Calvin College is embarking on several big initiatives to help guide teaching and scholarship over the next several years. Members of the Political Science Department will play a role in all of them, but especially in an initiative titled “Faith and Citizenship.” Here’s a snippet from the proposal for this initiative:

If a body politic is only as good as its citizens, then what does it mean to say that a citizen is “good”? The question is age-old, but never more urgent than today. In just the past three decades, new forces and movements have challenged the role of the citizen. On a macro-level, citizens have been buffeted by globalization and rapid technological change, shifting international alliances and hardening transnational conflicts, and intergroup hostilities in reconstituted or emerging forms. But they also confront these new realities in their particular territories and cultures. In many postcolonial and post-communist systems, citizens have unprecedented freedom, yet they struggle with both the privileges and responsibilities of self-determined rule. Others experience ambivalence in countries that are coping with unintended effects of hope-filled revolution, including the persistent threat of authoritarianism .... Still others reside in the established democracies of Europe and North America, but feel an indifference and alienation that impedes participation and the formation of civic virtue.

These are worrisome dynamics, which explains why scholars and practitioners have responded with renewed attention to the question of what makes a good citizen. ... But whatever their perspective, they tend to share the conviction that the role of the citizen is under profound threat across the globe. Nearly everywhere we see evidence of decline in social trust and tolerance, alarmingly low levels of political knowledge, and eroding civic engagement. One might plausibly argue that the citizen is in global crisis.

What should we do with such a grim assessment? Anyone concerned with public justice can’t run away from it. That’s the point of the Faith and Citizenship initiative: To add a Christian voice to the vital conversation about citizenship. As we begin rolling out parts of the initiative next year, look for opportunities to exchange ideas, engage each other and the church, and sharpen our thinking about the role of citizens across the globe.

- Kevin den Dulk

Class Supports Local “We the People” Competition

A Calvin College Political Science class, Constitutional Foundations taught by Professor Kevin den Dulk, looked to help a local high school participate in the “We the People” competition this April. “We the People” is a program that promotes civic competence and responsibility among the nation’s upper elementary and secondary students. It includes a simulated congressional hearing, which allows students to learn and discuss the constitution in an exciting and interactive way.

One local high school, South Christian, experienced the “We the People” competition for the first time and sought help from the Calvin community. Under the direction of Professor den Dulk, Calvin students acted as judges in a mock congressional hearing in order to help them understand what a real competition would entail. Calvin students prepared questions on the Constitution, just as real judges would do, and provided feedback for the participating students.
McBride Invited as Guest Lecturer at USC

This March, Calvin College Political Science professor Becca McBride was invited to give a lecture at the University of Southern California’s Center for Public Diplomacy in Los Angeles. The center is a research, analysis, and professional education organization dedicated to furthering the study and practice of global public engagement and cultural relations. The Center for Public Diplomacy at USC is currently offering a graduate course on “Soft Power in the International System.” As part of that course, they include a unit on how corporations might have soft power in the international system and influence politics, even though we might not think of them as powerful international actors. Professor McBride has extensive knowledge on that subject and was therefore invited to share her unique research.

“I did a presentation on how the Walt Disney Company has power in the international system,” she explains. “I talked about three different ways we can understand this effect. First, during World War II, the Walt Disney Company used animation in military contract work to produce military training films, propaganda films, and public service films. Second, the Walt Disney Company uses their films to project certain values across cultures, in an effort to influence hearts and minds through entertainment. Third, through the proliferation of Disney Parks worldwide, the Walt Disney Company not only spreads these ideals through experiences, but also spreads the ‘Disney way’ of corporate citizenship.” She describes that these Disney ideals are often in tension with local culture, which is why Disney as a company often uses entertainment as a method of challenging cultural perspectives. Professor McBride’s lecture served as a case study for the students as they engaged this new subject matter.

This idea is especially important because “if we focus exclusively on states in the international system as agents of power,” McBride explains, “we miss the ways that other non-state actors have the power to influence.” Closed societies like Iran, she gives as an example, might be separated from the influence of political actors, but entertainment companies are given access and can easily influence dynamics within those societies.

Professor McBride describes the lecture as a great opportunity to present her research. “I had mostly professionals in the audience who are pursuing second careers…Indonesian and American diplomats for example, or post-military students,” she says. “They were engaged and excited about the material. It was also a wonderful opportunity to publicly present on some of my interests that are less mainstream.”

Alumni Update: Tim Vermeer

Timothy Vermeer graduated Calvin College in 2010 with a double major in Sociology and Political Science. He then enrolled in Officer Candidate School and received a commission to join the United States Marine Corps. After his completion, he went on to serve as an artillery officer and Executive Officer of Battery R, 5th Battalion, 11th Marines. Timothy served seven months in Afghanistan in 2013 before returning to his hometown of Lansing, Illinois. Soon after his return from duty, he moved to a military base in California to await his next assignment.

