

Thirty Years of Service in Exchange for a Lifetime of Memories Gained Throughout Asia and the Pacific

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In the beginning...

Recruitment

I saw an advertisement for the UOG philosophy position in *the Chronicles of Higher Education* and it seemed to fit my interests and skills well. I didn't know much about Guam, there was no internet back then to look up facts about it—other than it was generally known as a U.S. military outpost. Still, Guam was a warm place (still trying to flee Minnesota winters) and on the ocean (we all loved beaches, swimming, and diving). On our way out to Guam, we (myself, wife and three kids) arrived in Honolulu from the East Coast and waited for our connecting flight to Guam. We expected the next flight to Guam to be like our many half-hour flights to neighboring island off of Oahu; to our shock and terror, the pilot told us to sit back and enjoy the flight to Guam *which would take seven and a half hours!* My wife and children all glared at me for getting them into this pickle.

Hire

After the exhausting flight from Honolulu, we arrive on Guam in time for the fall UOG semester, 1990. It was our first exposure to a “rainy season” as we didn't see the sun for the first two weeks—not exactly welcoming. However, and fortunately, thanks to a recent influx of money into the island economy, the board of regents agreed to a new program for incoming faculty so we were picked up at the airport by our division chair (Gerry Berkeley) and later, accompanied by a senior faculty member and her spouse (Becky Stephenson and Hiro Kurashina) we were taken out for a nice dinner at Sizzler Steakhouse in Agana (even though I and my wife were vegetarians!). The university provided us with a suitable rental car and a two week stay at a two-bedroom condominium. Evidently, this was quite a change from previous times where new faculty arrive and were not greeted by anyone; they took a taxi to another faculty member's home and slept on their sofa for a short time till they found a place of their own. They also had to either leach a ride or rent a car to look for an apartment and buy a used car for their new life on Guam. What a change!

No doubt, besides the (temporary) booming Guam economy, the reason for this upgrade in new faculty policy rests on the fact that I was part of a major influx of new faculty (24 in total) that infused the university with new blood, expanding existing departments and creating new programs in some cases. There was a lot of excitement about the number and quality of the new faculty, a perceived major improvement in the quality of education offered at the island's only university. Some senior faculty were less thrilled about the faculty change, however, as they resented the new buzz about the new-hires, as I heard on more than one occasion, “what, are we chopped liver?” Still, the *real* buzz around campus and throughout Gov-Guam was the fact that

Governor Ada was giving all government employees a \$5540 annual raise, all Guam tax payers a \$1000 tax rebate, plus all UOG faculty were to receive a 10% raise starting fall term. There is nothing that makes employees happier than more money jingling in their pockets. Sadly, that was the last across-the board raise or tax rebate that I would see for the next 27 years while I worked at the University of Guam. To the contrary, we saw our overload and summer teaching salary go from 10% of our salary (8% summer) per course to a flat \$3000 (\$2500 if one had a MA degree) a course salary for the duration of my time at UOG and to this day.

Personal Background Information

I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, though move multiple times while growing up (e.g., Virginia, Kansas, Indiana) due to my father's government employment with the FAA; I returned to Minnesota to complete my Middle and High School education and onward to the University of Minnesota. I married during my undergraduate schooling, moved to Seattle to earn my Master's Degree, and received my Ph.D. in Hawaii with a degree in Comparative and Asian Philosophy. I guess you could say that I took the expression "Go West Young Man" serious, plus I just wanted to find a warmer and still yet warmer place to call home—can anyone really say they like 40 degrees below zero windchill where the hairs in your nose freeze together? We prospered on even warmer Guam where my wife, Andrea, (a kinder teacher for Guam DOE for 24 years) watched our three children (a son and two daughters) attend public schools and go on to college (two at UOG) and in turn we have enjoyed the company of seven grandchildren (six granddaughters and one grandson)—all of whom moved back to the states.

Brief Academic Background Information:

As noted above, I got degrees from the University of Minnesota, Washington, and Hawaii. I initially taught philosophy classes in the greater Chicago area (called myself the "highway philosopher" due to traveling from one school to another as an adjunct professor); a year later, I held my first full-time position at Frostburg State University (University of Maryland), then moved to Guam to teach in the philosophy program for twenty-seven years.

Academic Achievements and Rank at UOG:

Teaching, Philosophy Program, and Travel Studies

It is fair to say that I did well at UOG—a mutual benefit for all concerned! When I began my employment in the fall of 1990, the philosophy program had a minor program with no students, all classes except Introduction to Philosophy were cancelled (due to non-enrollment); it was a service program with a single faculty member teaching four or more sections of Introduction to Philosophy a semester to meet the philosophy general education requirement. Within three years, I (along with a later-hired second philosophy faculty, James Sellmann) had totally revised and updated the philosophy program to contemporary standards and created and got approved a new philosophy major. By the time I retired, the philosophy program had fifteen majors (respectable for a UOG humanities program) and completed WASC paperwork to add a complete online philosophy major—it would have been the first UOG undergraduate program to offer an online B.A.

