Tibetan monk Phelgye calls EWU home, for now

Beginning January 2014, students at Eastern Washington University will get a chance to learn and take classes from a world-renowned scholar and teacher, the Venerable Geshe Thupten Phelgye. Geshe Phelgye will be teaching a two-credit course for the College of Arts, Letters & Education (CALE) during the winter and spring quarter. The course will be a two-credit seminar in international affairs, within the Departments of Government and Honors called “Peace and Conflict.” “We are honored to have the Venerable Phelgye teaching at EWU. This is an amazing and unique opportunity for students,” said Jonathan Anderson, chair of EWU’s Department of Psychology.

Geshe Phelgye was born in Tibet in 1956. When he was only three-years-old, he had one of the most challenging events of his life. He and his parents walked all the way to India to escape the communist invasion of his homeland, Tibet. However, Geshe Phelgye didn’t let adversity, early in his life, prevent his education and development. He has a long list of achievements and offers EWU a whole new vision of the world, which was shaped in his youth. By the time Phelgye was 17, he had become a monk, which was more shocking to the girls than him. “Going into a monastery is an even bigger sacrifice, I think it was even harder for the girls,” said Phelgye as he laughs. “The girls didn’t believe me that I was going into a monastery.” After he became a monk, he went on to earn his Doctorate degree in Buddhist philosophy from Sera Monastic University in 1991.

Following his advanced studies at the Gyumed Monastery, starting in 1993, Phelgye embarked on a five-year meditation retreat in the Dhauladur Mountain range in the Himalayan foothills. “The monistic principles, the vows we take, are basically to simplify your life, and to stay away from problems,” said Geshe Phelgye. In 1997, not long after his retreat, he founded the Universal Compassion Movement (UCM), a charitable trust, which promotes vegetarianism worldwide. The UCM’s mission is to bring people together and help animals who are slaughtered or suffering cruel and inhumane treatment. One of the main reasons why Geshe Phelgye is such an avid supporter of the UCM is because he saw the inside of a slaughterhouse when he was a child. As a result he became a strong advocate of vegetarianism.

It’s that same passion for animals, fellow human beings, and all creatures that drives Geshe Phelgye forward today. And next year, students at EWU will be privileged to work under the guidance of a great humanitarian. 

By Shane Moses
Meet the new Interim Dean

Meet Dr. Jim Perez, the College of Arts, Letters, and Education's Interim Dean. He is already a familiar face around the campus having spent several decades at Eastern as a student, professor, and interim dean of other EWU colleges. Now, as the head of CALE, he continues his impressive line of work at EWU.

The youngest child of poor migrant workers from Mexico, Dr. Perez started school at a disadvantage. Spanish was the primary language in his home, and his parents never had a formal education of their own. Despite these difficulties, he successfully completed high school and followed his peers to college.

Once in college, however, he struggled, academically, failing out of several universities around Washington State. His problems stemmed from a lack of preparedness for college level work and being a “self-proclaimed” poor student. He was inspired by his father’s never give up attitude and decided to achieve more for himself. As a result, he returned to EWU and earned his bachelor’s degree. He soon found his niche and finished his master’s degree in social work.

After college, he worked at a prison trying to rehabilitate troubled youths. However, he found himself drawn back to EWU by nieces and nephews who were beginning their college journeys. He returned to assist in the development of the Chicano studies program. This led to a new opportunity working in EWU’s administration. He also went back to school for a doctorate program. Dr. Perez wanted to achieve his cherished goal, helping students who faced adversity in education, as he did, to succeed.

His passion continues to drive him today to assist all struggling, the non-traditional, and the disenfranchised students with their education. That enthusiasm spills over to all the work he does around the school. You can hear the excitement in his voice as he talks about improvements to CALE, such as reviving past cut programs, filling long-empty positions, and increasing the number of online course choices for students. He takes joy in EWU’s success because it translates to the success of the students.

For the next year, CALE will be in the compassionate, competent, and careful hands of Dr. Jim Perez.

By Ariel Heining

Tenure-Track Professor has Sights Set on Student Success

Dr. Sean Agriss, a tenure-track professor at EWU, is an English department faculty member who mentors both students and teachers with his rich background.

Dr. Agriss remarked about a time in his life when he came to critically reflect upon teaching in the classroom, which ultimately sculpted his teaching style. That pivotal experience for him was when he was a faculty member at the Institute of American Indian Arts, a tribal college in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It is a small liberal arts college with a student population of three hundred students. But of those three hundred students, there were at least fifty different native cultures represented. “So that was a pivotal moment for me to consider myself as an educator who designs courses and curriculum based on who the students are in the classroom”, observed Dr. Agriss. This experience fundamentally brought him to understand that education is not one size-fits-all standard applied to every student, but a craft involving a constant process of reflection and improvement to benefit student learning.

(Continues on the next page.)
He is currently overseeing the Concurrent Enrollment Program (CEP) which offers college-level courses to high school students. The program allows students to participate in actual college courses without leaving their school. Sixteen different schools across the eastern region of Washington are involved in this beneficial program. Dr. Agriss is passionate about getting students, lacking access to campus, connected to a college. He is also committed to providing an avenue of opportunity for students not fully committed to continuing their education in college. He believes that graduation from high school with some college credit can be a strong incentive for students to complete a college degree.

