

Distinguished Faculty Award
Reflections From Alumni, Alumnae, Colleagues and Friends
June 2, 2017

Crenner, Cummings and Daise were instrumental in bridging the Intellectual tradition of the colleges and the Western Civ tradition and the ferment of the seventies. They were each important anchors and resources to many students finding their way in complicated times.

- James Roistacher '72, Boston, N.Y.

Dr. Daise transmitted a rare and contagious enthusiasm for philosophy and treated students with respect, dignity, and equality. Although Daise's grading may have evoked "fear and trembling" his love of philosophy and erudite lectures along with maieutic prodding's created a sense of the "ubermensch" in us. His openness to dialogue and fellowship outside the classroom inspired us and helped us rise above our specious sophistry. With great gratitude and grins -

- Bob Schindler '72, Houston, Texas

As a philosophy major, I took three courses with Professor Daise. He made us stretch our ability to understand various philosophical perspectives and try to unwind/attack the perspective, first within that perspective's framework, then once we were unable to do so, step back and unwind/attack the framework from OUTSIDE of the perspective. He taught a course on Nietzsche that I took in senior year, that to this day sticks with me. Nietzsche's logic and rationale within his philosophical framework was unbendable/unbeatable. In a paper he assigned, we were to attack his work only within Nietzsche's framework. I was about a 3.5 GPA student, yet for this paper I received the most satisfying C+ I have ever received on a paper, as odd as that sounds. It was a difficult subject and I did the best I could and I really stretched on it. Prof. Daise's comments made the C+ go down like a spoon full of sugar with medicine. He was a tough grader, and everyone knew it, and many Philosophy majors steered clear of his courses (damn pragmatists!). As I recall, this course had only two other students, so you had better done your reading and come to class ready to discuss and debate. You didn't take his courses to get an A. You took his courses to learn and to stretch your abilities as a thinker. Thank you, Professor Daise.

- Ken Harootunian '82, Berkeley, Calif.

I have many memories of my treasured years at Hobart, but some of the most vivid are of the lively, rigorous, and compelling discussions in philosophy classes of Professor Benjamin Daise. A model of intellectual vigor and integrity, Professor Daise brought the great debates of philosophy to his students with a skilled hand. We were invited to join the discourse without fear of censure, but were expected to put in the work required to rise to a level of excellence. While my career has been in journalism and history, it has been informed every day by the clarity of thought and methods of intellectual analysis I acquired in Professor Daise's classroom. His teachings were the cornerstone of my college experience, and for that I am forever in his debt.

- Hobson Woodward '82

In 1985 I took a seminar given by Professor Daise on Søren Kierkegaard. During a particularly intense discussion one class period, both my classmate Mary Beth Halls and I watched in awe as Professor Daise proceeded to recite by memory substantial passages from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. It was an astonishing moment and a testament to his deep scholarship. Thirty years later I was at a reception in Philadelphia where I happened to be sitting next to a Professor of Philosophy from Drexel University who, I later learned, is herself widely known for her translations and studies of Kierkegaard's works. I mentioned my experience and she was very aware of Professor Daise's work and confirmed what we had intuited in 1985, that his scholarship was well known and highly respected in the field.

- Paul Snitzer '86, Philadelphia, Pa.

It was winter trimester and the class was Existentialism. (I hope that's the right one.) We sat around an old wood table in a classroom in a building on South Main Street. My recollection is that there were 8 - 10 of us in the room with Professor Daise and that it was a late afternoon Tuesday / Thursday class or longer and the sun always set before we finished.

Professor Daise took us through the text with care and was an inspiring philosopher to me. He showed me patience in building understanding and taking time simply to think through an argument. I may have the class wrong but the memory of the classroom and Professor Daise are bright.

Ben Daise, Steven Lee, Dale Moberg and Eugen Baer inspired me. I've had a very fortunate life and I'm certain that my major and my time at Hobart and William Smith Colleges were both driving forces in shaping me. Thank you for that.

