

Summer 2024

SUNY New Paltz

Philosophy Department Alumni Newsletter



Greetings from the Chair

Hello, New Paltz philosophy alumni! I am happy to share with you this inaugural alumni newsletter, and which I hope will be a regular feature going forward. We have a long list of alumni dating back to the late 1960s—who have gone on to do a range of interesting and diverse things—and it's valuable for all of us (faculty and past graduates alike) to stay in touch and have greater connectedness.

As you may or may not be aware, these are challenging and uncertain times for philosophy programs across the country, and for the liberal arts more broadly. In the last few years, three philosophy departments across SUNY have been closed. Demographic and enrollment trends are changing the higher education landscape, particularly as a result of the pandemic. That said, philosophy at SUNY New Paltz is going strong, and we are working every day to maintain a robust and enriching program. We ended the spring 2024 semester with a very healthy number of majors and minors, indeed more majors than any of the other non-PhD programs within SUNY. Our alumni consistently tell us about the value of their New Paltz education, and the myriad ways in which a philosophy degree has helped them in their careers and in their lives.

In the pages of this newsletter you will read about our faculty, our current students, recent events, and of course our alumni. If there's anything you'd like to see in these pages—or any updates you'd like to share—please reach out to me at wernerd@newpaltz.edu. And if you plan to be in the New Paltz area at any point, please let me know! The other faculty and I are always happy to get together for coffee and/or arrange a visit to one of our classes.

Best wishes,

Dan Werner
Chair, Philosophy Department



Faculty News



Eugene Heath was awarded a SUNY Distinguished Professorship in the spring 2024 semester. This is the highest academic rank available within the SUNY system, and reflects his substantial scholarship over the last 30+ years as well as his international reputation in the fields of early modern philosophy (specifically eighteenth century Scottish philosophy) and business ethics. We are very proud of this accomplishment! Eugene is currently working on a book on Adam Smith and is co-editing a nine volume edition of the collected works of Adam Ferguson. He regularly teaches courses on *Modern Philosophy*, *Ethics*, *Social-Political Philosophy*, and just developed a new course entitled *Philosophy and the American Founding*.



Bruce Milem was promoted to the rank of Professor this past summer, which was very much deserved! In recent years he has served two terms as department Chair (2010-2016) and has been actively involved in campus service, including the recent restructuring of the General Education program. He was on sabbatical in the spring 2024 semester, and his recent scholarship has been devoted to topics in the philosophy of religion (specifically atheism) as well as the philosophers Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor. His recent course offerings have included *Medieval & Renaissance Philosophy*; *God, World & Soul*; *Happiness*; *Philosophy & Technology*; and *Pragmatism*.



David Elstein rounds out our slate of recent promotions, having been promoted to the rank of Professor in the summer of 2021 (also very much deserved!). Following that promotion, and following the completion of two terms as department Chair (2016-2022) he enjoyed a sabbatical during the 2022-2023 academic year. David's recent publications include numerous articles and books related to Confucian philosophy and an edition/translation of the selected works of Xu Fuguan. He has also written about the philosophy of sport. His recent courses include *East Asian Philosophy*, *Buddhist Philosophy*, *Chinese Philosophy*, *Environmental Ethics*, and *The Philosophy of Sport*.



Dan Werner began his first term as department Chair in the fall 2022 semester, and has been working to maintain a thriving and vibrant department in the midst of an uncertain higher education / SUNY landscape. His current research concerns philosophical issues related to life and death, considered both historically—in the context of Plato's dialogues—and in contemporary terms. His recent courses have included *Ancient Greek Philosophy*, *Later Greek & Roman Philosophy*, *The Meaning of Life*, *The Philosophy of Death*, and *The Philosophy of Love & Sex*.



Madeleine Arseneault has been enjoying a sabbatical research break during the '23-'24 academic year. She is continuing her research on metaphor and idiom, some of which was presented in a keynote address to the Eastern Michigan University Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy, in Ypsilanti MI, in November 2023. She regularly teaches courses on *Metaphysics*, *Theory of Knowledge*, *Philosophy of Language*, *Symbolic Logic*, and *Philosophy of the Arts*.

Other faculty news:



Rebecca Longtin left SUNY New Paltz in 2023 to move to the Washington, DC area. She is currently an editor at Palgrave Macmillan. We were sorry to see her go, and wish her the best!



Michael Humiston continues to teach in the department on a part-time basis, offering courses in logic, the philosophy of mind, and subjectivity (among other things).