Dr. Agriss is a remarkable asset to EWU. He is a mentor, distinguished by his vast experience in teaching and compassion for the enrichment of student learning. This professor models a pedagogy which surpasses the average standardized curriculums because he sees the potential in what every student can achieve. “Students don't come into a classroom knowing nothing. They're not empty vessels that we as instructors then pour knowledge into and then ask for it to be spit back to us. I don't believe that's how education works,” said Dr. Agriss with a chuckle. “It is our job as instructors to figure out ways to incorporate knowledge that our students already have into the new knowledge that we are bringing to the course.”

By Sergio Robles

GSA Students from the English Department

The Graduate Student Appointment (GSA) program at Eastern Washington University offers valuable additional training for graduate students. It is a competitive program that is awarded to high caliber students. Dan Caudel and Justin Abel are both second year GSA students in the English Department who have much to share.

Dan Caudel earned his Bachelor’s degree in philosophy at EWU and is now pursuing a Master's degree in Rhetoric and Technical Communication. Justin Abel comes to the GSA program with a Bachelor's in Creative Writing from EWU and a degree from the New York film academy. Teaching others has taught Dan to reframe and simplify information so that others can make sense of it. Justin tells us: “You really learn about teaching by teaching.” They say that you also learn responsibility and how to manage your time when in the GSA program. Justin says the program has also increased his professionalism. These are all valuable tools whether you stay in academia or enter the corporate world.

The GSA program does have its challenges though. Graduate school is difficult enough, but the GSA program adds an additional workload. Effectively dealing with stress is a skill Dan and Justin have learned in the GSA program. In order to cope with the stress of graduate school, Justin heads to the gym and regularly participates in Bloomsday. Occasionally, he finds time to still do film work. Dan spends time with his family, goes to the gym, and reads Brandon Sanderson, his favorite fiction author. They also enjoy being able to teach and interact with students.

Dan offers the following advice to students who would like to apply to the GSA program: Your undergraduate degree need not be in the same field as your graduate degree. In fact it can be an advantage. He also recommends making yourself known to the professors of the program you wish to apply for. Justin suggests that you start thinking about the application process early. He states that current GSA students can offer suggestions and guidance too.

Dan's thesis project will be to develop a social media program or website for the technical communication program. He chose this thesis because the technical communication program currently lacks a website and an effective way for graduates to stay in touch with each other. Similar challenges exist in the corporate environment, so this should prove valuable for his future career.

Justin's thesis is focused on whether William Butler Yates’ poetry is fascist. This thesis came from an early project where Justin asked if William Butler Yates was a fascist. He is also continuing a project for the Adult Education program that focuses on the education and rehabilitation of criminals through literacy.

Dan and Justin are inspiring examples of what you can accomplish in the GSA program and how to balance life while in graduate school.

By Ulfa Hall

Photos by Daniel Kovalyov

Justin Abel  Dan Caudel
Educating Educators:
EWU Instructors on Queer Pedagogy

EWU instructors Matthew Hodgson and Elizabeth Rognes have prepared a presentation entitled, “Queer Pedagogy in the English Composition Classroom: Gender Literacy in Performative Writing.” This thought-provoking presentation is aimed at helping English Composition teachers at secondary and higher educational institutions to challenge traditional approaches to gender and self-image issues of their students. According to Professor Hodgson, and the philosophy known as queer theory, their goal is to assist educators and encourage students to “think critically about how they write about their identities.” One specific concept they address is the idea of nepantla. It is the term used by writer and queer theory scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, to describe the transitional space after an old idea fades, but a new one has not yet taken its place. “I think one of the most exciting things about in-between spaces is that they offer endless possibility,” says Professor Rognes. “Engaging classrooms in dialogue and with ideas that challenge our notions of stability and normativity can really encourage critical and creative thinking.”

Rognes and Hodgson presented their work at Pacific University’s “Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Sexuality, and the Body” in Portland, Oregon, on October 18th and 19th of 2013. They were members of a panel entitled, “Dressing Up Bodies: Performativity, Discipline, and Resistance.” The panel consisted of members of several disciplines. However, it was Rognes and Hodgson’s focus on teaching strategies that made their presentation unique. Both educators agreed the presentation was well received, and the panel discussions were thoughtful and engaging. We all at EWU hope they continue their insightful work.

By Amoreena France

WORD SEARCH

Hyperbole
Elegy
Beowulf
Sonnet
Diatribce
Chaucer
Sarcasm
Donne

D O N N E M E M E M F V
W X T E N N O S A K
E R N E G Z N T Y T
L P E B I R T A I D
O A K S O H T A P F
B Q E N L V M U L G
R Y D U Z X N U O L
E E L E G Y W D C A
P G D M N O T L I M
Y X I C E N R A X T

Brogue
Iambic
Milton
Genre
Drama
Pun
Verb
Meme