- Chris Biehn, Vice President Institutional Advancement and Communication, Ithaca College
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I took Ancient Philosophy with Professor Daise. By this time, I was no stranger to the Philosophy Department. But I was more than a little anxious. The rigors of his courses and the heights of his expectations were legendary. I enjoyed his class immensely, as well as his witty and instructive comments on my work, and I am as proud of my grade in his class as I am of anything I achieved at HWS. But my fondest memory of Professor Daise occurred when the Philosophy Department took me out for dinner at a local Chinese restaurant after the oral defense of my honors thesis. For the first time, I was able to see Ben Daise outside of the classroom. He was warm and charming and wonderfully supportive. He also told one of the funniest stories I have ever heard, which I still repeat at every opportunity. And he contributed to one of my many fond memories of a Department that continues to define who I am (and whose members, I am so happy to say, are still there). Congratulations to Professor Daise on this well-deserved and meaningful honor.

- Doug Edlin '88, Carlisle, Pa.

What Happened?

The last trimester of my first year at William Smith (we were the last class prior to the conversion to semesters), I had the pleasure of taking Professor Daise's "Justice and Equality" course. I had been warned, by students whose experiences had led them to coin the foreboding moniker "No A's Daise," to avoid his classes. As they put it, "he expects you to think too much." But the future Philosophy major within me sensed a challenge and sought him out. The challenge, as it turns out, was mutual.

My contributions to the class discussion and some early writing assignments had apparently caused Professor Daise to think that I might have salient points to make. But my final paper for the class was rushed and poorly constructed, a function of overconfidence and poor time management raised to the power of distraction. I struggled with the question of whether it was better to turn in a paper I knew was bad or no paper at all. Later that week I climbed the narrow back stairwell of Demarest Hall, pausing momentarily in consideration of exiting on the chapel level for some last minute appeal for divine intervention, to face my fate. My plan to dash around the corner, retrieve my paper, and hurry back down the stairs-unseen, unquestioned, and blissfully unaccountable-were foiled when I saw that his office door was open and the stack of papers directly in front of it. Whether I was the first to retrieve my paper, or the *only* student who bothered, I'll never know--I was too focused on the fact that the papers were *not* in alphabetical order (affording no "Augustine advantage" this time) so I had to make some awkward small talk as I searched through them. Paper secured, I retreated to the safe confines of the stairwell. I didn't dare stop until I was down to the parking lot door, where I was sure that I would have an

auditory heads up if he were exiting the same way at the same time. I looked for the typed comment page, customarily attached to every assignment, where he would (in bold Arial font) give his thoughts about each argument presented, offering suggestions for improvement, and concluding with the letter grade earned for the effort. It wasn't there. Instead, written on the last page of my paper were just two words, "What happened?" and a grade the likes of which I would never sink to again.

I had been preparing myself for this devastation. The grade was just as bad as I thought it would be, and deservedly so. The anticipation had been fraught with humiliation and fear. Yet, much to my surprise, I started smiling. I felt happy. I felt that I had not only gotten what I deserved (and justice should be pleasing to everyone who encounters it) but I hadn't received a reconstruction of the correct answer. By receiving only those two words, he was communicating several additional propositions: "You know why this is poorly written," "You are capable of much better work," "You haven't met the expectations of either of us."

I left Demarest motivated—not only to take another class with Professor Daise, but to take as many as possible. He wasn't content with mediocre effort, and I wasn't going to be, either.

In his Ancient Philosophy course, we considered the question "is virtue teachable?" Not yet being self-reflective enough to put all of the pieces together, I wrote a long essay that argued that the answer is clearly "no." Wrong. As Professor Daise explained via the Meno, and demonstrated in his own approach to teaching, the philosopher's vocation is midwife-of-the-truth. For my remaining time at HWS, through my PhD studies in Philosophy at the University of Rochester,

and even now, Professor Daise has been a sounding board and gentle guide. He holds up a mirror to what I say and do and asks the questions that reflect back the kernels of truth and consistency that serve as stepping stones over rough water. He has been a champion of the necessary over the expedient (which put my graduate work into proper perspective) and a calm and patient friend (which has grounded my thinking in many areas of my life). He has consistently reminded me that while theories are wonderful things, they must touch down with the text (and reality) at least every once in a while.

