

# RUTGERS PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2019 Newsletter

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Faculty & Staff Awards . . . . .	1-2
Philosophy Dept. Events . . . . .	3-6
Faculty Accomplishments . . . . .	6-7
Graduate Accomplishments . . . . .	8
Dissertation Defenders . . . . .	9
Undergraduate News . . . . .	10-11
Letter from the Chair . . . . .	12

*Pictured left: Mercedes Diaz with Charlene Jones and Prof. Howard McGary*



## FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS: MERCEDES DIAZ

**Mercedes Diaz** was among the recipients of the 2019 **Rutgers Arts and Sciences Staff Excellence Award**.

The awards honored twelve individual staff members and two teams for their distinguished service to the university, their departments, and students at Rutgers University.

The following article (originally published on the RSAS Award webpage), celebrates Mercedes' contributions to the Rutgers Philosophy Department:

Mercedes Diaz epitomizes high standards of service excellence and success in her work as the Graduate Administrator for the Philosophy Department and senior administrative assistant supporting the Department Chair, Graduate Director, Graduate Admissions and Placement Directors, and the Business Manager with countless tasks, projects, and initiatives.

In 2018, Mercedes exceeded her performance and service during a time of transition for the department. As the department administrator was retiring and a new undergraduate assistant being hired, and a new Director of Undergraduate Studies assumed office, Mercedes was the one true constant for academic year 2017-2018. Her strong work ethic helped the Department through a turbulent time of retirement, reorganizing, and recruitment. Mercedes went above and beyond in 2018 to support faculty, students, and the educational community of customers, as their comments show: "Her interactions are always positive, pleasant, and cheerful," "Mercedes's dedication to serving the needs of the undergraduate and graduate students is exemplary."

*continued on page 2 . . .*

During the spring semester, the department also held over ten major events, conferences, and lectures where Mercedes took initiative and extreme dedication to see each of them through successfully with oversight of logistics and administrative management. She exemplified grace under pressure for creating and maintaining a positive atmosphere for all, taking initiative to support others, providing advice and guidance, and encouraging others – what a great team player!

She continued to provide formal and information advice to legions of undergraduates in her role as Advisor to Sigma Tau and the Honors Club; as well as former graduate students as they were moving on in their professional lives. Mercedes has also served as the longtime assistant for the Rutgers Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy.

The Summer Institute is a seven-day residential program designed to encourage undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds to consider careers in academic philosophy, give students a better idea of what graduate studies in philosophy is about, introduce students to the various areas of specialization in the discipline, and explore various perspectives on what it means to be a professional philosopher. She has displayed remarkable leadership qualities and excellent communication and organizational skills. In this capacity, she goes beyond the call of duty. All who have been involved with this award-winning program have called special attention to her contributions.

Mercedes leaves an optimistic lasting impression with everyone she encounters; she embodies staff excellence in service, initiative, and outstanding performance, particularly noticeable and appreciated during the entire year where it was essential. Mercedes is a longstanding employee who demonstrates a powerful commitment to the department, SAS, and the university in everything she does.

