Political science faculty, who have devoted their lives to the study of politics and have received professional training requisite to this important task, pay close attention to current and ongoing political matters, making use of concepts and tools from the discipline of political science to help make sense of complex events. In our courses, we encourage students likewise to pay close attention to political matters and introduce students to concepts and tools that will help them make sense of such events. Whether students take our courses to satisfy requirements of the core curriculum or within their majors or minors, our goal as faculty members is the same: "to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ’s agents of renewal" - regardless of their pursuit of politics as a vocation or simply to live as informed and engaged citizens.

Even the best students, however, sometimes find it difficult to apply concepts and tools from their courses to the complex political events they hear about - or even to keep up with such events during periods of rapid and significant drama within the political sphere. The current semester has coincided with dramatic political events, but it also has provided students with excellent co-curricular opportunities to examine and discuss these events and to put into practice the knowledge and skills they have developed in the classroom.

The semester started with a Constitution Day event in which students from the College Democrat and College Republican student groups, alongside faculty members from the department, debated the constitutionality of President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which President Trump had recently claimed was unconstitutional and decided to end. Subsequent debates in the Constitution Series featured discussions about whether the constitutional structure of the United States government is to blame for the deep and widespread political polarization currently observed, and also whether constitutional provisions protecting free speech should be interpreted more narrowly to curtail the hate speech that has accompanied resurgent white nationalism.

Concurrently, students participating in the Model United Nations Club focused their attention on learning the structures and functions of the United Nations Organization and the practices of diplomacy. As the assigned group to represent Saudi Arabia, they also studied particular domestic and foreign policies of the country in preparation for the American Model United Nations (AMUN) conference in Chicago. From the opening of the Seventy-Second UN General Assembly in September, to the arrests of members of the Saudi royal family, Saudi claims that Iran had committed ‘acts of war’ by its support of Houthi rebels, and the recent resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister while visiting Saudi Arabia, students have followed the news with rapt attention. As they prepared to simulate Saudi Arabian diplomacy within the General Assembly, they had an opportunity to consider these events from a distinct perspective.

Students also had opportunities to attend on-campus lectures pertaining to recent events. Dr. Rodney Ludema, former Chief Economist with the United States Department of State, discussed recent Trump Administration statements and decisions regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). One week later, Dr. Lori Esposito Murray, former Assistant Director for Multilateral Affairs of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at the U.S. Department of State, discussed recent Trump administration statements and actions pertaining to North Korea’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs.

It has been a semester of dramatic events and extraordinary opportunities inviting Political Science and International Relations students at Calvin College to examine our current political landscape. We are pleased to see our students taking advantage of these opportunities as they pursue their education and discern their callings.
Ana Devereaux graduated from Calvin College in 2011 as an International Relations Major. She is now living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, working as a staff attorney for the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center.

While at Calvin, Ana loved all things International Relations, and explored career options in the Midwest that would allow her to pursue her passions. In her search, she discovered Immigration Law and went on to attend Wayne State University Law School. At Wayne State, Ana realized her passions included public interest law – including family law, consumer law, and disability law. She learned this fervor could be put to great use: “I realized law could be used as a great tool to serve the under-served.”

After law school, Ana found a career at the Michigan Immigration Rights Center (MIRC). She currently is a staff attorney at the Grand Rapids MIRC office; she lives in the city with her husband, who is a mathematics professor at Cornerstone University.

When asked what programs or courses were most helpful for her graduate school experience and current legal career, Ana cited Calvin’s Pre-Law Program and its advisor, Professor Joel Westra, as great resources. She is also grateful to career services and their guidance when looking for ways to fulfill her passions in a future career.

When describing the faculty she interacted with at Calvin, she explained, “the professors at Calvin were great at equipping me and expecting much of me in the classroom, which helped me be ready for the next academic step in law school, as well as providing me guidance on navigating decisions and thinking through my ultimate career goals.”

This year, Calvin chartered six new student organizations, including the Calvin College Democrats. Since Calvin had a College Republican club for several years, the leaders of the Democrats desired to make a similar space for Democratic student experience and interaction.

