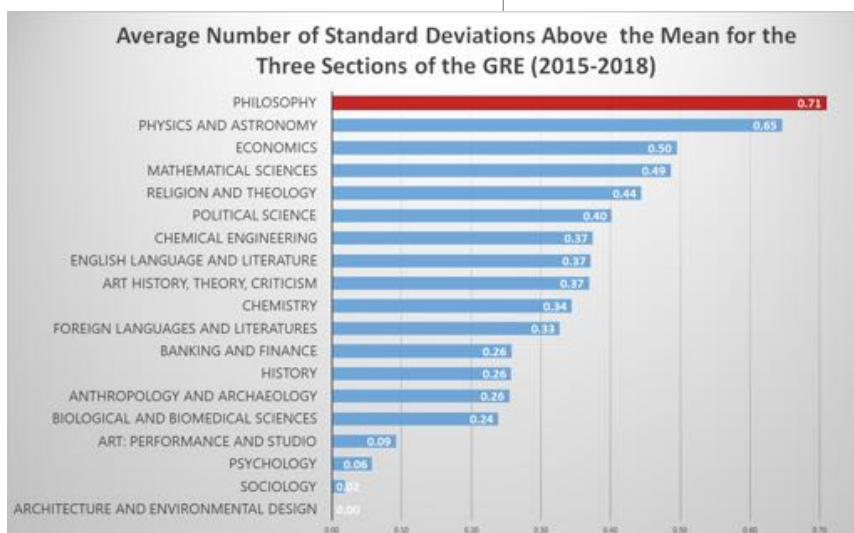
The last few weeks have given us all a lot to think about. There's a lot to be worried about, but the ethics, politics, and science that is on our minds draws our attention to the value of building social connections, of thoughtful decision-making, of justice and knowledge—and reminds us of all the reasons we do philosophy.

## Philosophy Majors Crush the GRE

Once again Philosophy Majors do extremely well on the GRE—the main test used for graduate school admissions. In fact, the most recent results show that Philosophy Majors score better across all three sections of the GRE—measured by standard deviations above the mean—than any other major!

Philosophy Majors have the highest scores on the Verbal and Writing section of the GRE and have the highest Quantitative score of all the humanities.

Using figures from ETS, Tomas Bogardus (Pepperdine) made the following chart:



Data based on seniors and non-enrolled college graduates who tested between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2018  
 Available here: [https://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre\\_guide\\_table4.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre_guide_table4.pdf)  
 Mean and standard deviation data available here: [https://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre\\_guide\\_table1a.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre_guide_table1a.pdf)  
 Chart made in October 2019 by tomas.bogardus@pepperdine.edu

For more information see: <http://dailynous.com/2019/10/11/philosophy-majors-gre-updated-data/>  
<https://sites.google.com/site/whystudyphilosophy/>

## Philosophy Student Spotlight: Anna Murphy

ANNA MURPHY is a 3rd year philosophy/computer science double major from Vermont. She's also Vice President of RIT's Philosophy Club.

**Q:** So, why are you studying philosophy? Is it because philosophy and computer science overlap, or is one a break from the other?

**A:** Definitely the latter: I do both so I don't have to do one all the time. I really love computer science and I really love philosophy, but if I had to sit in front of a computer and look at ones and zeroes for the rest of my life I would go insane. Being able to write and express myself creatively through philosophy make CS better and gives me an outlet that I need.

My interest in philosophy started in high school. What really grabbed me was that it was completely impractical — though

you'd probably disagree with that!

Here's what I mean: when you do something in CS there's always an end-goal you're working toward, but when I'm reading and writing philosophy it's just for fun, and I'm doing it for fun—and you can't tell me otherwise. And that's what really grabbed me about philosophy.

**Q:** What do you enjoy reading and writing, philosophy-wise?

**A:** I don't want to confine philosophy to a single mode of expression, like essays or treatises...the philosophy I've

enjoyed reading the most is often narrative, like Platonic dialogues, or like Sartre or Camus, who wrote for the theater, and you get something from these works that you can't get from an argument. And that's really compelling to me.