***Congratulations, Mercedes!***

## **FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS: HOWARD MCGARY**

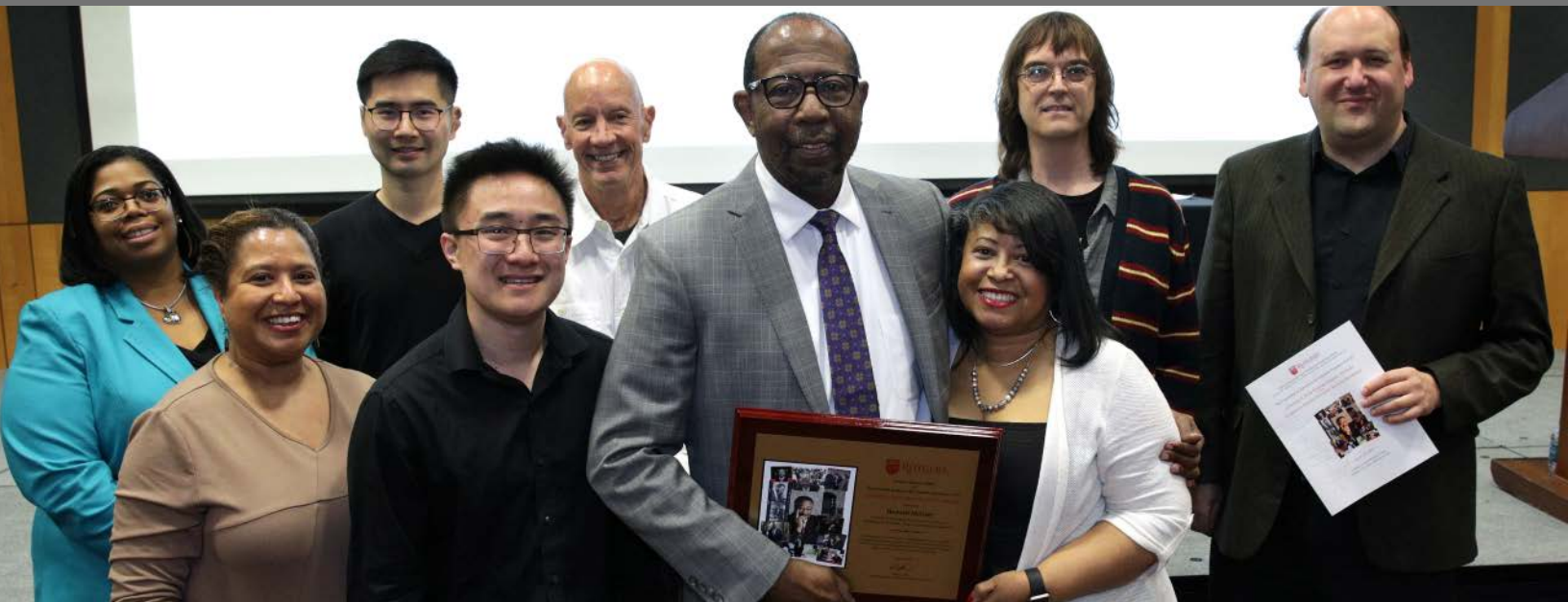
**Howard McGary** received the 2019 **Clement A. Price Human Dignity Award** for outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion through his work with the annual Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy (SIDP) for 21 years.

The SIDP provides outreach to undergraduates on a nationwide basis to increase the number of underrepresented minority students in philosophy graduate programs and faculty positions. Meeting every summer for the last two decades, the institute has had an impact on the field. About 60 percent of past participants have gone on to pursue graduate studies in philosophy.

The institute received the 2004 Award for Excellence and Innovation in Philosophy Programs sponsored by the American Philosophical Association and the Philosophy Documentation Center. And the institute has become the model for schools starting similar programs around the country.

(The Clement A. Price Human Dignity Award recognizes outstanding individuals that have demonstrated extraordinary achievement and commitment to promoting and practicing diversity and inclusion at Rutgers University and/or in partnership with the broader community.)

***Congratulations, Howard!***



*Pictured above: Prof. Howard McGary with members of the Philosophy Dept.*

## DEPARTMENT EVENTS

**Rutgers Day** 2019 took place on April 27th. The Philosophy Department tent was run by undergraduate, graduate, faculty, and staff volunteers, offering information about philosophy at Rutgers, Minorities And Philosophy (MAP), and the discipline of academic philosophy more generally. Rutgers Day participants were drawn in by Justin Kalef's monster puzzle game, and Mercedes Diaz put on a philosophy puppet show for interested onlookers. *(Pictured right)*

The 2019 **Rutgers Epistemology Conference (REC)** took place on May 3rd and 4th at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick. Alex Byrne (MIT), Susanna Rinard (Harvard), Jonathan Kvanvig (Washington University St Louis), Maria Lasonen-Aarnio (University of Helsinki), and Anil Gupta (Pittsburgh) spoke at REC this year, along with Alex Worsnip (UNC) the most recent winner of the Young Epistemologist Prize.

