



# College of Liberal Arts Newsletter

Fall 2009

## *A Conversation with Dr. Adam C. Podlaskowski*

Dr. Adam C. Podlaskowski comes to Fairmont State from the University of Connecticut where he worked for two years as a Visiting Assistant Professor in philosophy. Podlaskowski earned a double B.A. in philosophy and history at the University of Michigan, and his Ph.D. in philosophy at Ohio State University in 2006. Since arriving at Fairmont State, Dr. Podlaskowski has had articles accepted for publication by *Synthese*, the *European Journal of Philosophy*, and *Theoria: A Swedish Journal of Philosophy*. Another is forthcoming in *Philosophia*. All of these articles touch on his research interests in the philosophy of mind, language, and epistemology. On January 12, 2010, I sat down with Dr. Podlaskowski in his office for a conversation.

SH: What drew you to the study of philosophy? Did you know when you began your undergrad that you wanted to be a philosopher?

AP: Before twelfth grade, I was planning to go to art school. But I was very interested in philosophy, and tracking some of the classes my older friends were taking in college. Then it was suggested, hey, I could do philosophy for a living. So I completed a double major in philosophy and history as an undergrad.

SH: Let's face it: there are astronomical odds against succeeding in the profession of philosophy. It's kind of like if you had wanted to be an artist and, of course, there is the starving artist. Philosophers are challenged, too, in our current market.

AP: Yeah, sadly there's not enough value placed on thinking clearly.

SH: When it comes to philosophy, you



believed you could do it, it was your passion?

AP: Yeah, it was. If you go on in academia, it's usually because you're somewhat obsessed with what you're doing. Philosophy is my favorite thing to do. I think I've always had the kind of mind that's interested in questions about the foundations of thought. Philosophy is essentially a reflective enterprise. I'm interested in questions that strike at what it is we're doing instead of just acting—the really hard questions.

SH: You mentioned art earlier, and I still can't get away from thinking of art and philosophy. Sometimes philosophy rests on surreal premises, strange things, like the brain in the vat and the images that come with it.

AP: Sure, there are thought experiments, for instance. They're just exaggerated situations to emphasize something important about our concepts. It appears, for instance, that we know a great deal about the external world. If we possess such knowledge, it's clear that we also know that we stand in the right sort of relationship to the world. Well, how do I know that I'm not really just a brain in a vat, and the world I seem to sense is a digital illusion? We can say intuitively that, at first glance, I don't know that I'm not being deceived in this way, and that has interesting implications for our concept of knowledge. So though thought experi-

ments are weird scenarios, they're not merely exaggerations: they get rid of the noise, and pick out the salient features of some of our concepts. This one helps to raise a distinctively philosophical puzzle: it seems as though we have a great deal of knowledge about the external world, but as the brain in a vat scenario suggests, it's unclear how this could be. We are faced with a variety of skepticism.

SH: Thinking of knowing, do you think we have to believe we know something to get through an everyday life?

AP: I take it that knowledge claims play an important role in our lives. It's for this reason that skepticism about knowledge is such a striking problem. If I were interested in parachuting, I wouldn't say, "I've got a pretty good shot of the chute opening, so that's good enough for me." I want to know that the chute's going to open or I'm not jumping. It's just to say that it's clear that knowledge claims play an important role of our lives. The tough thing is figuring out exactly what knowledge is and how we acquire it. It seems that while these concepts play an important role, when we start poking at the concepts themselves, all sorts of difficulties arise: it's not entirely clear how our concepts fit together or how we could acquire knowledge at all.

SH: I noticed a definition of philosophy on the bulletin board in the hallway that said something about looking at the world in a rational and logical way. It made me contemplate the rational when I saw it.

