



## UST'S CATHERINE PETERS NAMED YOUNG SCHOLAR OF THE YEAR BY AMERICAN CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION

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*UST Communications Director Sandy Soliz visited with Peters to discuss her award, her doctorate and her future plans.*

Center for Thomistic Studies PhD. Candidate Catherine Peters recently won the “Young Scholar Award” from the American Catholic Philosophical Association. The award is given to the best paper submitted to the ACPA’s annual conference by a scholar 35 years old or younger regardless of academic position.

Peters is poised to defend her dissertation this summer. Peters’ dissertation director is Dr. R. E. Houser, professor emeritus, Center for Thomistic Studies, who also won the Young Scholar Award “back in the late middle ages.” Houser will receive his own prestigious award, the Aquinas Medal, at the ACPA’s 2019 meeting. This honor is shared with past recipients Jacques Maritain, Pope John Paul II and Ralph McInerney.

**Q: I understand that you submit a paper for possible inclusion at the ACPA annual meeting, and you indicated interest in being considered for the Young Scholar Award.**

**A:** Every year the American Catholic Philosophical Association holds a conference, which has drawn hundreds of participants and presenters from the US and abroad.

Papers submitted to the ACPA are read and blind-reviewed by a program committee. The highest-scored papers are accepted for presentation at the conference and publication in the proceedings. From these accepted papers, the author of the best one submitted by a scholar under the age of 35 is also named the “Young Scholar” for that year.

**Q: Would you give me a brief synopsis of the paper?**

**A:** My paper was on “The Objective Relativity of Goodness.” It began as a term paper for a graduate course I took with Steven Jensen at the CTS. It looks at how we can talk about something being “good” in a meaningful way: “relativity” means that what makes something to be good depends on what kind of thing it is. “Objective” means that goodness is not something that we can arbitrarily come up with, though, because things have natures that we do not merely subjectively determine. The basic thesis is that we need to have an understanding of what something is before we can say if it is good or bad. This is because the way they are good depends on what kind of things they are (for example, what makes a human to be good is different from what makes a dog or a donut to be good!)

I presented my paper at the annual meeting of the ACPA held this year in San Diego, CA. Immediately after I gave my paper, there was an invited comment given on my work by a professor and then the floor was opened to questions from the audience. I was presented with the “Young Scholar” award at the conference banquet that evening.

**Q: Where did you receive your bachelor’s and master’s degree?**

**A:** I earned my Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, in 2012. Following this, I began my studies at the Center for Thomistic Studies and finished my Masters in Philosophy in 2014. I have been working on my doctorate since then and am excited to be almost done!

**Q: What is the topic of your dissertation?**

**A:** My dissertation is on “The Causality of ‘Nature’ in Avicenna’s Physics of the Healing.” It explores the philosophical physics of a medieval thinker, Avicenna. I am looking at the way natural beings both cause and undergo motion. I first encountered Avicenna’s thought in Dr. Houser’s course on “The Islamic Background to Thomistic Philosophy” in the fall of 2012, during my first semester at the CTS. This piqued my interest in medieval Arabic philosophy and, fast forwarding a few years, I decided to write my dissertation on Avicenna under Dr. Houser’s direction.

**Q: When will you finish your dissertation and defend it?**

**A:** I have been writing my dissertation for just over a year and am very glad to have finished my first draft! I am now working on revisions. My director is R. E. Houser and my readers are Thomas Osborne (CTS) and Jon McGinnis (University of Missouri – St. Louis). Once they approve my revisions I will be ready to go to defense this summer, when I present my research and respond to questions from my director, readers, and additional professors from the CTS before answering questions that any other attendee might have. Dissertation defenses at the Center for Thomistic Studies are open to the university community and public.

**Q: Why did you choose the Center for Thomistic Studies for your PhD?**

**A:** I was drawn to the Center for Thomistic Studies because it is the only graduate program in the US specifically focused on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Many of my professors in college strongly recommended my coming here and I am glad that I followed their advice. I have met people from various institutions during my time as a CTS student and I have been struck by how many recognize the Center as an institution that excels at instructing and forming educators and scholars. I count myself very fortunate to have been a student here.

**Q: What are your plans after you receive your PhD?**

**A:** I have just accepted a tenure-track position at Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA) in medieval philosophy, with a particular focus on medieval Arabic thought. My passions are teaching and scholarship, so I am very excited to continue pursuing both after I conclude my graduate studies.

**Q: Do you teach philosophy at UST?**

**A:** I have taught “The Philosophy of Nature” at St. Mary’s Seminary in Houston and “The Philosophy of the Human Person” here on the UST campus. I am taking time off from teaching now to focus on my dissertation but I certainly miss it! Teaching is one of my favorite parts of academia and I can’t wait to get back in the classroom this fall at LMU.

**Q: How long have you been an employee at UST?**

**A:** Since coming to UST in 2012, I have been a student, staff member, and adjunct faculty. I worked as a graduate assistant for the Center for Thomistic Studies, as a philosophy and writing tutor for the tutoring center, and as an adjunct instructor for the Philosophy Department. Since 2016, I have been the administrative assistant for the Theology Department. I have enjoyed experiencing the University of St. Thomas in all of these different capacities and I look forward to using the skills and experience I have acquired through each of them in my future work.

**Q: Tell me something personal about you.**

**A:** I have lived all over the United States, but my family lives in Michigan. I have called Montrose “home” since beginning my studies at the CTS in 2012. I love its walkability and coffee shops.

When I am not working or writing, I enjoy doing CrossFit four or five times a week at CrossFit Live Oak, a box about five minutes from campus. It is a great help in living a balanced life and it strengthens me both physically and mentally. Avicenna was a physician as well as a philosopher, so I think that he would likely approve of the writing-then-workout pairing!