On April 18th, Mercedes Diaz organized a **Philosophy Alumni Career Panel** for the Rutgers Undergraduate Philosophy Club and Phi Sigma Tau. Former undergraduates of the Rutgers Philosophy department returned to reflect on how philosophy both has helped, and continues to help their careers, as well as give advice for present undergraduates. Panelists included David Gandelman, Heather Katzoff, Stephen Lin, Jamie Lombardi, Jasmine Story and Frank Wu.







***Pictured above: Panelists and audience members at the Alumni Career Panel***

On May 16th-17th the Rutgers University Center for Cognitive Science held a **conference in memory of Jerry Fodor** (*pictured below*).



Tom Bever (Arizona), Rochel Gelman (Rutgers), Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini (Arizona), David Rosenthal (CUNY), Terry Horgan (Arizona), Louise Antony (UMass Amherst), Kevan Edwards (Syracuse), Eric Margolis (University of British Columbia), Susan Schnieder (Connecticut), Georges Rey (Maryland), and Randy Gallistel (Rutgers) gave talks at the conference, at which Fodor was remembered as one of the world's foremost philosophers of mind, a scholar at the forefront of the cognitive revolution, and a founder of the Rutgers University Center for Cognitive Science.

All of the talks at the conference were captured on video and have been made available online, along with a number of remembrances and obituaries written in honor of Fodor. Interested parties can find those materials [here](https://ruccs.rutgers.edu/component/jevents/icalrepe)--

<https://ruccs.rutgers.edu/component/jevents/icalrepe>  
[at.detail/2018/04/13/583/134/conference-in-honor-of-jerry-fodor](https://ruccs.rutgers.edu/component/jevents/icalrepe)

***The Women in Philosophy Dinner took place on April 4th this year. This yearly event is organized and funded by the Philosophy Dept. Climate Committee***





On May 10th and 11th Rutgers hosted a workshop on Anthony Duff's recent book *The Realm of the Criminal Law*. Faculty and students in the Rutgers Philosophy Department and the Rutgers Law School were among the workshop participants

## PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIA & EVENTS

- 1/31** **Brian Epstein** (Tufts) gave a colloquium talk on social ontology and social groups.
- 2/28** **Teresa Blankmeyer Burke** (Gallaudet University) gave the 2019 Climate Lecture. Her talk was entitled "The deaf, who deserve only friends, have enemies: Deaf Philosophy in the 21st century".
- 3/14** **Lara Buchak** (UC Berkeley) gave the 2019 Mesthene lecture. Her talk was entitled "Why We Should Care More About The Worse Off".
- 3/28** **Paul Pietroski** gave the first Break it Down lecture of the term, entitled "Human Languages: What are They?".
- 3/28** **Zoë Johnson-King** (NYU, USC) led an inclusive pedagogy workshop for students and faculty.
- 4/11** **Gideon Rosen** (Princeton) gave the Class of 1970s Lecture in early April. His talk was entitled "Managing Moral Outrage: How Philosophy Can Change Your (Emotional) Life".
- 4/16** **The Jilin University-Rutgers Philosophy Forum** took place in mid-April. This event came about as the result of collaboration between the Rutgers Philosophy Department and the philosophy department at Jilin University in Changchun, China. The conference involved talks on six short papers, three by students from Jilin University, and three by Rutgers students.



- 4/18** **Larry Temkin** gave the second Break it Down lecture of the term, entitled "Population Ethics: Forty Years On".
- 4/25-27** The **Rutgers Semantics Workshop** (organized by Ernie Lepore), took place in mid-April, and featured talks from a number of Rutgers philosophy alumni.
- 7/21-26** The **22nd Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy** will take place this July, organized by Alex Guererro and Mercedes Diaz.

## FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Frances Kamm** authored a chapter entitled "The Badness of Death and What to Do About It (If Anything)" in *Saving People from the Harm of Death* (OUP 2019). She also gave the Safra Ethics Center Lecture at Harvard in March, entitled "The Use and Abuse of the Trolley Problem: Self-Driving Cars, Medical Treatments, and the Distribution of Harm". Additionally, she gave the keynote address at a conference on supererogation and rights at MIT (May 2019), as well as a lecture at a conference on rethinking moral status at Oxford University (June 2019), and she will give the Jack Smart Memorial Lecture at Australian National University in July, at which time there will also be a one-day conference on Kamm's written work.

This March, **Frances Egan** and **Robert Matthews** gave the 2019 Rudolf Carnap Lectures at Ruhr-University Bochum.

**Barry Loewer** received a Templeton grant of \$170,000 for a project on laws, chance, and causation. In addition, his paper "The Mentaculus Vision" is part of a forthcoming collection on the philosophy of statistical mechanics (ed. Valia Allori). Loewer also gave an invited lecture at the Eastern APA in January, entitled "What Breathes Fire into the Equations", and this May he gave the keynote lecture at a conference in Ankara, Turkey on recent trends in the philosophy of biology. In addition, this spring Loewer gave a talk at a conference in Jerusalem on levels of reality (May 2019), and he will be a member of the faculty at a summer school on the philosophy of statistical mechanics in Saig, Germany.

**Holly Smith** (Distinguished Professor Emerita) presented "Alternatives" to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chambers Conference in April 2019. Her paper is based on a chapter titled "Alternative Actions," forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Consequentialism*, edited by Douglas Portmore for Oxford University Press.

**Dean Zimmerman** gave a talk entitled "Perceiving God" for the Sprague and Taylor Lecture at Brooklyn College in April.

# FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Martin Lin** published a book entitled *Being and Reason: An Essay on Spinoza's Metaphysics* (OUP 2019).

## *OUP book summary*

In *Being and Reason*, Martin Lin offers a new interpretation of Spinoza's core metaphysical doctrines with attention to how and why, in Spinoza, metaphysical notions are entangled with cognitive, logical, and epistemic ones. For example, according to Spinoza, a substance is that which can be conceived through itself and a mode is that which is conceived through another. Thus, metaphysical notions, substance and mode, are defined through a notion that is either cognitive or logical, being conceived through. What are we to make of the intimate connections that Spinoza sees between metaphysical, cognitive, logical, and epistemic notions? Or between being and reason?

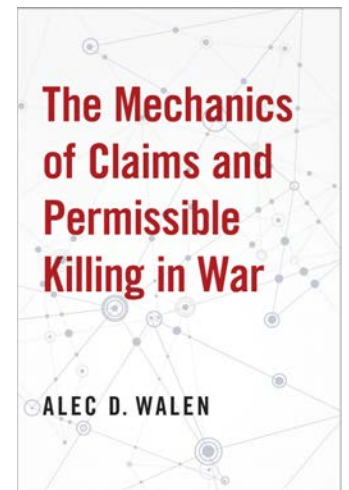
Lin argues against idealist readings according to which the metaphysical is reducible to or grounded in something epistemic, logical, or psychological. He maintains that Spinoza sees the order of being and the order of reason as two independent structures that mirror one another. In the course of making this argument, he develops new interpretations of Spinoza's notions of attribute and mode, and of Spinoza's claim that all things strive for self-preservation. Lin also argues against prominent idealist readings of Spinoza according to which the Principle of Sufficient Reason is absolutely unrestricted for Spinoza and is the key to his system. He contends, rather, that Spinoza's metaphysical rationalism is a diverse phenomenon and that the Principle of Sufficient Reason is limited to claims about existence and nonexistence which are applied only once by Spinoza to the case of the necessary existence of God.