This expansion of the philosophy program included both an Ethics and Asian-Pacific curriculum path within the major; the philosophy program also serviced other programs i.e., Micronesian Studies (Micronesia Religion), Nursing (Death and Dying), Biology (Biomedical ethics), Environmental Studies (Environmental Ethics), History (History of Western Philosophy I &II), Japanese Language (Japanese Philosophy). Many of these courses were *required* courses for majors in these programs. I personally created and taught twelve times (always during the summer or intersession terms) a travel studies course enrolled by UOG students and interested community members. Locations covered include India, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, China, Tibet, and Mongolia. This latter course resulted in local news coverage before and after each course taught, and a significant outreach and resource to interested community members—as well as an invaluable and entertaining experience for UOG students.

Awards and Service to Others

Within the first five years of my hire, I received a college-wide teaching award, mirroring an excellence in teaching award at my previous position at Frostburg State University. In addition to my college teaching award, I also received college awards in both service and assessment. Besides serving as chair of the Humanities Division for nearly a third of the years I taught at UOG, I served on numerous college and university wide committees, e.g., promotion & tenure, salary committee, tech committee, countless search committees, CLASS academic affairs committee, and chaired the distant education committee for three years. I secured community funding for bring out renown American-Japanese artist, Roger Shimamura, as well as two professors from Clemson University and set up a large UOG public presentation by these three professors as well as assorted presentations and public gatherings throughout Guam. I gave public lectures both on-campus and in the community several times yearly for the whole time I was employed by UOG. My presentation on assessment through the use of a critical thinking test within the philosophy program (during faculty development day) led to a university wide adoption of this assessment instrument throughout the university.

Research and Contribution to my Fields of Study

In addition to giving frequent public talks both off and on campus on Guam, I presented research papers several times a year off-island in the US, Asia, and Europe—and continue to do so even after retiring from UOG in 2017. Summarizing my CV, one could count sixty-two different papers presented, some papers presented multiple times at different conferences. Recently I was scheduled to give several new papers, but conferences were cancelled due to the pandemic; but this fall (2021) I was able to present a paper virtually online. Further, I have had twenty-one articles published in refereed journals and books. Over the last half of my career at UOG, my academic recognition rose dramatically internationally, as I become one of the top US scholars in the field of Jain Studies (one of the three principal traditions in India, the others being Hinduism and Buddhism). I was selected to give a paper at Harvard University dealing with Jainism and ecology—to which a series of books were published on this topic (Harvard University Press). As a follow-up, I was invited to serve on a panel at the UN in New York, explaining Jainism and Ecology. Further, I served as guest editor for a special issue of *Philosophy East and West*, a premiere journal in the field of Asian and Comparative Philosophy.

For a number of years, I was invited to serve on key panels dealing with Jainism at academic conferences in all parts of the world; a number of these papers were incorporated into books that included *select* papers from these panels.

Special Colleagues, Administrators, Students, and Staff to be remembered

So enough of this “self-aggrandizement” already, I apologize but was required to include these activities and accomplishments. On a personal note, I highly appreciate the professional relationships I formed with scholars and friends I met in my travels and interactions around the world. Happily, I still continue to communicate and interact with many of these people in my life as a retired (but active) professor of religion and philosophy. Yet, what I personally remember and hold most dearly, are the many memories and interactions with colleagues, students, and the local community on Guam. I think my family and I attended every fiesta in every village for the first ten years we lived on Guam—so many full plates of food along with good stories to hear and share. I was as interested to learn about the local cultural traditions in Micronesia as those Asian traditions I had trained for fifteen years in my academic schooling. I received several Guam Humanities Council grants to develop material about Guam and Micronesia and even now (2021), I am in the process of publishing a Micronesia Reader of traditional folklore for children. Exposure to and appreciation of people from all over the world has always been a central focus of my life and living on Guam (and Hawaii) for nearly forty years has been one of the most cherished and important opportunities of my life, period! It was only my need to be with family (something I learned to value during my life on Guam), that prompted me to take an early retirement and move to where my family (parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren) live now.

My years of leading travel groups throughout Asia must be noted, as I made many friends who repeatedly traveled with us as we explored and shared our island culture with local people, tour guides, priests, nuns, holy men, reincarnating lamas, and the like for nearly thirty years. After my last trip to Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia), I was informed that a group of local/loyal course participants over the years had formed a new “self-guided” tour group, named in my honor, that would continue to travel annually through exotic lands to the island’s east. What greater honor could a person wish for....