David Blankenship and **David Appelbaum** are both enjoying retirement and live in the New Paltz area.

Student News

We wish to congratulate the following students who graduated during the past academic year:

Fiona Leonard (January 2024)
 Asher Stein (May 2024)
 Sophie Painter (May 2024)
 Skye Goldberg (May 2024)
 Sean Barrett (May 2024)
 Louis Webster (August 2024)

Skye was also given the department's Outstanding Graduate award.

Remembering Ray

We are saddened to report that one of our majors, Ray Rattray, passed away on January 24, 2024. Ray was well liked on campus and (aside from being a philosophy major) was part of the rugby team. We offer our condolences to his friends and family.



Student Spotlight

Chase Adamo (expected graduation May 2025) is one of our current majors. In fact, she has the almost-unheard-of distinction of pursuing *three* majors! (The other two are Political Science and History.) And as if that weren't enough, she is also enrolled in the Honors Program. She works at the campus bookstore, and this past summer studied abroad in Germany as part of a language immersion program. During the summer she also works with Suffolk Independent Living Organization (SILO) which provides job preparation training and assistance with building life skills with special needs high school students on Long Island.



Why did you decide to major in philosophy?

"My introduction to philosophy came through transcendentalism in high school, where I was captivated by Emerson's eloquent descriptions of nature. I wanted to experience such a profound passion for something. This fascination deepened in college, particularly during an honors seminar on "The Individual and Society," where Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* sparked a transformative realization; life is what you make of it and you must participate in the creation of it. I couldn't escape philosophy, it seemed to permeate every class I took, so I decided to embrace the constant questioning of everything around me, and declare a major in philosophy."

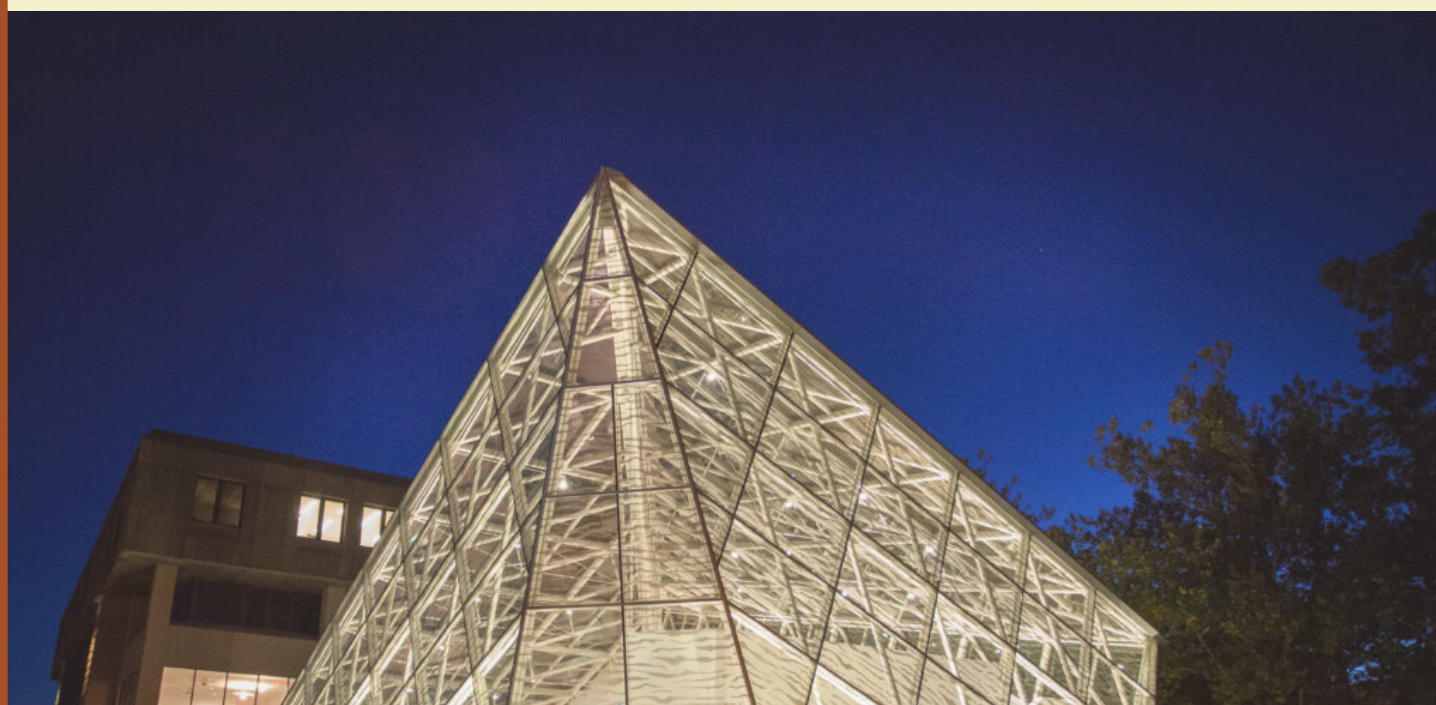
Are there any philosophical texts or ideas or questions that are of particular interest to you?