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## *Constitution Day Celebration*

On September, 17, 2009, Fairmont State University celebrated Constitution Day with several events. The Alpha Phi Sigma National Criminal Justice Honorary Society sponsored a Constitution Table on the first floor the Falcon Center. Students stopped by to sign a copy of the Constitution and also to pick up a pocket-sized copy. In the afternoon, Shirley J. Stanton, B.A., J.D., presented a talk titled, "The Declaration of Independence Was the Promise; the Constitution Was the Fulfillment...222 Years of Ordered Liberty," in the Ruth Ann Musick Library. At least fifty people attended the lecture on the illustrious history of our Constitution. Stanton serves on the FSU Board of Governors as secretary, is a life member of the Fairmont State Alumni Association, and is currently a partner in Stanton law firm in Fairmont.



Freddie the Fighting Falcon signs a copy of the Constitution.



Alpha Phi Sigma National Vice President Pam Wilson hands a student a copy of the United States Constitution.



Alpha Phi Sigma members manage the official Constitution Day Table.

### *Note from the Dean*

Greeting faculty, staff and students! Another semester full of activities has come and gone. All the teaching, learning, and accomplishments associated with each semester never cease to amaze me. The College of Liberal Arts is certainly a wonderful and exciting place to be. I'm looking forward to the activities the spring semester brings: campus visitation days, honor society initiations, academic awards banquets, faculty recognition receptions and commencement, of course. One important upcoming event is the HEPC-funded Social Justice Program scheduled for March 3 and 4. As part of the event, students will design research projects on the subject of social justice and the protection of civil and human rights. I thank Dr. Gregory Noone and Dr. Adam Podlaskowski, our new philosophy professor, for providing the expertise for the keynote address and workshops. It is a pleasure to work with such a talented and energetic group of faculty, staff and students.

#### **We'd like to hear from our alumni!**

The upcoming newsletter will feature alumni news. All the faculty members, students, and other alumni are curious to know what you're up to, your new positions, new accomplishments, and ongoing projects.

Please submit your contribution electronically by e-mail to [hheagy@fairmontstate.edu](mailto:hheagy@fairmontstate.edu).

# *International Education at Fairmont State University Faculty, Student and Alumni News in the College of Liberal Arts*

*-in alphabetical order*

International education is an exciting area of growth at Fairmont State. Dr. Erin Hippolyte, Study Abroad Advisor and French Program Coordinator, recently explained that international education includes not only international students on campus, but also study abroad, language learners, international faculty, and students and faculty who engage international issues across disciplines and beyond the campus.

In recent years, a number of French students have studied abroad for a semester. Dr. Hippolyte is interested in promoting study abroad to a larger audience. A semester abroad, as Dr. Hippolyte points out, is not just an exercise in language and grammar, but is also about intercultural experience. Students can even study abroad at English-speaking institutions, for example, studying business in Hong Kong. To make study abroad more affordable, the WV HEPC has bought into a consortium, the International Student Exchange Program, which offers an equal exchange of tuition, room and board for students at public higher learning institutions statewide. Fairmont State students can apply their financial aid and Promise scholarship funds to study abroad. Interested students can preview opportunities at [www.isep.org](http://www.isep.org) and schedule an appointment with Dr. Hippolyte for individualized advising.

Study abroad does require planning. Dr. Hippolyte suggests that students start a year in advance. An informational study abroad event is planned for Feb. 3, 2010 in the Falcon Center. Interested students can ask questions and review resources from 11-1 p.m. Dr. Hippolyte advises students to study abroad early in their college careers so that the knowledge and insight gained can add value to the rest of their college experience.

Fairmont State is also proud of its longstanding and newer faculty-led one-week programs abroad. These are usually embedded in a course, like the annual Honors Program trip and the Business in Europe experience. In addition, new

opportunities for short term study travel are developing in statewide efforts. The Consortium for Internationalizing Higher Education within the HEPC has been involved in organizing study bus trips to Quebec. This spring the second annual trip for first-year college students studying in various majors will take place, as well as the first trip for French students in grades 8-12. Students need the chance to have these experiences at the earliest possible moment in their education and formation, in order to prepare to be productive in today's global society.