I am so grateful that “What happened?” happened. I am grateful for the instruction, friendship, and guidance of Professor Daise (whom I still cannot address simply by first name - I guess some habits really are intractable). Distinguished Faculty? He certainly accords with the form.

With respect and appreciation,
Jackie Augustine '99

My nomination is for Professor Benjamin Daise, who challenged my way of thinking perhaps more than any other professor during my four years at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. During my first year, I took his 'Moral Dilemmas' course and I admittedly struggled in the class at first. However, because he constantly pushed me to approach problems from a different perspective, it helped to change the way that I viewed the world and the issues that we face within society. Furthermore, he was one of the few professors that could give criticism, but not allow that to keep him from judging one's work fairly. He was a very hard-nosed professor, but that rigidity helped me to challenge myself in my writing.

- Joseph Goings '01, Silver Spring, Md.

Professor Daise was a tough, thorough, and demanding teacher and reader. His high standards for student work provided a level of critique for both writing and argument that was wonderful to understand, answer, and use in the advancement of my own discipline and writing. My experiences in Professor Daise's class left me wishing I could schedule more classes with him, and left a lasting impression on me. I was delighted to learn that he is being honored this year.

- John Chamberlain '02

Ben Daise taught the important lesson that no matter how hard you work and no matter how much time you invest at chipping away at difficult and complex subject matter, you still might get a B... or worse, but you have to learn it none-the-less.

- William Alexander Marsh '05, Frisco, Colo.

Lowell Bloss, Benjamin Daise and Richard Dillon were great teachers. All challenged their students.

- Geoffrey Lippa '07, Alfred Station, N.Y.

Distinguished Faculty Award Presentation Remarks

By Thomas Howard '72

Professor Daise changed my life. The study of philosophy had found me the year before, so I was ready to set off on my personal version of what Joseph Campbell described as the hero's journey. But a hero needs to meet a guide and a teacher to help him understand what he sees and what he is searching for. Ben Daise was mine at the colleges.

I first met Professor Daise in his first course at Hobart & Wm. Smith, an advanced seminar in the Fall of 1970 devoted to the questing of Søren Kierkegaard. We began with *Fear and Trembling* (the study of which enabled me to meet my Elizabeth, who is with me here today, but that's another story) and concluded with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, all the while trying to understand the often opaque Johannes Climacus, the use of pseudonyms, and indirect communication.

Over the next two years, we labored through Immanuel Kant, surveyed the pre-Socratics, peeked at Plato and Aristotle, discovered Peirce, James and Dewey, and tried to begin to fathom Nietzsche. I was fortunate to visit him at his various homes where we listened to Charlie Pride, drank Scotch, and talked on through the night on topics long forgotten. Through it all, you displayed a wry wit that kindly but effectively pointed out the incompleteness of my (or anyone's) thinking. Even his own. On more than one occasion, his laughter at his own remarks rendered the conclusion inaudible.

Somehow, you could see through my poor writing style and understand what I so vigorously but poorly expressed. Always, you inspired me to work. To spend time on what I came to college for. Those who failed to prepare for your courses sometimes could be heard to complain of an inability to understand. Without question,

Ben Daise required effort, but I believe that was deliberate. The study of Philosophy is not supposed to be easy; you ensured that we earned the reward, and you did so with integrity.

Thanks to you, I earned the 1972 Sutherland Prize for Excellence in Philosophy, I was accepted at and was graduated from New York University School of Law, and I have been able to find a measure of success in my career as a Trial Lawyer. And now, I am able to participate in this richly deserved honor at the same time as my 45th reunion.

Professor Daise displayed a warmth and an intensity that transformed me from an adolescent into an adult, and gave me an intellectual foundation that has sustained me and will sustain me throughout my life. This award recognizes your similar importance to the many young women and men you have taught and guided through the years, each of whom would join in these remarks. For all of this and more, you have our undying affection, appreciation and respect. Congratulations Professor Daise. You've earned this. You are a Distinguished guide, teacher and scholar. You have and will always have an honored place in our lives and memories.