"I am mainly interested in the history of philosophy, feminist philosophy, and Aesthetics. I have a particular interest in German philosophy, particularly Nietzsche and Hegel, as well as 20th century French philosophy."

A Note of Thanks

We wish to thank an anonymous alumnus who has made a series of very generous donations to the department over the last decade. Some of these donations have been made available for general department use, but most have been dedicated toward the establishment of a new scholarship fund for philosophy majors (entitled the Drs. David Appelbaum-Amiya Chakravarty Philosophy Scholarship Fund). Over the years, the following philosophy students have been awarded some of these scholarship funds:

- ✿ Ari Bayvertyan '19
- ✿ Brendan Conneely '19
- ✿ Nissa Bisguier '20
- ✿ Jared Green '20
- ✿ Jerome Amster '21
- ✿ Jade Mogavero '21
- ✿ David DeTurris '22
- ✿ Chase Adamo (current student)
- ✿ Willow Baribault (current student)
- ✿ Myros-Orestis Shiamilis (current student)



Recent Departmental Events

Each year we host a number of on-campus events for our majors and for the broader campus community...

Talks

In the 2023-2024 academic year, we hosted the following outside speakers:



Benjamin Lipscomb, Professor of Philosophy, Houghton University, "*Life Writing and Life Together: Biography, Empathy, and Community*" - Monday, October 16, 2023



Rachel Silverbloom, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Vassar College, "*Hope as Refusal: Queer, Feminist Futurity*" - Tuesday, November 7, 2023



Lauren Kopajtic, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, "*Problems of Other Minds (and Hearts): On the Challenges of Being a Smithian Spectator*" - Wednesday, March 6, 2024

If you live near New Paltz and would like to receive notifications about upcoming campus talks, please let us know.

End-of-year party

In addition, each May the department organizes an end-of-year gathering for our majors and minors. This gives everyone in the department a relaxed way to conclude the year and reconnect before the summer break. It has also been a tradition in recent years for several students to give a brief presentation on some of their work. In May 2024 two of our majors gave talks: Myros-Orestis Shiamilis presented work on epistemology, and Chris Baisley presented on the question of human nature (is it good or bad?). Discussion, pizza, and refreshments were enjoyed by all!



Alumni career roundtable

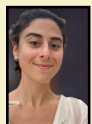
In October 2022 we hosted (in the College Terrace) our first-ever alumni career roundtable, in connection with Alumni Reunion Weekend. It is common for our students (and their parents) to ask “What can you do with a philosophy degree?”, and this event was meant to offer some answers to that question. Four of our alumni participated in the event:



Tom Sartain '06, Senior Staff Engineer
Skillshare



Shantel V. Scott '13, Clinical Supervisor
The Bowery Mission



Zoe Kheyman '12, Staff Attorney
Legal Aid Society



Jack Haanraads '15, Vice President
FINN Partners

The panel was moderated by Bruce Milem and was followed by student Q&A. Turnout for this event was very good, and students appreciated the perspectives given by these alumni. We are currently planning a similar event for this fall (tentatively scheduled for October 18, 2024). If you are interested in joining this upcoming panel—or others that might be held in the future—please reach out to wernerd@newpaltz.edu.



Alumni News

Here are some recent life/career updates that we received from alumni. We love receiving these updates, no matter how big or small! Please send any update to wernerd@newpaltz.edu for inclusion in our next newsletter.