As a member of Calvin College’s Track and Field team during his time at Calvin, Timothy kept very busy while on campus. He describes the team as one with a strong reputation and a long history of success. He accredits the distinct, rigorous training that the team required for his preparedness to deal with the physical rigors of the Marine Corps.

Being a Calvin College Political Science major also prepared Timothy for his future success. He spoke highly of Calvin professors, noting their extensive knowledge and professionalism. When describing the department as a whole, he explains “they set high standards and demanded a lot from their students, but they were also there to help them along the way. Calvin is unique in the opportunity its students have to personally interact with their professors.” He continues on, “Personally, I attribute much of the success I have known so far in my career to the instruction and mentorship I received, both in and out of the classroom, from many of my professors.”

The department looks forward to following Timothy’s future career and success. We thank him for his service!
Political Science 2015 Interims

Professor Becca McBride’s Interim on Disney Culture and Progress

This course sought to equip students to explore cross-cultural understandings of progress by observing Walt Disney World’s projected vision of global progress in cross-cultural engagement, scientific and technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and global citizenship. The students traveled off-campus to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. While at Disney, the students explored representations of human progress in science, technology, cross-cultural engagement, environmental protection, and global citizenship.

Professor Pyle’s Interim on Inequality and U.S. Democracy

This course sought to address the origins of unequal representation along with its implications for policy. It also asked whether the rising inequality of recent years is merely an unfortunate societal development, or a fundamental threat to the successful functioning of our democratic system. Students looked to American history to observe the valued concept of “one person-one vote” and the concerns about the impact of economic inequality on equal representation that have existed from the founding of our country.

Professor Mikael Pelz’s Interim on Education Reform Perspectives

In January, Professor Mikael Pelz led an interim entitled “Perspectives in Education Reform.” The course presented controversies in education reform by reviewing the major reforms in the U.S. public education system since the publication of “A Nation at Risk” in 1983. Professor Pelz explains that the purpose of this course was to have “students become familiar with the political fault lines of education reform and critically evaluate the range of arguments for different types of policy reforms in public education.”

After the students became familiar with the literature in education reform, administrators and school leaders from different types of schools in Grand Rapids were invited to participate in a panel on public education, allowing students to actively engage in the common policy debates surrounding education. The learning experience, however, was not limited to public education in Grand Rapids. The students also visited the city of Lansing to see how the Michigan Department of Education and the city of Chicago to learn how the Mayor and other important players that impact Chicago’s Public Schools responded to education reform. These site visits allowed students to not only hear different sides of the argument, but also to actively participate by asking questions. Interim student Nathan Stripp, a freshman History and Social Studies Secondary Education Major, believes that, as a future educator, it is important for him to understand and address the political forces at play, which his experiences in this interim facilitated. His classmate Abigail Denton, a fellow freshman majoring in Elementary Education with a concentration in ESL and Spanish, agrees. She described the trips as exciting experiences that allowed her and her classmates to listen to and critically analyze the opinions to which they were exposed. “The site visits demonstrated that there are always trade-offs in public policy, and that many public officials are compassionately and creatively working to address these very challenging problems,” Professor Pelz explains. “Site visits are also a wonderful exercise in citizenship. It is easy to study policy and politics from a distance and miss the personal side of public policy or assume that public officials can easily make the ‘right’ decisions in this policy area or that policy area.”

Students did not only learn from experts in the field, but from one another through class discussion. Abigail describes how Professor Pelz encouraged students to look at issues within education from a distance, allowing them to form well-rounded opinions. “His lectures were complex, but engaging,” she explains. “Most importantly they were multifaceted in a way that mirrored education reform.” Nathan agreed with his classmate, believing the complications of this issue is what allowed for deeper discussion. “Though many of us held very different views on what solutions would work best to solve the problems at hand,” he says, “the arguments were always well thought out, reasoned, and recognized the enormous complexity of an issue like education reform.”

As future educators, both students found this interim extremely helpful. Abigail described a deepened understanding of the political obstacles that educators today – and of the future – face as a result of this interim. This reality, however, does not act as a deterrent, but a motivator for her. Nathan experienced similar feelings. “One thing I learned in this course which could apply to my future career is the strikingly political nature of education,” he says. “There is an amazing amount of weight placed on the decisions of legislators who may know very little about education. It is my job, therefore, as a teacher to make my voice heard to represent what is best for the students in schools, so that they don’t get caught in the crossfire of a political debate.”

The interim was a success and provided students with a deeper understanding of the debates surrounding education reform and a greater ability to critically evaluate the range of those arguments.
The biennial Henry Symposium on Religion and Public Life was held April 30th-May 2nd, 2015 at the Prince Conference Center on the Calvin College campus. The purpose of the Symposium is to provide opportunities to share current research, foster personal and professional networks, facilitate joint research endeavors, and learn about research opportunities in the field. The Symposium includes 22 different panels, 3 special lectures, and over 100 participants.