**Alec Walen** published a book entitled *The Mechanics of Claims and Permissible Killing in War* (OUP 2019).

## *OUP book summary*

According to the dominant account of rights, there are two ways to permissibly kill people: they have done something to forfeit their right to life, or their rights are outweighed by the significantly greater cost of respecting them. Contemporary just war theorists tend to agree that it is difficult to justify killing in the second way. Thus, they focus on the conditions under which rights might be forfeited. But it has proven hard to defend an account of forfeiture that permits killing when and only when it is morally justifiable.

In *The Mechanics of Claims and Permissible Killing in War*, Alec D. Walen develops an alternative account of rights according to which rights forfeiture has a much smaller role to play. It plays a smaller role because rights themselves are more contextually contingent. They systematically reflect the different kinds of claims people can make on an agent. For example, those who threaten to cause harm without a right to do so have weaker claims not to be killed than innocent bystanders or those who have a right to threaten to cause harm. By framing rights as the output of a balance of competing claims, and by laying out a detailed account of how to balance competing claims, Walen provides a more coherent account of when killing in war is permissible.



## *New Faculty:*

This coming academic year, **Derrick Darby** and **Alexander Skiles** will join the Rutgers Philosophy Department.

---



*Darby pictured left;  
Skiles pictured right*

**Derrick Darby** works in social and political philosophy, and is the author of *Rights, Race, and Recognition* (Cambridge). His recent scholarship combines empirical, historical, and legal research with philosophical analysis to produce insights about race, racial injustice, and racial inequality. *Welcome, Derrick!*

**Alexander Skiles** works primarily in metaphysics, and has specific research interests in non-causal explanation in metaphysics and the sciences; the metaphysics, epistemology, and logic of identity, essence, and individuation; the nature of existence; and logical and metaphysical issues in classical Hindu and Buddhist thought. *Welcome, Alex!*

## GRADUATE STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Sam Carter** published “The Dynamics of Loose Talk” in *Noûs* (forthcoming), as well as a chapter entitled “Vagueness & Discourse Dynamics” in *Linguistics meets Philosophy* (forthcoming).

**Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini** gave a talk entitled “Gaslighting in Axiology” at the New York City Minorities and Philosophy Workshop Series at CUNY in March. He also gave a talk entitled “Slurs Are Directives” at the Bochum-Rutgers Workshop in Philosophy and Cognitive Science at Ruhr-University Bochum, and his paper “Slurs Are Directives” is forthcoming in *Philosophers’ Imprint*.

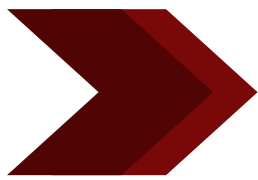
**Chris Frugé** published “Epicureanism and Skepticism about Practical Reason” in *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

**Adam Gibbons** presented a paper entitled “The Conceptual Ethics of Hate Speech” at a conference in Tennessee on the Moral and Political Challenges of Speech this past April. Additionally, this summer he will present “Beyond Epistocracy” at the Dialoguing Democracy symposium taking place at the National University of Ireland Galway, as well as at the 9th Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association in Belfast, Ireland.

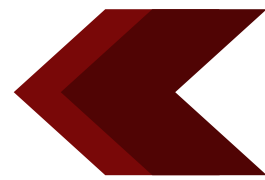
**Tyler John** was awarded the Global Priorities Fellowship. This is a prize awarded by the Forethought Foundation for Global Priorities Research headed by Oxford philosopher William MacAskill, and includes fellowship (including a workshop) and research funding (£5,000) and is renewable annually.

**Dee Payton** presented her paper entitled “Real Definitions for Real Social Constructs” at the Bay Area Feminism and Philosophy Conference this May, and she’ll present it again at the 13th Biennial ENSO Conference on social ontology in Tampere, Finland this coming August. She also compiled this newsletter—thanks to everyone who contributed photos/text to this document!





# DISSERTATION DEFENDERS



## **Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini**

defended his dissertation entitled *Commitment, Communication, and Content: Toward a Theory of Assertion* (Committee: Andy Egan, Liz Camp, Paul Pietroski, John Hawthorne, Ernie Lepore (co-chair), Jeffrey King (co-chair)). Kirk-Giannini will start as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers University, Newark in Fall 2019.