Ed Killar '73 "My name is Ed Killar aka/Jason. Graduated in 1973, now 73 yrs. old. Have had a very interesting life and always amazed at what it brings. Spent first and second college life at St. Bonaventure and Northeastern. New Paltz was last. Met my wife and we have been married for 50 years, we have 3 kids and six grandchildren. My wife was sent from heaven. She has helped me through a benign brain tumor, seizures, and so on. She is a retired RN. I traveled to Europe in the 60's, dragraced motorcycles in the 80's. I wrote a racing book about nitrous oxide and we had a business for 10 years selling cylinder heads and crankshaft kits for the automotive industries. Worked for NYS as an inmate grievance supervisor in a local maximum prison for 10 years until retirement in 2015. My body is kind of messed up now, but happy God has kept me alive. If anyone is interested in writing me, whether you remember me or not, e-mail me at spaceface89@aol.com."

Anne Saunders '78 "I was a slightly older, returning student. Graduated in 1978 with a double major in Philosophy and Biology. Graduate degree in Biochemistry from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute was next and then a job in the environmental field, followed quickly by a switch to the HIV/AIDS /immunology field.

After several years, a totally different opportunity, one that had been relegated to a hobby for a long time came along and for the past 30 years I have been the Artistic and Publicity director of the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival now in its 36th year."

Stacey Barros '90 "After I graduated from New Paltz I moved to San Francisco, California.

I did a graduate program at SF State for special education. I went on to complete a Masters in Clinical Psychology at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute.

I have been an educational specialist for many years, teaching students of all ages and special needs.

Through my experience teaching, I recently became a board member for The NIKA Project; a volunteer organization affiliated with San Francisco State University. We bring Speech and Language students and Special Education students to different countries in need of communication tools for their special needs population in the elementary schools.

This year we collaborated with the University of Recife, Brazil and helped their team implement the first speech and language program in the elementary schools in Recife.

In retrospect, my time at New Paltz from 1986-1990 was brief, yet extremely impactful. I majored in philosophy and minored in art. At New Paltz, I was able to be creative and had freedom to explore. Many of the professors were open to new ideas. As the president of the philosophy club, I expanded the program and created a poetry/performing arts group.

My classmates and I have fond memories."

Valerie Malott '93 "I was admitted to the PhD program in the Philosophy Department at the University of Cincinnati (OH) with a graduate teaching assistantship position. After seven months in the program, I discovered that, although I enjoyed teaching, I was not a good fit for their department and left the program in March

1994 to start a family. Once my children were old enough, I returned to graduate school just shy of turning 50, earning my Master of Arts in English at Northern Kentucky University (NKU). While in my final year of my MA, I started teaching English Composition at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College. That same year I was also granted a graduate assistantship within the English department at NKU, working with both the Director of English Graduate Studies and the Director of the Writing Instruction Program. After graduating in 2020, I continued to teach (remotely) for Cincinnati State and was hired in 2021 to teach English Composition at the University of Cincinnati Clermont College, a regional campus east of Cincinnati, OH. In 2020, I had my first poem, "Memoria", published in *Passager*, a literary journal for writers 50 and over.

Philosophy is still at the heart of my research and writing interests, particularly the intersection of epistemology and phenomenology with writing. My presentation "*A New Knowledge of Reality: Epistemology and Phenomenology in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*" (2019) and my MA capstone "*On the Threshold of Transcendence: Poetic Image as Liminal Space*" (2020) both examine poetry through the lens of Kantian and Platonic idealism. My spring 2024 writing course followed an interdisciplinary theme of "Pursuing Happiness", where students examined the ideas of philosophers, psychologists, scientists, and writers. I live east of Cincinnati, OH and am the parent of seven grown children."

Todd Bleecker '99 "Went on to get a Dual Masters in Education and Special Education (Touro College) then a Masters in School Building Leadership (College of St Rose). Currently serve as a Dean of Students and Crisis Team Leader at a NYCDOE Special Education High School called the Queens Transition Center (752Q) in Jamaica Queens, where I have worked for the past 23 years.

I am married (to a amazing and beautiful woman - Rachel), we live in Long Beach NY, and am the proud parents of 7 year-old twins, Isabella Grace and Noah, and a French Bulldog named Charlie."

Erik Scorelle '05 "I'm currently one of the principal engineers working on Microsoft's custom AI accelerators (Azure Maia for the era of AI: From silicon to software to systems | Microsoft Azure Blog). I specifically lead engineering systems for the software stack of the MAIA 100.

It's been an interesting journey. I started at Microsoft Research in Ireland 9 years ago as part of their acquisition of Havok (Havok). I was an engineer on the operating system for HoloLens and HoloLens 2 (Microsoft HoloLens - Wikipedia). That would grow into a number of products-- I worked as the engineering lead for the API for Azure Remote Rendering | Microsoft Azure and then the networking backend of Microsoft Mesh (Introducing Microsoft Mesh | Connect like never before).

