News from our internationally recognised centre of excellence

Unique opportunities
The Department of Philosophy offers more than you can imagine

Most important lecture
Find out more about this year's student prize of £900

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Welcome to the Department of Philosophy

The Department of Philosophy is a centre of excellence in teaching and research, with expertise in a wide range of areas, including ethical and political philosophy, social philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and metaphysics. Our students are at the centre of all we do – that's why 89% said they were satisfied with their course in the 2013 National Student Survey. We provide exciting opportunities on campus and further afield, including the chance to study philosophy abroad in Australia, Canada, China, Mexico, Singapore, or one of several European universities. And of course we'll help you develop the skills you need for your career – last year, 90% of our graduates reported themselves as either being in work, or engaged in further study within six months of finishing university.

We hope you'll join us at one of our open days where you can find out much more about us; in the meantime, this newsletter should give you a taste. Do contact us if you have any questions and we look forward to welcoming you to Nottingham soon.

Dr Jonathan Tallant
Head of the Department of Philosophy

Cover image: The Humanities Building on University Park Campus provides plenty of space for staff and students to work and socialise.

News

Unique opportunities

One of the best things about going to university is the amount of opportunities you'll have - some you can't even imagine. Philosophy student Daniel Miller took part in the international competition Chinese Bridge.

“During my third year I participated in Chinese Bridge, a well-known competition which tests fluency and proficiency in Mandarin Chinese. My knack for Mandarin began during GCSE and A level and the passion for the language and culture was further enhanced by a gap year in Taiwan where I taught English for a year. It is something I was keen to continue when I started university, alongside my philosophy degree.

It was my flatmate who recommended I enter a Chinese speech competition held in the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies at Nottingham. This was in fact a qualifying round for the national Chinese Bridge competition and through a lot of hard work I managed to get first prize with a speech called My Chinese Classmate, about the challenges Chinese students face when going abroad to study their respective courses.

The Chinese Bridge competition was held at the British Library, London. All the contestants were involved in a general knowledge quiz about Chinese history and culture, a talent show and a three minute speech on their chosen topic about China. I wrote a speech linked to my philosophy studies, regarding Confucian values and the parallels with Plato. For my talent I had bravely decided to sing a cheesy Chinese pop song with my guitar!

I made it to the semi-finals and it was a brilliant experience. My interest in philosophy really helped me compose my speech in Mandarin as I was passionate about the subject. All the contestants were majoring in Chinese so I was proud to be the only contestant doing a different course. I’m glad I was encouraged by my department and the experience has definitely made me consider a career involving philosophy and Mandarin.”
The most important lecture of the year

Every year we invite an eminent academic to deliver the prestigious Michael Lumsden Memorial Lecture – the most important in the department’s calendar.

The event is held in memory of Michael Lumsden who graduated in philosophy at Nottingham in 1993 and sadly died shortly after. In 2014 we welcomed Professor Jennifer Saul of the University of Sheffield who gave a lecture on the topic of ‘dogwhistles’ – messages that mean one thing to the general population but can carry different, and perhaps objectionable, meanings for more specific groups of people.

The occasion is also used to present the year’s academic prizes, including the Jim Lees prize – £900 awarded to the best overall second year student to help with their third year studies. Jim Lees is a former lecturer in the Department of Philosophy. The prize has been set up in his honour after having a profound effect on students in the department.

Before the lecture the prizes were presented to this year’s student winners: Keziah Niven and Thomas Hall.

Welcoming academics from across the world

Thanks to an international fellowship from The University of Nottingham, Lina Jansson, assistant professor of philosophy at Anyang Technological University in Singapore, was invited to spend three months in the Department of Philosophy.

“During my time at Nottingham, I was part of a research project on fundamentality and parsimony led by the Head of Department, Jonathan Tallant. Towards the end of my stay, Jonathan and I presented our joint work.

I’m now back in Singapore and it’s been a privilege to be part of the philosophical research community at Nottingham. The workshop, the reading groups, and the exchange of papers have allowed us to develop collaborative projects. I’m excited about continuing to build on this.

