

Tuesday, August 18, 2015

Philosophy student chosen as only undergrad to present at international conference

Many college students across America typically use their summers to earn extra cash at summer jobs or take trips with friends.

While he may have done those things as well, Oakland student Karl Martin Adam had a different, more unique opportunity this summer: He was the only presenter at a respected professional philosophy conference who is still in his undergraduate studies.

Adam, a philosophy major, presented a paper on the topic of polygamy at the North American Society for Social Philosophy's (NASSP) 32nd International Social Philosophy Conference, held July 16-18 at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, which is 15 miles from Kansas City.

His paper, titled "The Slippery Slope to Justice: An Argument for the Recognition of Polygamy," was the only undergraduate paper accepted by the program committee. More than half of the papers at this year's conference were written by professors.

Mark Navin, Ph.D., associate professor in Oakland's Department of Philosophy, said the Philosophy Department supported Adam "because it is a great honor, and highly unusual, for an undergraduate student to present at a professional philosophy conference. We wanted to help make an amazing educational experience possible for an Oakland University student."

The College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Philosophy covered the cost of Adam's trip to the conference, during which he was also selected to chair a session on hope and other virtues.

Presenters at the conference hailed from the United States and abroad, including Harvard University, Columbia University, the University of Amsterdam, Oxford University, Georgetown University, The University of Kansas and many more.

Adam's paper argues that proponents of same-sex marriages should also be for the recognition of polygamous marriages, contrary to arguments by gay rights advocates such as John Corvino, Andrew Sullivan and Jonathan Rauch, as well as philosophers who are primarily concerned with opposing polygamy rather than advancing marriage equality for same-sex couples, such as Thom Brooks and Simon May.

"... As politically expedient as it might be, it is seriously morally wrong for proponents of the right of same-sex couples to marry to attempt to secure that right by engaging in further marginalization and cultural imperialism against people with even less socially accepted family structures – namely people in relationships involving more than two parties," Adam contends in his paper.

"Rather than reinforcing society's practice of legitimizing one type of romantic relationship while oppressing people in others by attempting to move from the group of the oppressed to the group of the privileged, advocates for the right of same-sex couples to marry should argue for the recognition of all consensual romantic relationships whose members request that recognition."

Navin said Adam attending the NASSP conference also offered an opportunity to get feedback from a diverse audience and become socialized to professional academic culture.



OU student Karl Adam presented at the North American Society for Social Philosophy's 32nd International Social Philosophy Conference in July.

Adam added he is grateful to both the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Philosophy for their role in making his unique summer trip possible. “Not only did I receive many useful comments, which will help me in my next project of getting my paper published, but presenting a paper at a conference was valuable experience for my future career as a professor of philosophy.”

For more information about Oakland University’s Department of Philosophy, visit oakland.edu/phil.