Political Science Department
Professors Becca McBride and Micah Watson published their respective books this semester. Professor McBride’s The Globalization of Adoption: Individuals, States, and Agencies Across Borders and Professor Watson’s C.S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law both make significant contributions to the field.

The Globalization of Adoption: Individuals, States, and Agencies Across Borders was published in July, 2016 by Cambridge University Press. Professor McBride expands our understanding of a growing, yet largely unstudied phenomenon: the flow of children across borders through intercountry adoption. What explains the spread of intercountry adoption through the international system over time? McBride investigates the interconnected networks of states, individuals, and adoption agencies that have collaborated to develop the practice of intercountry adoption we see today. This book tells the story of how adoption agencies mediate between individuals and states in two ways: first by teaching states about intercountry adoption as a policy, and second by helping states implement intercountry adoption as a practice. McBride argues that this process of states learning about intercountry adoption from adoption agencies has facilitated the global development of the practice in the past seventy years.

Professor Micah Watson’s C.S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law was published in August, 2016 by Cambridge University Press. New York Times reviewer Peter Wehner shares that Professor Watson and his co-author Justin Dyer “show in their groundbreaking new book Lewis’s understanding of truth and human nature, of what constitutes the good life and the good society.” He continues, “Professors Dyer and Watson write that Lewis had ‘a very limited view of government’s role and warrant,’ was skeptical of its capacity to inculcate virtue and worried about its paternalistic tendencies. The duty of government was to restrain wrongdoing. Because he believed in the fallen nature of humanity, Lewis was concerned by the concentration of political power.” Ranging from the depths of Lewis’ philosophical treatments of epistemology and moral pedagogy to practical considerations of morals legislation and responsible citizenship, this book explores the contours of Lewis’ multi-faceted Christian engagement with political philosophy generally and the natural-law tradition in particular. Drawing from the full range of Lewis’ corpus and situating his thought in relationship to both ancient and modern seminal thinkers, Professor Watson’s work is said to offer an unprecedented look at politics and political thought from the perspective of one of the twentieth century's most influential writers.

Congratulations to both of these outstanding Calvin College Political Science Department professors!

Political Science Professors on the 2016 Presidential Election

Looking at the Election Through Polarized Lenses: Professor den Dulk, Cardus Comment Magazine, 09/2016
Spreading the Word: Making the Case for Robust Religious Freedom: Doug Koopman, Religious Freedom Institute, 09/2016
Why Loving Our Neighbors Includes Voting Down Ballot: Kevin den Dulk, CPJ Capital Commentary, 10/2016
An unusual and contentious 2016 US presidential election produced a period of reflection and discussion across the entire campus. Students, faculty, and staff wondered together how the electoral system could produce two such unpopular and deeply distrusted presidential candidates and questioned why fellow members of their community would vote for one or the other of them, for an invisible third-party candidate, or perhaps not vote at all. They reflected together on issues in a range of policy areas including the environment, immigration, religious freedom, criminal justice, foreign affairs, and the economy, questioned how much of what each candidate claimed regarding the election was valid, and considered the role of the media in “fact checking” such claims. They also wondered together how polling data could fail to predict the outcome of the election and questioned how a sizeable majority in the popular vote could fail to produce even a slim majority in the Electoral College. In short, the extraordinary nature of the 2016 presidential election compelled the campus community to come together in wonder, excitement, confusion, and doubt, and in so doing it provided an extraordinary opportunity for citizenship education.

The Department of Political Science is pleased to have played a prominent role in several campus-wide conversations regarding the election. Faculty members from the department participated in the Challenges for the Next President series (sponsored by the Calvin College Faith and Citizenship Initiative and the Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics), in the IDIS-180H Great Ideas, Great Texts: Things You Should Read for the Election course (required of all students living in the Third Floor Van Reken Honors Living-Learning Community), and in the CALL Noontime Series (sponsored by the Calvin Academy for Lifelong Learning). Faculty members also participated in numerous in-person and online conversations and were interviewed by local and national media publications.