Different academic communities tend to emphasise different sets of views and assumptions and my own work has benefited greatly from the opportunity to work across such communities. I’m impressed by how adept Nottingham’s Department of Philosophy is at developing and sustaining collaborations both across national and disciplinary boundaries.

During my brief time at the University I found fruitful collaborations between philosophy and other disciplines ranging from art history to psychology to physics. This all contributed towards making my stay a richly rewarding one.”

Graduate profile

“Thoroughly enjoyed studying philosophy at Nottingham. It is such a broad discipline and the modules vary widely, meaning I was never bored but very much kept on my intellectual toes.

The course challenged the way I view the world and how I live in it, so much so that during the three years I formed and then reassessed my political position. During my final year Environmental Ethics module, I became a vegetarian after being a life-long carnivore. I also developed a passion for informal debating as there was always an interesting topic to debate with fellow students, both in our seminars and around campus.

As a graduate, I am now doing the Teach First Leadership Development Programme, teaching English in the North West. My degree course has been an invaluable springboard into my professional life; it has taught me to think critically, to argue articulately and effectively and to explain extremely complex concepts in a simple, structured and coherent manner. Upon reflection, the thinkers I’ve discovered, the people I’ve met and the doors that have been opened have made me more grateful than ever for my opportunity to study philosophy at Nottingham.”
At Nottingham we work with the Sutton Trust to run summer schools on campus, offering school pupils the opportunity to explore the university experience in depth.

The Sutton Trust is a charity working to combat educational inequality and to prevent the subsequent waste of talent. It is particularly concerned with breaking the link between educational opportunities and family background.

Our Sutton Trust Summer School offers a varied programme of activities – academic and social – aimed at providing a fun and valuable insight into student life. School pupils stay in university accommodation and take part in workshops on fascinating issues such as: can machines ever think? How do we make decisions? The nature of Art; what is impossibility?

At the end of the summer school, students leave with skills and knowledge to help them progress to the country’s top universities.

Opening up the university experience

Welcoming new staff

We’re delighted to welcome Zach Hoskins to the Department of Philosophy. Zach writes on moral, political and legal philosophy, with a particular interest in the philosophy of criminal law. He studies such questions as ‘is punishment morally justified?’ and ‘what sorts of behaviours should the state criminalise?’

Zach, a native of the United States, says he was excited not only for a chance to live in the UK but in particular ‘to join such an accomplished, and very friendly, philosophy staff.’ He joins the department as an assistant professor.

Thinking the impossible

Assistant professor Mark Jago has published a new book with Oxford University Press (April 2014).

The Impossible presents an original philosophical account of meaningful thought, and in particular, how it is meaningful to think about things that are impossible.

We think about impossible things all the time, especially when thinking about philosophy, science, mathematics or religion. This book provides accounts of knowledge, belief, information, content and meaning which allow space for the impossible.

Funding for research

The School of Humanities is delighted to be part of a successful bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council of £14.6m to support doctoral research training.

The Midlands3Cities Doctoral Training Partnership will be offering 87 studentships for commencement of study in 2015 across six universities in Nottingham, Birmingham and Leicester.

Find out more: www.nottingham.ac.uk/philosophy/funding

Nottingham goes to New Zealand

In summer 2014, philosophy lecturer Harold Noonan was a Visiting Erskine Fellow at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The visit was funded from a bequest which brings four internationally prominent visitors each year to Canterbury to contribute to teaching.

Harold taught on a course called Puzzles and Paradoxes, with his contribution focusing on puzzles about identity. As obligatory reading, he set Stanford Encyclopedia articles by Jago and Mackie, also lecturers in the Department of Philosophy.

If you require this publication in an alternative format, please contact us: t: +44 (0)115 951 5559 e: alternativeformats@nottingham.ac.uk

The University of Nottingham has made every effort to ensure that the information in this newsletter was accurate when published. Please note, however, that the nature of the content means that it is subject to change from time to time and you should therefore consider the information to be guiding rather than definitive.

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