*(continued on p. 4)*

## Philosophy Student Spotlight *(continued)*

Some philosophy is almost like art, at least in being somewhat impractical. A philosopher has experiences and a life—and their work and thoughts and ideas are shaped by those experiences. And those experiences become part of who you are, so when you're writing philosophy you're partly writing about your life, in an almost autobiographical sense. It's the same for an artist painting a canvas. They are both creative processes. That doesn't mean they are always pleasing.

Q: Are there any philosophers you especially enjoy reading, like literature? Any recommendations? Five favorite books?

A: Michel Foucault is one, though I might not have said that a year ago. I understand him better now. But also Plato: he's a great storyteller. And I'm really partial to Camus, because I'm edgy: *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* are both revelations.

Q: I really like Camus' *The Fall*. Anything else we should all read?

A: One of my favorite works of literature is the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. I would consider that philosophy: it's an expression of absurdist humor, and it masks the deep pain that we experience in living. But almost more important than reading a particular piece is creating the space for talking about that piece. So instead of saying, "Read X, Y, Z..." I'd rather tell people to experience what it's like to talk about these ideas with other people. That's the important part. Taking an idea and turning it inside out.

Or approaching philosophical ideas from a completely different angle. Shining a light on the things we forgot to scrutinize.

Q: I think I see: you're sort of talking about the critical impulse that goes back at least as far as Plato and Socrates and the commandment to "know thyself." Something like that?

A: Or maybe "know *ourselves*." Social experiences are really important: being able, in a group, to talk about a text, to take the things we're passionate about and share them with others. This makes the experiences richer and talking about philosophy with others allows you to get different perspectives, and that gives you a better understanding both of the philosophy and the people you're talking with, which is sometimes even more important.

Q: I think a lot of what we do when we talk about philosophy is create a space for reflection, so we can have an experience both with a piece of philosophy and with other people. And that reminds me of our Philosophy Club....

A: Right: the Philosophy Club is an attempt to build that space where we can just talk about ideas, shine a critical light on questions, with other people, in person, sharing ideas, feeding off the enthusiasm of the people around you.

Q: Is the Philosophy Club only for philosophy majors? Can, say, someone join who's taking their first philosophy class?

A: Of course! If you have things to talk about then that's what this space is for. It's for everyone. We try to create an open and welcoming environment.

Q: You did sort of dodge that question about your 5 favorite books.

A: That wasn't a dodge. That was an answer that simply rejected your question.

## Greetings From the Chair *(continued)*

you can count on us to do what we can to help you in whatever way we can, beyond simply trying to assist you with your courses. We are also your advisers, but more than that we are friends in a philosophical community. So, if you need to confide in us about any personal or emotional matters, I hope you know that you can feel free to reach out and contact us. I am here at any time for any of you, even though I am not your present course professor. It's always difficult to speak for the other, but I'm sure that this view and sentiment is shared by all of us in the department.

Up until now, the Philosophy Department had another typically fine year. There were interesting speakers who came to campus, various events that the department participated in, and some good interaction all around. In particular, I want to draw attention to the great work being done by the Philosophy Club, which has been active all year. Meeting periodically on Friday afternoons, the club meets with both students and faculty presenting some of their reflections on a range of topics and figures and fostering lively discussion. It has also once again actively played a significant role in organizing and running the RIT Undergraduate Philosophy Conference.

This year also saw a significant change in terms of an important role in the department. After over a decade of dedicated, excellent service by Prof. Jack Sanders as the Program Coordinator, that baton passed this year to Prof. Evelyn Brister, who has also provided the

same high standard of service, as many of you know who have worked with her. We owe both of them our sincere gratitude. I also want to thank Prof. John Capps for keeping this newsletter alive and current.

One of the remarkable aspects about the study of philosophy is that it can give us a measure of calm, rational distance from events and thoughts that allows us to gain a perspective that can provide a sense of understanding and calm. Life is by nature unpredictable and everchanging. But the history of philosophy has provided many great role models to help us get a better handle on existence. Those who have come before us over the millennia are also our friends, and what a great fortune it is that we can turn to them also for insight and help.

Try to be strong and in good spirits throughout this crisis! I am confident that if we remember that we share many of the same thoughts and emotions, we can overcome this historical event if we pull together as a community, on all levels small and large, growing stronger and wiser as a result!

Peace and all best wishes,

*Brian Schroeder*