*Kirk-Giannini pictured above  
Callahan pictured below*



**Laura Callahan** defended her dissertation entitled *Responsible for What's Rational*. (Committee: Susanna Schellenberg, Ruth Chang, Andy Egan, Roger White, Ernest Sosa (chair). Callahan will start as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame University in Fall 2019.

**Austin Baker** defended her dissertation entitled *When Perception Bypasses Truth: Attention, Bias, and the Structure of Social Stereotypes* in June. (Committee: Andy Egan (chair), Susanna Schellenberg, Eric Mandelbaum, Chaz Firestone, and Alex Guerrero). Baker will begin a three-year postdoctoral fellowship at RuCCs in Fall 2019.

**Daniel Rubio** defended his dissertation entitled *Essays in Formal Metaphysics*. (Committee: Dean Zimmerman (chair), Ted Sider, Jonathan Schaffer, Robert Adams, Brandon Fitelson). Rubio will begin a two-year Philosophy and Religion postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton University in Fall 2019.

**Many congratulations to  
everyone who defended  
this year!**

# UNDERGRADUATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The **Undergraduate Thesis Symposium** took place on May 7th. At this symposium, honors thesis writers presented portions of their theses to an audience of students and faculty. The following students spoke at this year's symposium: Yimao Liu, "State Interference in Parenting"; Max DuBoff, "The Esoteric Meets Society: Rhetoric, Protreptic, and Nicomachean Ethics VI"; Julius Solatorio, "Semantics: It's Personal!"; Andreas Kauderer, "Understanding and Conceptualizing Aesthetic Concepts after Sibley".

*Pictured right: Max DuBoff presents on his thesis to an audience of students and faculty.*



## WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER GRADUATION?

**Rivky Brandwein** will attend Columbia Law School beginning Fall 2019.

**Max DuBoff** will enter the PhD program in Classics and Philosophy at Yale University beginning Fall 2019.

**Giang Le** will start as a software engineer at Google World HQ in Mountain View, CA.

**Han Yan** will attend Columbia University to begin graduate study in Applied Behavior Analysis.

**Max Wade** will enter the PhD program in Philosophy at Boston College in Fall 2019.

**Stephen Weiss** will begin teaching at a charter school in the South Bronx on behalf of Teach for America.

## Congratulations Graduates!



# UNDERGRADUATE EVENTS

## The 2nd annual Rutgers-Columbia

**Undergraduate Philosophy Conference** took place on April 6th. The conference was organized by Phi Sigma Tau (Rutgers) and Pamela LaGuardia (Columbia) and this year speakers traveled from as close as Philadelphia to as far as Peru. Speakers included: Sherry Tseng, "Visual Causation"; Diego Arana, "Trivialist Epistemology and False Mathematical Beliefs"; Steven Yue Heng Yang, "Nietzschean Compassion"; Kimon Surlas-Kotzamanis, "Is Metalinguistic Negotiation Compatible with Semantic Externalism?". Achille Varzi (Columbia) delivered the keynote lecture, entitled "Boundaries: From Politics to Metaphysics (and back)".