I left Microsoft Research in Ireland for the US office when I moved back. During that time, I transitioned from augmented reality to artificial intelligence.

I'm grateful for my time at New Paltz. The philosophy degree paved a way for an intellectual curiosity that carried me from one interesting problem to the next. Philosophy stays close to my heart as I reflect on what it means to augment the world around us or to change the way we approach problem solving through artificial intelligence.

I'm currently re-reading Thomas Merton's *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* which always reminds me to stay grounded in the world around us, even as our technological achievements can sometimes seem to reach dizzying heights."

Juliet Biemiller '09 "I will share about my current job because I know a good amount of colleagues who were also philosophy majors undergrad!

I continued my education in 2016 to become an ESL teacher, I did a grad program at UNCG (university of North Carolina Greensboro) - MAT TESOL (masters in the art of teaching - Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). It had no prerequisites except for having a bachelor's degree in any subject. I worked as

an ESL teacher in a high school for 3 years, then got a job at a nonprofit called New Arrivals Institute, where I am currently the lead teacher and coordinator of the Citizenship Preparedness program. My program helps people prepare to pass the US Naturalization interview and test, and our partners help people fill out and file the application for naturalization. Our organization offers daily English classes and a wide range of other support services for immigrants and refugees.

When I worked at the high school, my lead teacher (supervisor) had a bachelor's in Philosophy and currently, one of the teachers who teaches in my program has a bachelor's in philosophy.

I think it is interesting that a number of fellow ESL teachers I have worked with started off as philosophy majors. When I was in school at New Paltz, I would have loved to know where people's philosophy degrees led them...I didn't have many ideas at the time except that that was what I was interested in reading about and studying. Maybe my career path will help spark an idea for someone."

Rivkah (Alexandra) Nathan '10 "Since graduating from University, I have spent my time doing various things. Initially, I left the USA to teach English in South Korea. Following my time in South Korea, I moved to Jerusalem, Israel, where I was studying Judaism in a Midrasha (Seminary), and engaging in the Hebrew texts and wider Rabbinical texts. After a few years in Israel, I moved to New Zealand, where I still live with my daughter and partner. During my time in New Zealand I returned to University to receive a Masters in Teaching and Learning. I am currently teaching at an all boys secondary school in the English Curriculum space. I am also a Dean at my school, where I am in charge of a year group in both disciplinary and pastoral matters. During the last 3 years at my school I have started a Philosophy class for seniors, which has grown in the department to include 2 classes, and a Religious Studies option. I am hoping that both the Religious Studies classes and Philosophy classes continue to flourish here.

Studying Philosophy at New Paltz was one of the greatest joys of my life and has shaped the way that I engage critically with the world. I am hoping to one day pursue a PhD. Otherwise, New Zealand is a beautiful place to live, and has a very relaxed lifestyle with plenty of beautiful nature to explore. I do miss the Catskills though!"

Michael Murray '13 "In my time since graduation I have been involved in several professional pursuits and taken different interests. Much to Plato's chagrin I have taken to culinary pursuits, working as a baker, sous chef and owning my own wood fired pizza food truck. I have twice gone back to school to pursue supplemental degrees of passion at the local community college in my county. I received a degree in Film Production and Photography and am currently pursuing a degree in Automotive Engineering. Perhaps my most noteworthy "personal achievement" since graduation was an interest in exercise and eventually the completion of an Ironman Triathlon. I at one point put in a 3/4 hearted attempt to start a "Philosophy of Film" podcast as an offshoot of the Partially Examined Life's network of content (great program if you've never stumbled across them). I currently live a mile from the beach and only several miles from my childhood home in Belmar, NJ with my girlfriend and two cats, Teton and Everest."

Tom Savidge '15 "I am currently a Research Fellow in Fiscal Policy at the American Institute for Economic Research (based in Great Barrington, MA but I work remotely). My family and I live in Indianapolis, Indiana. Last August, I was published in *The Wall Street Journal*, "Fitch Downgrade Could Mean Medicaid Cuts". I have two peer-reviewed publications (hoping for more in the future), but my focus is currently on policy papers and other short-form writing (i.e. op-eds, blog posts, and public regulatory comments). Despite working more in the "applied" spaces, I still have a deep appreciation for philosophy. While policy analysis is often "downstream" from philosophy, I often [find] myself coming back up stream (often without a paddle) looking for deeper insights that might help my understanding of research methods or possible flaws in my own reasoning.