Dr. Hippolyte is also working on ways to celebrate and further develop and integrate our international community on campus. She is working with several campus committees, wonderful colleagues and the new administration to advance these goals and open up new and existing conversations. Beyond the campus, she has participated in two HEPC international recruiting trips, the most recent in November 2009 when she joined a statewide contingent to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey.

Within the French program, Dr. Hippolyte offered a fall section of a French cultural class to non-French learners, in order to open up a route to language learning via cultural studies. Upper-level French students and general studies students worked together to understand the art of film through the work of directors from the French-speaking world.

This semester, an international education highlight will be International Festival Week in mid-April. Events include Taste of the World, flag-raising ceremony, daytime activity fair and evening international fashion show. Dr. Hippolyte hopes that people from around campus will come together in these activities and celebrations, both to plan, participate, help with publicity and attend and support our efforts.

For interested students, there are a wealth of opportunities.

Lockheed-Martin, working with Fairmont State Foundation, has established a \$2000 "Leaders in Criminal Justice" scholarship for outstanding master's students in criminal justice at Fairmont State. The scholarships help worthy students more easily achieve their goal of obtaining an advanced degree. The recipients for the 2009/2010 academic year are: Adam Berg, Angel Heldreth and Terri Shrader.

Molly Born, a senior French major at FSU, spent the summer as an intern at the Quebec Government Office in Washington, D.C. At one of the six Quebec offices in the U.S., Molly worked in a bilingual environment where she was responsible for researching business and trade relations between the U.S. and Quebec. Molly was a participant in The Washington Center for Internships & Academic Seminars which placed her at the Quebec Government Office based on her interests and abilities.

Dr. Judy P. Byers presented two sessions/papers before the Assembly on Appalachian Literature and Culture at the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) Annual Conference in Philadelphia in November, 2009. She also serves as the NCTE's Program Committee Chair. In October, Dr. Byers, along with Noel W. Tenney, directed the West Virginia Folklife GALA for fundraising and programming, which also included a visit from Connie Ragen-Blake, national storyteller and founder of the National Storytelling Association. Dr. Byers and Tenney were also recipients of the Appalachian Teaching Project, 2009, a grant that directed student undergraduate research and culminated in a student presentation at the organization's conference in Washington, DC in December. In the summer of 2010, Dr. Byers will travel with students and community members on a Roads to Appalachia Study Abroad through Eastern Europe that supports undergraduate and graduate scholarship.

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Dr. Suzanne Heagy has fiction forthcoming in *Untamed Ink*, the literary journal of Lindenwood University. A critical essay, "Agonistics in the Age of Emerson and Whitman: Language Games and the Canon," is forthcoming in the *Philological Review* of the University of Arkansas-Monticello.

Dr. Tulasi R Joshi, professor of geography at Fairmont State University, was honored by the ANA (Association of Nepal in the Americas) with the prestigious Jyotisi Surya Bhakta and Champa Devi Joshi Memorial Award during its annual convention last July in Oakland, California. The award included a purse of \$1,000 that was donated to the Nepal Education and Cultural Center located in the DC metropolitan area. Veda Bhakta Joshi of California who has been a major donor for the Nepal scholarship fund at Fairmont State established the award in memory of his parents. Currently Fairmont State enjoys the largest number of international students from Nepal. Dr. Joshi promotes Fairmont State at the ANA conventions that take place in different major metropolitan areas of America. The ANA convention will be held in Boston next year.

An excerpt from Dr. Donna J. Long's poem, "First Winter Grace," will be featured as one of forty-one inscriptions on

park benches, open air rafters, stone steps and banners displayed artistically around the Milwaukee Zoo. Similar poems appear in Central Park Zoo in NYC. She also has poems in recent issues of *Third Wednesday* and *Off the Coast*. In February, 2010, Dr. Long along with Dr. Elizabeth Savage will each read from their work and conduct a workshop at the University of Pittsburgh's Writer's Café, a monthly gathering of students and faculty.