The group plans include supporting local and national liberal candidates, encouraging bipartisan discussion, promoting progressive ideologies and fostering an inclusive environment on Calvin’s Campus. They have already attended and promoted events in support of Democratic Grand Rapids residents running for seats in the Michigan State Legislature.

The Calvin Democrats and Republicans also participated in the Constitution Series Debates sponsored by the Henry Institute and the Political Science Department during the fall semester.
CONSTITUTION SERIES DEBATES

Sponsored by the Paul B. Henry Institute, the Calvin Provost’s Office, the Political Science Department, Pre-Law Program, College Democrats, and College Republicans, the Constitution Series debates were held to create conversation and share ideas between increasingly polarized political ideologies. The debates covered contemporary topics related to the United States Constitution, such as the constitutionality of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the Constitutional roots of political polarization, and the constitutionality of hate speech in regards to the First Amendment.

For each debate, political science faculty members joined representatives from both the College Republicans and Democrats.

Immediately before the beginning of the debate, the two faculty members were randomly assigned to present the conservative or liberal view. After sides were determined, the debate followed a format of opening arguments, responses or rebuttals, closing arguments, and topic-related questions from the audience. Moderators at each debate managed the time and clarified points made during arguments or responses.

Following the debates, an opportunity was presented for students to continue the conversation. Debate Over Dinner allowed students to enjoy a meal together while discussing their views on the topic and the debate overall. Participants were encouraged to listen to all perspectives and to keep the conversation open to everyone.

Each month during the fall featured a Constitution Series debate, and there are tentative plans to continue the series through the spring semester as well.

DEPARTMENT WELCOMES NEW FACULTY MEMBER

The fall 2017 semester has been greeted by the addition of a new faculty member in the Political Science Department. Dr. Nadejda Bontcheva has joined the department as an instructor, teaching International Relations courses.

Dr. Bontcheva holds numerous Masters degrees: in International Relations from the University for National and World Economy; Public Policy from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies; and History from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She received her PhD in International Relations from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo, Japan. Dr. Bontcheva has also taught at the University of Miami and Florida International University.
2017 Fall Semester Career Breakfasts

For the second year, the Henry Institute is sponsoring monthly Career Breakfasts for students. The informal events include a small group of students who meet with a special guest whose career path is related to political science or international relations. The Institute provides breakfast and students receive valuable information about potential career options and advice. During the fall semester of 2017, four breakfasts were held:

Winnie Brinks
An elected member of the Michigan House of Representatives, Brinks has served there since 2013, and is the Michigan Democratic Caucus Policy Chair. She also serves as chair of the Progressive Women's Caucus, a non-profit organization that addresses concerns about women's health, pay equity, economic security and gender violence. Before being elected to office, Brinks was the Executive Director of One Way House Inc., a residential facility for non-violent female offenders and was a caseworker at The Source, an employee support organization.

William Garvelink
Garvelink began his Washington D.C. career as a Capitol Hill aide in the mid-1970s before moving to a position with USAID. He has worked in humanitarian assistance, international development, disaster assistance and democracy programs during his career. From 2007 to 2010, Garvelink served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He is currently a Senior Advisor for Global Strategy for the International Medical Corps, as well as a Senior Advisor for the Center for Strategic International Studies.

Jonathan Bradford
Bradford recently retired from a long career in housing, community development, policy, and urban planning. He served as the executive director of the Inner City Christian Federation in Grand Rapids, dedicated to providing quality housing opportunities for low-income people. Bradford pioneered ICCF's program of buying unwanted houses, rebuilding them to middle class standards with federal funding and then providing them to low-income families. ICCF now also provides home ownership, home maintenance, finance, and other classes related to community improvement opportunities through housing.

Rod Ludema
Ludema teaches Economics at Georgetown University in the School of Foreign Service and Department of Economics. He formerly served as Chief Economist of the U.S. Department of State and as Senior International Economist in the White House Council of Economic Advisors. He specializes in international trade, with interests including the political economy of trade policy, international trade bargaining, preferential trade agreements, trade and the environment, World Trade Organization rules and dispute settlement, and economic sanctions.