What I am likely to remember most clearly about these past months, however, are the conversations I had with my students the day after the election. Students came to my classes that day feeling fatigued after staying up late to watch election results that had been reported only gradually due to the closeness of the vote, bewildered after learning of an election outcome that most of them had not expected and that some (perhaps many) of them had feared, and eager to ponder the implications of a new administration whose policy decisions would affect all of them in one way or another. This was not a typical, late-semester morning in which torpid students needed to be roused from their lethargy to engage with the assigned material. It was not even a typical, post-election morning in which enterprising students attempted to avoid engaging with the assigned material by asking questions intended mostly to sidetrack class discussion. No, this was a morning in which students’ eagerness overwhelmed their bewilderment and fatigue. Most of them were agog and full of questions that in profound and important ways related the presidential election campaign and its outcome to the assigned class material.

This was not what I expected – not because my expectations of students are low, but because my subfield of international relations addresses issues that generally are less affected by the outcomes of particular elections than issues addressed by other subfields of political science. Within the international relations subfield, we tend to discuss the role of foreign policy-makers as constrained by the international system in which they must operate and thus generally do not expect the outcome of any one election to have significant effect on foreign policy. The 2016 election, however, is different in two ways: that foreign policy issues played a key role in the election campaign and in that the election outcome is likely to have significant effects across a range of policy areas, both domestic and foreign. My students recognized this difference and came to class prepared to engage in informed conversation about the significance of the election and its possible effects, building on the material we had been discussing throughout the semester while engaging in respectful, thoughtful, and energetic conversation.

Such conversation, in the classroom and beyond, is the primary purpose of a liberal arts education, but this sometimes is forgotten. Instead of recalling the original idea of a liberal arts education as introducing students to a range of knowledge and skills that are essential for them to engage as free persons in civic life, there is a tendency to describe a liberal arts education simply as a “well-rounded” education and to shy away from the political. As my colleague, Prof. Kevin den Dulk has noted:

“The academy is often beat up for being too ‘political’ with students (and with an ideological bent). But in civic-educational terms, I’d say it’s quite the opposite: We’re not political enough. We have built into our pedagogies and curricula – and especially our co-curricula – the presumption that civic engagement need not have much to do with government … leaving the impression that students can pursue [their] calling [as citizens] without thinking deeply about their relationship to the state. “

I’m pleased with the ways in which our department consistently has strove to integrate the political into the academic in useful and appropriate ways, but I’ve been especially pleased over the past several months, both with my colleagues’ efforts in this regard and with our students’ responses thereto. These efforts comprise our department’s particular contribution to the College’s mission of helping students to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly.

- Joel Westra
This fall, Political Science Professor Doug Koopman took a leave of absence to work in Washington D.C. for the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. I was able to ask him the following questions about his work there.

**Can you describe your current work?**
My title is Special Advisor, Strategic Communication and Public Affairs, for the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The CCCU is a membership organization of about 140 U.S. Christian colleges, including Calvin, and a few dozens more in other nations. My job is to help member colleges engage policy makers and the media more effectively, mostly in Washington, D.C. but also wherever our colleges are found. Day to day, I work with other Christian and higher education organizations trying to influence Washington, D.C. policy makers in the areas of higher education and religious liberty.

**How does your work as a professor aid you in your current responsibilities?**
It helps a lot. The years of teaching and research on religion and American politics, and on American government generally, gives me a lot of knowledge to draw upon in my daily work. Much of my time is spent explaining to government officials and the media what our colleges do, and to our colleges how government works and how to affect it. So, to a great extent, my work is just modified forms of teaching and scholarly engagement--just what professors do in more traditional settings.

**Alumni Update: Luis Avila**

Luis Avila graduated from Calvin College in 2005 and immediately following graduation, went on to work for JP Morgan as a Commercial Banking Analyst for two years. After spending some time in the banking world, he felt called to attend law school. He was accepted, attended the University of Michigan Law School and graduated with his Juris Doctor in 2008. After graduating law school, Avila worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, where he spent several years before coming back to Grand Rapids. He joined Varnum LLP in Grand Rapids in 2011 and has been there ever since. At Varnum, Avila works as a Labor and Employment attorney, where he represents clients nationwide on employment litigation and traditional labor matters such as collective bargaining and labor arbitrations. He also finds time to serve on several local and state boards, including Governor Rick Synder’s Michigan Board of Medicine.

