

# ALUMNI UPDATE

---



It has been fourteen years since I took Professor John Knoblock's Honors Introduction to Philosophy, my first philosophy course at the University of Miami. Although I have taken many and sundry other philosophy courses since then, both for the BA and then for the PhD at Stanford University; and although I have now taught Introduction to Philosophy several times myself; nothing compares to the impression made by that first experience. For it was an unusual experience, as is evident in the reading list: Descartes' *Meditations*, Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, and Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*. My (admittedly unscientific) survey of fellow philosophy teachers leads me to think that this particular syllabus has never been replicated. Dr. Knoblock introduced the topics by saying that we would be engaging with three authors, each of whom had revolutionized philosophy in a different way, and each of whom continues to challenge philosophers. I certainly found them challenging, in every sense: the texts were difficult, the ideas within surprising or even shocking. Nothing could have been more exciting.

I never looked back. The undergraduate courses I took at the University of Miami provided a wonderful preparation for graduate study as well as for teaching. Alan Goldman's course in aesthetics and Edward Erwin's course in the philosophy of language established foundations for the areas in which I later specialized. I still use my notes from Claudine Verheggen's Modern Philosophy course when I teach that subject. The opportunity to take classes with graduate students, such as Pragmatism with Susan Haack, was invaluable; and writing my senior honors thesis with Dr. Haack trained me in the rigors of philosophical research and writing. When my students spend too much time in their essays exploring ideas before drawing a conclusion, I tell them what she told me (and her advisor told her): "Research like a detective, but write like a lawyer." Find out what others have said, but then state exactly what you think and defend that claim with reasoned arguments. To me this is the essence of what a good philosopher does.

Philosophy for me, though, is not just a topic of study; it is my career. In explaining why I chose this path I return once again to my experience as a freshman. In addition to teaching an excellent class, John Knoblock also shared his enthusiasm for philosophy as a way of life. I will never forget the evening he had the students to his home for dinner: a tour of his beautiful antique furniture and objets d'art from all over Asia, a sampling of exotic foods, an hour spent listening to opera. He told me that he had specialized in Chinese and Japanese philosophy partly because of the travel, and I was enthralled by the possibilities. I knew that evening that that's what I wanted to do.

Philosophy has already set me travelling. After graduating from UM, I lived in San Francisco while working on my doctorate at Stanford. The intellectual community in the Bay Area was marvellous, and combined with the charms of San Francisco and the beauty of Northern California, I would not have minded studying there forever. But such is not the way of academia—a truly itinerant lifestyle. I spent a year of my doctoral studies in Paris, where I had a Chateaubriand scholarship from the French government to study at a research center there (now the Institut Jean -Nicod). I recently gave a paper at the Institut—and visited the friends I met there years before.

After receiving my PhD, I took a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, working with Kendall Walton on philosophical issues related to fiction, and then a post as Assistant Professor at Washington & Jefferson College, a small liberal arts college near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A liberal arts college, especially one with only three professors in the department, offers a splendid opportunity to teach ... well, just about everything. In my two years at W&J, I taught Introduction to Philosophy, Early Modern Philosophy, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology, Personal Identity, and Social and Political Philosophy. Teaching Political Philosophy during the last presidential election—and to students who were just eligible to vote—has been one of the highlights of my career.

The main difficulty in moving around to academic posts is often called the “two-body problem”: coordinating the lives of both partners when jobs require travel. While perhaps not as intractable as the mind-body problem, it demands flexibility. So when my husband was offered a particularly attractive position with his company in London, we decided to make another move. I am currently lecturing at Birkbeck College, the extension college of the University of London. From teaching 18-21-year-olds who don’t know what to do with their lives, I have gone to teaching mature students who already lead full lives. The dedication of students who choose to give up several evenings a week to the study of philosophy, while juggling full-time jobs and numerous other responsibilities, reminds me of how worthwhile it can be to engage in philosophical thinking. The adventure that started fourteen years ago continues.

*Stacie Friend earned her BA in Philosophy and English Literature at the University of Miami in 1995, and her PhD in Philosophy at Stanford University in 2002.*

---

*Do you have a story to tell? Let us know! E-mail us at [philosophy@miami.edu](mailto:philosophy@miami.edu) or fill out the form below.*

NAME : \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS : \_\_\_\_\_

NEWS : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please send to:** Department of Philosophy, PO BOX 248054, Coral Gables, FL 33124-4670