Nick Oliveto, a sophomore Honors student, majoring in Political Science and National Security and Intelligence has had a piece of writing accepted by *USA Today's* National Gallery of Writing. The piece was done originally for *The Columns*.

Students Jessica Patterson and Celi Oliveto attended the Sigma Tau Delta meeting in Sheperdstown at the end of September.

Travis Ramsey, a graduate of Fairmont State University, recently published his first novel, *Hillbilly Nights*, which is available on-line.

Dr. Elizabeth Savage has received a NASA grant to pursue research on the uses of popular culture and film in the work of poet Elizabeth Willis. This

research is toward the completion of her manuscript on Lorine Niedecker.

Kevin Smith has been busy this past semester juggling his teaching, his supervision of the student press and his presidency of the Society of Professional Journalists. Kevin has been to Denver, Ft. Worth, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Washington, D.C., New York and New Haven Conn. since taking his office on Aug. 30. SPJ is the largest journalism organization in the nation and is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Kevin most recently spent three days in DC representing SPJ at a Federal Trade Commission hearing on the internet's impact on newspapers and has been before the Senate Judiciary Committee working for the passage of a federal shield law to protect reporter sources from federal subpoenas.

Dr. Craig White's book, *Unemployment Ended by Community Restored*, is available at [Virtualbookworm.com](http://Virtualbookworm.com) Publishing Inc. The book unveils an innovative plan to end unemployment and poverty in America through the introduction and implementation of new community structures designed and constructed to impose and restore viable grass root communities.

## *Haiku Death Match Strikes Again*

It was standing room only at the Second Annual Haiku Death Match. Approximately a hundred people of all ages gathered at the event, hosted by the Department of Language and Literature, which took place on Friday, September 25, 2009 at 4:00 in the Brooks Gallery of Wallman Hall. Dr. Elizabeth Savage, previously Reigning Haiku Death Match Champion, shared the position of MC with returning Honors student Jason Vanfosson (Biff Johnson). The competition asks that the audience contribute Haiku topics, which are later drawn from a hat. The contestants must then write a Haiku in ninety seconds in response to the topic.

This year's poets included faculty members Jeffrey Ingman (Direct Ingman) and Frances Davey (The Francinator), and librarian Charley Hively (The Venom Pen). In the cutthroat competition of wit and speed, topics included bras, Watergate, Muppets and hair loss. Direct Ingman scored the most points to become the new Reigning Haiku Death Match Champion. Francis Davey won the Spam Award for second place. Contestants were scored by a standing panel of judges including faculty members Dr. J. Robert Baker and Dr. Suzanne Heagy and Associate Provost for Academic Affairs Dr. Chris Lavorata.

Art by Derek Overfield was featured in the Brooks Gallery during the event. You can currently view his work in the arts-and-literary journal, *Kestrel*.



Direct Ingman writes a haiku under pressure.

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SH: Doesn't that take us toward the Enlightenment view that we believe we can know the world and know it with certainty? Is there any way that philosophy celebrates the irrational?

AP: Some philosophers do: Nietzsche, for instance. But I take it that philosophy is essentially a rational activity. If you think about it though, even Nietzsche, who at times championed irrationality, did so using reason. We are rational beings, fundamentally. Even people who don't seem terribly rational most of the time are responsive to reasons. Philosophical problems, like the problem of skepticism, are generated by tensions between many of the basic beliefs of rational agents. What are we doing when we're trying to appreciate the beliefs of a rational agent? We're trying to figure out what reasons one has for holding those beliefs and, for any given belief, and how it fits together with our other beliefs, whether or not it's consistent, and how it contributes to our whole system of beliefs. Solving philosophical problems involves taking proper stock of our basic beliefs and the reasons for holding them. So philosophers attend mostly to the foundations of thought. But the human condition is really complicated. People in different fields will respond to it—try to make sense of the human condition—differently. Some artists, for instance, might celebrate the irrational. Or do other things, look at the world in many different ways. A religious thinker might reach for a certain kind of significance in things, or even transcendental reality. A social scientist will surely try to come up with a quantifiable appreciation of some part of human existence. So, again, what is a philosopher doing here? We ask the basic questions: What kinds of things are we? What can we know for certain? How should we live?

