Philosophy and Religious Studies Help Form Student’s Career Path
by Janette Ballard

Not everyone can appreciate a good Ludwig Wittgenstein joke, but Gabe Rusk, a senior philosophy and religious studies major, got a good laugh when he shared one at the Annual Undergraduate Conference on Philosophy and Religion in Pennsylvania this past spring.

“There are few places where I can crack a Wittgenstein joke and have the whole room erupt in laughter,” said Rusk, who presented a paper on Wittgenstein, religion and the Supreme Court at the conference. “Being among peers who ‘love wisdom,’ the etymology of the word philosophy, in this kind of light is fun for us philosophy and religious studies majors.”

Rusk is a prolific writer whose work has been published in philosophy journals as well as the Columbia University Undergraduate Philosophy Magazine, aka The Gadfly.

“My love of political philosophy and religion can't be kept in an abstract vacuum. As I progressed at DU, I had an insatiable desire to apply these principles in practice and in writing. Forming my own arguments has the intended goal of forming my trajectory,” he said.

His favorite paper to date, published by The Gadfly, is about the concept of Queue Theory and Social Contract Theory in the framework of Greek Mythology.

“That alone would probably put most people to sleep...but the idea and cultivation of the paper came from now retired philosophy Professor Frank Seeburger and religious studies Professor Carl Raschke. They would always entertain some of my more creative endeavors within their assignments,” said Rusk. “All of the department faculty who I've been taking classes with have shared in this sense of intellectual muscle building.”

Rusk first discovered an interest in philosophy as a high school debater, where the general strategy involved debating principled arguments: when does security trump liberty, when does equality trump the common good? From there he joined the DU debate team, and pursued study of his two favorite subjects, political philosophy and civil rights.

“Gabe’s intense intellectual curiosity, sharp reasoning skills, and his unbounded work ethic clearly place him at the top of DU students,” said Candace Upton, associate professor of philosophy. “For an undergraduate to have secured four publications in one year, to have successfully competed on both DU’s debate team and DU’s bioethics debate team, and also to have maintained a high GPA is a striking achievement for any student. But it is Gabe’s kindness, humility, and gentle humor that make his intellectual achievements particularly worthy of respect.”
Rusk works as an intern at the Civil Rights Division of the Regional Transportation District and as a docent at the Colorado Appeals Court and Colorado Supreme Court.

“In both of these jobs, I see the implementation of theory to practice and from written word to social justice,” Rusk said. “I’ve had literal experience where the arguments I’ve made in a published paper can come to fruition in my labor, from teaching school kids about the Supreme Court to ensuring a discrimination-free workplace, these are principles grounded in what I’ve written.”

He will graduate this fall and plans to continue working in the areas of political philosophy, religion and civil rights.

“I have a strong desire to get some form of a graduate degree in either political philosophy or religion and then head to law school. If I have the ability to apply my theoretical background in philosophy and religion to civil rights that would be the best case scenario,” he said.