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UNH Media Relations

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DURHAM, N.H. – Nick Smith, assistant professor of philosophy at the University of New Hampshire and author of “I Was Wrong: The Meaning of Apologies” (2008, Cambridge University Press) is available to discuss golfer Tiger Woods’ anticipated public apology this morning and apologies by public figures in general.

Smith is available to discuss the following questions, among others:

- Does Woods explain what he did with an appropriate degree of specificity?
- Does Woods accept blame rather than mere sympathy? Does he cast the offense as an accident or otherwise deny that it was his intention to harm?
- Does Woods make clear why his actions were wrong and identify the principles he violated?
- Does Woods promise not to do it again and redress the problems he caused?

"We should also recognize a truth that often conflicts with our media culture: moral development does not occur with a news cycle. Mr. Woods will be accounting for this for the rest of his life. His reform and redress can hold much meaning. In my view, the best apologies are like promises to change. Like promises, we cannot judge them fully in the moments they are spoken. We need time to search for the deepest values that orient our lives and begin rebuilding our future with habits that honor those principles. We are all engaged in this process, and although it may not make for good television it this the sort of persistent moral growth that creates good people,” Smith said.

"For these reasons I caution that we should not make too much of Mr. Woods’ statement today. The words are likely to be ambiguous, like someone telling you that they love you on the first date. Such a statement could well be a life-transforming proclamation, but we would need to know much more before we could make a well-informed judgment. We will have a much better sense of the meaning of Tiger Woods' February 2010 apology if we check in with him in ten years,” he said.

A former Manhattan attorney, Nick Smith is a professor of philosophy at the University of New Hampshire, and is a regular contributor to major media outlets, including NPR, PBS, BBC, CBC, CNN, and others. He graduated from Vassar College in 1994, earned a law degree from SUNY Buffalo in 1997, and went on to complete a Ph.D. in philosophy from Vanderbilt in 2002. His writings have appeared in journals such as Continental Philosophy Review, Social Theory and Practice, The Journal of Social Philosophy, Culture, Theory and Critique, The Rutgers Law Journal, and The Buffalo Law Review.