SH: Philosophy was the only discipline at one point, before studies became fragmented or categorized. Maybe because knowledge became deeper in each of those fields, because there became more to know.

AP: There's a lot of discussion over this. One thing that seems to necessitate the breaking off of a subfield of philosophy

into a separate discipline is the establishment of a single, agreed upon method. Okay, we've got a proper method now to start moving ahead. If you think about it, one thing that philosophers spend a great deal of time upon is the very nature of method itself—all sorts of methods, including the ones they're using at any given moment. Instead of engaging in a practice, we look at the practice itself, whatever that might be. Even after fields break off, that doesn't mean there aren't interesting things for philosophers to think about. The philosophy of science, for instance, is a thriving field. Philosophers of science are trying to understand what scientists are doing, whereas as scientists are trying to gain an understanding of the universe with their distinctive methods. (And we get all sorts of cool things from the work of scientists, like understanding physical reality and iPods.)

SH: And even pretty stories, like Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*, which acknowledges it is a story.

AP: But it's more than just a story, it's one that's answerable to various kinds of tests and theoretical constraints. That's an overly poetic way of putting it. It's more than a mere story; it's a story that fits really well with a lot of things, other really good stories that seem to bear important relationships to the data. The thing is, just because a scientist is good at scientific research doesn't mean that they're very good at reflecting on what they're doing when they engage in scientific research. That's the job of the philosopher of science. They're trying to understand what the practice of science really amounts to.

SH: Does that bring ethics into it? When I think of pure science, I think of experimentation for the sake of knowledge without any consideration of harm or benefits to humanity, like creating nuclear weapons.

AP: I take it that this is a complicated situation. I'm not sure if I want to say science is necessarily ethical or unethical. At the very least, there are ethical and unethical people doing science. For scientists, just in terms of doing their thing, ethical concerns may not be relevant, but surely there are some cases where ethical

concerns also overlap. Human experimentation or something like that. It's just to say we have two sets of norms, norms for how to conduct oneself as a responsible scientist and norms for how one should conduct oneself as a responsible moral agent. Sometimes, something a scientist does has no bearing on any ethical considerations. Say that a scientist is trying to decide which test tube to use or which is the best lens for something. There isn't a single ethical concern there. But when you start doing something that's ethically relevant, such as something that might harm or benefit human beings, then the norms of ethics are in force. Here, you get an overlap.

SH: Speaking of ethics, I recently learned that you'll be a speaker at the Social Justice conference upcoming here at Fairmont State in March. There's a recommended reading list for the conference. If I were only going to read two of the articles, which would you suggest?

AP: I think, "Taking Rights Seriously," by Ronald Dworkin is an accessible piece and it's very important. Of all the texts, at least in the twentieth century, John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* is the most important thing in political philosophy, but it's also daunting. He was the man in political philosophy. He revitalized the field completely.

SH: On another topic, are you going to start a philosophy club at Fairmont State?

AP: I'm planning to set one up this semester.

SH: That sounds exciting. Thanks for meeting with me today, Adam.

AP: Sure, any time.

#### Editor's Note:

*I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to the newsletter. Please remember that you can forward news of events/accomplishments or suggestions for feature articles at any time to [hheagy@fairmontstate.edu](mailto:hheagy@fairmontstate.edu). Some contributions were edited due to space limitations. Any errors are mine. HSH*