The event included many panels; three roundtables provided an especially unique opportunity to engage with current popular issues.

Responding to ISIS Roundtable
This roundtable considered the interplay between faith, foreign policy and recent events in the Middle East, particularly as they relate to the recent formation and activity of ISIS in the region.

The Supreme Court Hobby Lobby Case and Religious Freedom Roundtable
This roundtable fostered discussion on the implications of the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby case and associated local measures like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) proposed during the lame duck session. Speakers addressed the question of what it means to have religious exceptions to generally applicable laws and discussed the positive and negative aspects of such exceptions.

Sustainable Community Development and Christian Action Roundtable
This roundtable considered how faith is included in Christian community development, how such development is “political,” methods being used by local churches and Christian development organizations to partner with the state to do justice, and whether they should be forming such partnerships.

This event also included 3 special lectures.

"Christianity in Africa 'On the Road to Emmaus': A Quest for a New Political Theology" - Bishop Zac Niringiye
Bishop Niringiye is one of the most prominent theologians in Uganda, if not in all of East Africa. His lecture framed ‘The Road to Emmaus’ found in Luke 24:13-35 as a parable of Christianity in Africa. He grappled with the contradiction of high church growth rates and high rates of poverty and corruption in African countries. He addressed many common questions surrounding the problems in Africa and explored what the rediscovery of ‘shalom’ looks like for Africa. He currently acts as a public affairs advocate.

Mr. Douthat is an Op-Ed columnist for the New York Times, where his column appears every Sunday. Douthat is the author of Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics; Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class; and co-author, with Reihan Salam, of Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream. He discussed the implications of Christian action in the 20th century and what that means for us today.

“Serving the City, Shaping Political Culture” - Reverend David H. Kim
Reverend Kim is the Executive Director for Redeemer Presbyterian in NYC, overseeing the ministries of the Center for Faith & Work and also the Pastor of Faith and Work of Redeemer. Previously, he served as the Director of the Gotham Fellowship and as a Chaplain at Princeton University, where he was the Founder and Executive Director of Manna Christian Fellowship. He talked about the close relationship between Christian service and political culture.

Department Pick

Professor Joel Westra recommends The Iron Lady, a 2012 film starring Meryl Streep, who won an Academy Award for her performance. He describes the film as “a depiction of the life of Margaret Thatcher, told in shorthand as a series of flashbacks by an ailing Thatcher (who is developing dementia and still coming to grips with the recent death of her husband, Denis.) This film is less an assessment of Thatcherite politics than an allegory of lasting love and fleeting power (both of Britain and of Thatcher herself).”
Graduating Class of 2015

Political Science and International Relations Majors

The Political Science Department congratulates all the graduating seniors and wishes them the best!

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major/Plan</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major/Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant Alphenaar</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Paulina Heule</td>
<td>Planning to attend law school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rok Dam Beak</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Frank Holub</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Bilgen</td>
<td>Returning to Turkey where he hopes to work in the music industry or in international relations</td>
<td>Erik Kraayeveld</td>
<td>Planning to sell realty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russell Brouwer</td>
<td>Pursuing internships and jobs in local government while continuing his work at Pine Rest</td>
<td>Carolyn Lang</td>
<td>Pursuing a career in the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin Byl</td>
<td>Working for Representative Amash in his Grand Rapids office</td>
<td>Saxon Lee</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Chesla</td>
<td>Pursuing a career in public administration before continuing on to grad school</td>
<td>Kee Bbum Lee</td>
<td>Planning to work in the United States for a time before continuing education in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Eigege</td>
<td>Hoping to work in Washington D.C. with a human rights focused NGO</td>
<td>Sydney Lee</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Ferguson</td>
<td>Pursuing a career in community development or non-profit consulting</td>
<td>Jongtaek Lee</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ainsley Goh</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Ashley Moore</td>
<td>Planning to study at the Goethe Institute in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Graham</td>
<td>Pursuing a job with the U.S. State Department in the area of Foreign Service</td>
<td>Nathan Slauer</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena Hamann</td>
<td>Pursuing a LLM in International Human Rights Law at the University of Essex</td>
<td>Alicia Smit</td>
<td>Planning to attend grad school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jovianus Hartopo</td>
<td>Job searching in the fields of business, consulting, finance, and think tanks</td>
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Political Science Department Scholarships

The Political Science Department would like to congratulate the following 2015-2016 scholarship winners:

- **DeKryger-Monsman Memorial Prize Scholarship**: Sung Hun Choi
- **Peace and Justice Scholarship**: Brooke Bonnema
- **Dr. James Penning Scholarship**: Jennifer Meulenberg
- **Charles Strikwerda Scholarship in Political Science**: Jenny Lamb
- **Lyle and Barbara (Duimstra) Voskuil Family Scholarship**: Jung Min Hong
- **Johan and Wilma Westra Scholarship**: Abigail Schutte
- **Dr. Bernard Zylstra Memorial Scholarship**: Colleen Beunk