In that time, I earned a Master in Public Policy from George Mason University (with funding). I worked as a program associate at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, helping usher Mercatus Research through the peer review process. I did a year of the Ph.D. program in Economics at George Mason University. When I found out I did not earn funding for year 2, I decided to leave the program and work in the DC non-profit space. I eventually found myself working on state and local public finance issues at the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). I was labeled the "theory guy" because I often look for how the issues of the day come back to older philosophical discussions (minus looking for connections between Plato's understanding of love and a good ham sandwich). There really is nothing new under the sun!"

Ethan Fiege '19 "After graduating from SUNY New Paltz, I moved to Japan and have been living in the country ever since. First, I taught English in a private English language conversation school in Osaka prefecture. Believe it or not, it was a great way to understand Japanese culture, as I would often ask them questions about their daily lives and opinions on global and domestic issues. Though I found this job interesting, I knew I could not do it forever. I had a passion for teaching, but an English conversation school is a fast paced, high pressure environment that also required me to participate in business activities, which I very much disliked. After about three years of English language teaching, I decided to pursue a Master's Degree at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. Currently, I am working on my thesis, which investigates surveillance practices on platforms like Instagram, and how these practices shape digital culture. I plan on continuing to a Ph.D., where I will further research digital platforms, and their influence on the musical performances of DJs in the Osaka and Kyoto area of Japan. I couldn't have gotten to this position of my life without the help of the philosophy faculty and their guidance over the years."

Lauren Greene '20 "Philosophy alum (2020 grad). Currently, I'm studying my second semester here in Kiel, Germany while participating in the International Masters of Applied Ecology. I recently just completed a Marine & Coastal Ecosystems course, working in the field (AKA playing in the sand with worms and clams for a week), and afterwards had lab analysis and group presentations. We discussed heavily what it means to be an ecosystem, ethics of field science, as well as principles of preserving biodiversity. Philosophy can be applied to any career path, even Ecology!"

Ranald Adams '21 "Currently things are very busy here at Virginia Tech. Entering my third year in the Science, Tech and Society PhD program; masters exam slated for August, prelims likely later in the fall semester. My research has focused on psychological warfare and the phenomenology of being targeted by Stasi Operational Decomposition, in the context of the evolving Internet of Things. I've also recently dabbled in land use political economy, designed a skeleton ruleset for a land use simulation-game in the process. After two years in the Grad and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) in various informal and formal roles, and a year as chair of the university's Commission for Graduate and Professional Student Affairs, I am now the incoming Vice President and Legislative Director of GPSS, responsible for overseeing policy and governance matters. Among other things, we have been consulting with the town government on questions surrounding the housing crisis and local zoning.

I was also one of 82 undergrads, grads, faculty, community members (including a high schooler!) arrested by our university at the Palestine protests. Looking VT President Tim Sands and provost Cyril Clarke in the eye at a subsequent meeting on the arrests in my capacity as GPSS VP and letting them know was a very fun experience."

Nick Manning '22 "What I would do to be taking another class with you! It's great to hear from you, and I think this is a brilliant idea.

I'm currently working on my MBA at the University at Buffalo, working in residential real estate, and flipping apartments to pay the bills."

Andrew Gluckman '23 "I recently finished my first year at Albany Law School. I made the dean's list and will be the treasurer of the Environmental Law Society at Albany Law School next year. Currently, I have an internship at the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office and am kept busy there, helping the assistant DAs and participating in a mock trial."

Now Available: Alumni Survey Results

In the summer of 2022 we conducted a survey of our alumni to determine what folks have been up to since graduation, and to see how their philosophy degree has (or has not) been helpful to them in their careers and their lives. Over the course of the 2022-2023 academic year we worked with the campus Office of Institutional Research to collect the data, and then a student intern (a graphic design major) to present the results in a new website. The results of this work can be found here: <https://www.newpaltz.edu/philosophy/careers.html>

We had a great response rate to the survey, and the results are encouraging: the overwhelming majority of respondents had positive things to say about the impact of their philosophy degree. Thanks to all of you who participated!

Visit Us!

The Philosophy Department is located on the ninth floor of the Jacobson Faculty Tower (JFT). Please pay us a visit if you're ever on campus! Our wonderful department administrative assistant **Jessica Krause** (who supports us in countless ways) is in the office on most days.