## Philosophy Club Board Elections

*(pictured top right)*

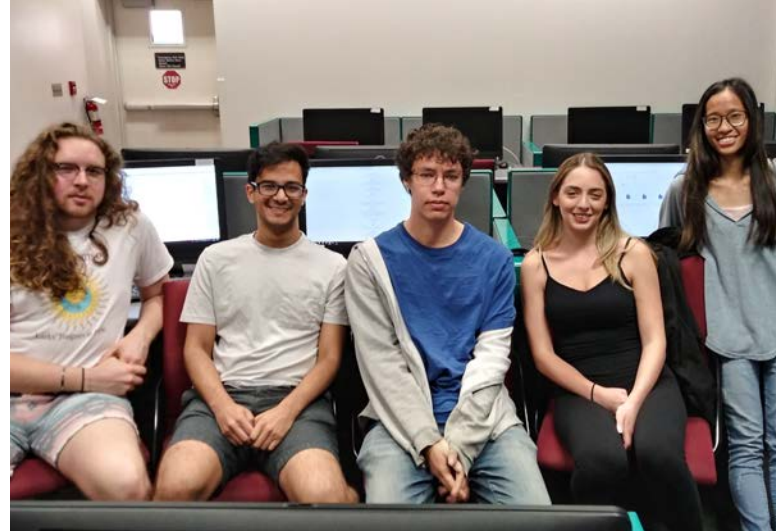
President: Daniel Cappell

Vice President: Nathaniel Serio

Treasurer: Steve Hernandez

Social Media Chair: Izilda Amber

Ambassador: Jurgen Lipps



This semester, **Phi Sigma Tau** continued to organize its **undergraduate reading group series**: The group met each week this term and engaged in student-led discussion on a paper covering a topic of non-curricular interest. Speakers this term included Frank Wu, Max DuBoff, Avraham Sommer, Mike Fellner, Steven Hernandez, Daniel Cappell, Julius Solatorio, and Andreas Kauderer.



*Pictured ...*

- *Second from the top: Prof. Kamm presents at Philosophy Club*
- *Second from the bottom: Editors of Areté*
- *Bottom: Philosophy Club/Phi Sigma Tau end-of-the-year dinner*

# Letter from the chair



This newsletter begins with reports about awards Rutgers has conferred upon Mercedes Diaz and Howard McGary. I thought I'd take a moment to emphasize our gratitude to them, and also to mention some new arrivals who will carry on in a similar spirit.

Both Mercedes and Howard have served our department for many, many years. Mercedes's unflagging optimism has set an upbeat tone for our floor of the Gateway Building, even during stressful periods — when deadlines loom and paperwork piles up. Her kindness, patience, and advice have been literally life-changing for many of our students. Howard, too, has always been a peaceful presence — someone willing to take the time to get to know his students, and to go the extra mile in helping them. His pioneering Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy has been just a more formal expression of his personal commitment to making philosophy a welcoming place for everyone.

We are sad to know that Howard will be retiring at the end of this year, and we hope still to see a lot of him. (Personally, I certainly hope to continue to see Howard — and sometimes his wife LaVern — in downtown New Brunswick, where there's great live jazz every week.) It's good to know that the Summer Institute will continue, hopefully for another 20 years at least, under the direction of others in our department who have a heart for its mission. This year, Alex Guerrero has stepped up to lead the Institute. And I'm especially happy to announce that Derrick Darby, from the University of Michigan, will be joining us in January. He and Alex will together ensure that Howard's vision for the Institute is fully realized. (Derrick's arrival is really big news! But a full trumpeting of this big news must await the next newsletter. For now I'll just say, keep your eye on *The Atlantic Monthly* this summer for a cover story about Derrick.)

Thankfully, Mercedes continues as our longtime graduate program administrator. She, Jessica Koza, and Charlene Jones have become a dream-team of department administrators. But their workload is still great. Happily, this Fall we are adding another team member who will be able to take on some of the burden: Alex Skiles. Alex will be both a teaching professor and an administrator, serving as associate director of the undergraduate program and working closely with Jessica and Liz Camp. Like Derrick, Alex will be more fully profiled in our next newsletter. But for now I'll just point out that he is an old friend of Mercedes and of many others of us (he spent a year at Rutgers while finishing his philosophy Ph.D. at Notre Dame; Jonathan Schaffer served as his teaching mentor).

I count myself lucky indeed to be working alongside such wonderful people as Mercedes and Howard. It was highly gratifying to see them properly honored by Rutgers this Spring. I know that Derrick Darby and Alex Skiles are cut from the same cloth. Our great good fortune continues!



**Dean Zimmerman**

**Would you like to donate to Rutgers Philosophy?**

Go to: [philosophy.rutgers.edu/giving](https://philosophy.rutgers.edu/giving)