Personal Advice for Current and Future Professors or Administrators

UOG Students

I have been asked to provide advice to those future instructors and administrators that follow me. To this I would respond to do as you should do to *anyone* one encounters in life. Always make an effort to take more interest in listening to others, more than one takes in talking about oneself or what you claim to know. Your best communication with others occurs if you first learn about their interests and life and then adapt what you can say to align with their needs, interests, and background. The first thing I learned once in a class of UOG students is that they are very different than what I had experienced teaching state-siders. For example, their attitude and “allegiance” to the U.S. is very different, as they come from generations who have at once been loyal to the U.S. but also displaced and disrespected by the U.S. Hence, issues about U.S.

policy and positions are more of an open discussion, rather than blind loyalty and obedience. I found this very refreshing and aligned much closer with my critical thinking disposition to think through things thoroughly, factually, and honestly.

Along these lines, I found Guam students much more open and appreciative of non-western traditions, in spite of their commitment to the Catholic Church. Some stateside students tended to be judgmental and biased toward Indian, Chinese, and Japanese traditions, especially if they differed from their own, personal religious and/or cultural background. This was not the case with the vast majority of UOG students I taught. Likewise, we were able to generate very lively and candid discussions in class debates regarding pressing moral issues of the day. It was always interesting to see Guam students dig into a problem in comparison to stateside, military, or recently-arrived (“FOB” or “Fresh-Off-the Boat”) Filipino students—as many Guam students put it—who usually held firm to a personal, religious, or cultural position already embraced, and were uncomfortable with a “raw” or frank discussion of the merits of assorted positions on a topic. I was asked to help out teaching military students on Guam bases on a regular basis, and I witnessed this disparity in terms of openness and honesty in class discussions again and again over the years between Guam and state-side military based groups of class participants. For this I will be forever grateful and consider myself privileged to have been in such an ideal classroom setting.

Staff

Over the years I served both as a faculty member and semi-administrator (division chair, committee member); consequently, I needed to work with staff members—usually administrative assistants or secretaries—who assisted me in conducting divisional or college wide business. Here I found these people kind, responsive, capable, and committed as any staff that I worked with stateside or at international conferences. What stands out is their personal and friendly demeanor, where only Hawaii (where I was a graduate student) best compares. Everywhere, as in all personal interactions, I found people to be kind and thoughtful, for the most part, so there was no lag behind in other locations. However, what really stood out is Guam staffs’ willingness to open up about all aspects of their life, from family to their culture in general. Within a short time I found myself talking to these individuals as I would talk to any good friend, and shared with them all the goings-on with my family as well. In other words, there was no “professional boundaries” established, so as to keep things in a “strict, nonpersonal level” as is often the case elsewhere. This trait made working at UOG so much more personal and fulfilling than elsewhere—a true pleasure and gift. When someone retired or was ill, there was a sincere outpouring of emotions and care that likely would also have occurred stateside, but not to the extent and level of emotion that one would find on Guam. Again, this fact, made working at UOG that much more meaningful and fulfilling over the years.

Colleagues

As many, if not most, of fellow colleagues at UOG are from the US stateside or non-Pacific Island parts of the world, one is immediately aware of a comradery and closeness that is not present in other academic departments where I have worked. When you serve overseas, far

away from family and love ones, obviously you rely on fellow colleagues to fill in where your extended family is missing. While some fly home for holidays, most either can't afford to do it or don't want to undergo the long flights for a brief holiday. Hence, people naturally tend to gather together for Thanksgiving or Christmas. This extends naturally to local colleagues and staff as well, as many open their homes and family gatherings. I found this to be an extension to the fiesta phenomenon on Guam we experienced so frequently when we first arrived on Guam. To be honest, it is not a true substitution to a gathering with one's own extended family at holidays, but it sure makes these times much more meaningful and less lonely and heartfelt—when away from family at these important times. Hence, there is a certain bond and closeness found when working at UOG that you will not likely find when working at an institution near your home.

Final Note

I personally joined SEPRS, gaining emeritus status this year (2021), nearly four years after retirement. This was not a deliberate choice, but rather it resulted from my inability to determine how to properly apply for emeritus professorship. I neglected to bring the university faculty handbook along with me when I moved closer to my family and the inability of my division chair and dean to communicate needed information stopped me from applying. Fortunately, a *new* emeritus policy and procedure was enacted earlier this year and I was informed of this by my past dean. Thereupon, I contacted the personnel department at UOG and they were extremely helpful in sending me all needed forms and information to complete my task. As is often said, “good things come to those who wait.” I was fairly quickly awarded emeritus status and have enjoyed interacting with SERPS since that time.



Dr. Skoog during his first year at UOG standing in front of the philosophy sign on his office door at the Old Student Center. "Someone found some money to make up signs of all disciplines taught and wrote them in both English and Chamorro," says Dr. Skoog.



1990. Dr. Skoog and a couple of UOG staff gathering at Taragi Beach at Anderson Air Force Base on a sunny Sunday Afternoon.



Dr. Skoog posing with a couple students at a mountain peak surrounded by Buddha Streamers.