Avila claims his professors made the biggest difference in his Calvin education. He shares “I had several professors who genuinely cared about me as a student and a person. They took the time to counsel me through my career choices, mentor me through life choices, and draft letters of recommendation for my law school applications. I still keep in touch with them today.”

Calvin College also played a role in preparing him for his career, by teaching him “to balance my studies, part-time work, and a social agenda. I studied a lot while I was at Calvin. Like, a lot. But, I also had student loans and bills, so I had to work part-time,” he explains. “I learned to be disciplined about my time and committed to my goals. My current life is no different. I have to balance a demanding legal practice with social and professional commitments, all while making sure I spend as much quality time with my wife and kids as I can.”

Avila has been a significant asset to Calvin’s Political Science Department – especially this year. He contributed to the Challenges for the Next President series conversation on immigration and spoke to the political science seniors about vocation. His experience both in law, human rights, and politics make him an excellent role model for students.

When asked what advice he would give to current Calvin students, Avila shares that students should not “be afraid to work hard for your goals. The hard work pays off. As a result of that hard work, I have been able to choose my career path, for the most part, without too many obstacles.” We thank Luis Avila for sharing his story with us this year!
This fall, the Paul B. Henry Institute wrapped up its popular Challenges for the Next President Series. This series of events were widely successful, drawing large student and community crowds with each new topic. Motivated by a desire to model Christian citizenship and discussion, the Henry Institute was proud to partner with the Calvin College Political Science Department to offer these events.

The series featured panels on seven topics relevant to the next president and the election process. The topics included the environment, immigration, religious freedom, criminal justice reform, faithful fact checking, foreign policy, and the economy. The panels featured professors, lawyers, pastors, reporters, and diplomats who were all able to provide nuanced insights into often controversial political issues.

The series also included a post-mortem event, a time intended for panel participants to consider the results of the 2016 presidential election. Professors den Dulk, McBride, Pelz, Koopman, and Watson all gathered to help attendees begin to sort out the results. Political science student and Chimes writer Matt Leistra shares the following:

"Donald Trump’s victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Election marked the first time a candidate with no history of government or military service has ever won the presidency. Despite this departure from the norm, a panel of political science professors portrayed the election outcome as fairly standard and predictable.” The professors explained that while the results seemed unexpected to the general public, they can be explained empirically by social science; a fact that helped the audience process the results.

In a particularly divisive and uncivil election season, the Challenges for the Next President Series acted as an example of what civil discourse ought to look like.

The Paul B. Henry Institute thanks all who participated in making these events such a success!

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**Department Picks**

**Silence by Shusaku Endo**
- **Professor Micah Watson**

After having several friends recommend *Silence* by Japanese author Shusaku Endo over a number of years, I finally picked up the slim novel in November. The book was written in 1966, but the story takes place in 1600s Japan. Endo (1923-1996) is one of Japan’s most celebrated authors, and *Silence* is his most famous book, for good reason. Endo himself is Catholic, and this Japanese Catholic identity gives him a particularly fascinating vantage point from which to write *Silence*. The book follows the journey of two Portuguese Jesuit priests who sail to Japan in search of their former mentor and teacher, Father Ferreira, who has reportedly apostatized in the face of torture. At one point Japan had been open to Christian missionaries and Western trade, but that openness shifted to severe persecution in the years preceding our story.

This is not a long book by any means, but it is packed with meaning and tough questions about faith and God’s presence, or lack thereof. The two young priests sent after Father Ferreira confront not only their own crises of faith but must wrestle with what it means for them to be faithful both to God and the fledgling Japanese church for whom they are shepherds. What happens when fidelity to God seems to conflict with the well-being of his church? It’s a powerful book, and not a comforting one. It’s also inspired a decades-long desire for director Martin Scorsese to bring the story to film, a project that will finally culminate this Christmas when Scorsese’s adaption will hit the big screen.

**The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest** by Walter A. McDougall
- **Professor Joel Westra**

The masterful book is a sequel of sorts to McDougall’s earlier work, entitled *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Houghton Mifflin, 1997). In his latest book, McDougall provides a realist critique of U.S. foreign policy and examines the role of American civic religion in promoting a more expansionist foreign policy. The book prompts the reader to consider how broadly the U.S. national interest should be defined and to ponder America’s role in the world.