Calvin Pre-Law Program Student Details

This past year, 117 students participated in Calvin’s Pre-Law Program (a slight decrease from 2014-15) (Figure 1). Forty-four students subscribed to the Pre-Law listserv as of the end of June; 43 students graduated in May, and 30 other students participated in pre-law advising or other events but either did not subscribe to the listserv or removed their names from the list.

Thirty-one different majors and minors were represented among 2015-16 Pre-Law students (Figure 2), with the eight most common being Political Science (21%), International Relations (13%), History (7%), Business (7%), Economics (6%), Psychology (6%), Philosophy (5%), and French (5%). The percentages are based on a count of majors or minors listed, not of student participants; not every student lists a major or minor, and some list more than one major or minor.

The numbers continue to reflect strong interest in international and/or transnational law (reflected in the percentage studying international relations and/or foreign languages) and in corporate law (shown in the percentage studying business and economics). Student interest in Political Science, International Relations, and Business remains strong, with renewed concentration in History and Economics, while Psychology, Philosophy, and English has declined. There is also increasing interest in Biology, Biochemistry, and Biotechnology as well as in Social Work and Public Health. French continues as the most common foreign language, although increasing numbers of students are studying Chinese. Note also that many pre-law students study Spanish without pursuing a major or minor in it.

Only some pre-law students and alumni share LSAT and law school information with Pre-Law Program, but the Law School Admission Council provides useful summary data. According to most recent LSAC reports, seven seniors and fifteen alumni took the LSAT during 2014–2015 (Figure 3). This is a slight increase compared to the previous year, but remains consistent with a significant downward trend since 2008–2009, both at Calvin and across the United States.

The average LSAT score among Calvin seniors and recent alumni during 2014–2015 was 160.1 (approx. 80th percentile) against a national median score of 151.5 (on a scale of 120–180). This score is consistent with a general upward Calvin graduate trend (Figure 4).

Of the Calvin seniors and recent alumni taking the LSAT during 2014–2015, eighteen applied to law school (81.8%) with fifteen admitted to one or more schools (83.3%), and thirteen matriculated (68.7%). On average, each Calvin law school applicant applied to 7.5 law schools and was admitted to 3.9 (52.5%).

The list of law schools to which Calvin seniors and alumni were admitted in 2014–2015 was particularly impressive. Top admissions include: University of Arizona, Boston College, Boston University, University of Colorado, Emory University, University of Florida, George Washington University, University of Illinois, University of Iowa, University of Miami, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, University of Notre Dame, Southern Methodist University, University of Southern California, Temple University, Vanderbilt University, University of Virginia, Wake Forest University, University of Washington, Washington University (St. Louis), College of William and Mary, and University of Wisconsin.

Other competitive law schools to which Calvin seniors and alumni were admitted include: American University, Baylor University, Case Western Reserve University, University of Cincinnati, University of Hawaii, John Marshall Law School, University of Kentucky, Lewis and Clark College, Loyola Marymount University, Loyola University (Chicago), Michigan State University, New York Law School, Northeastern University, Pace University, Pepperdine University, University of St. Thomas (Minneapolis), Valparaiso University, Vermont Law School, Wayne State University, and Western Michigan University.

Alumni Attorney Groups in Chicago and GR

Calvin alumni attorney groups have recently formed in Chicago and in Grand Rapids. Both groups sponsored gatherings during the past year, providing opportunities for networking and finding out more about Calvin’s current Pre-Law Program. In November, attorneys from the general Chicago area met together, with Joel Westra providing an update on Calvin’s Pre-Law program. The Calvin Legal Professionals of Michigan (the Grand Rapids group) met twice during the year, in the fall at their inaugural event, and again in the spring. The April event included a presentation by John Bursch (former Solicitor General for the State of Michigan and current partner at Warner Norcross & Judd) discussing his experiences arguing cases before the Supreme Court.

For more information about alumni groups, contact Mike Van Denend in the Calvin Alumni Office, alumni@calvin.edu; 616-526-7068.
Calvin’s Third Pre-Law Interim Class

The third Pre-Law Interim at Calvin was offered in January 2016. The Art and Science of Legal Practice gave participants an opportunity to learn directly from both scholars and practitioners in the legal field through lectures, discussions, and simulations, with books, articles, and video clips exploring specific aspects of law and legal practice. A number of Calvin alumni who are practicing law as attorneys and judges met with the group. The class introduced legal concepts and terms, as well as pertinent research from both natural and social sciences, and developed basic skills in writing and analysis. The session was co-taught by Pre-Law Advisor Joel Westra, Calvin psychology professor Eric Jones and Randy Vogelzang from the Calvin College Development Office.

Calvin Offers Semester Course on Law

During the spring semester, Pre-Law Advisor Joel Westra taught a semester-long course on Justice, Equality, and the Law, introducing sixteen students to various perspectives on justice, equality, and United States law.

The class included readings and class discussion, as well as a workshop on micro-aggressions, and several of the Pre-Law Lunch events (see side article). Students wrote reflection papers designed to provide competency in cross-cultural discernment and communication.

Chicago Learning Trip Sponsored by Pre-Law Program

In November, ten Pre-Law students participated in a two-day trip to Chicago. The students visited DePaul University School of Law, where they received a tour of the school from current law students and met with an admissions representative and faculty member. The group was hosted at the international law firm of Mayer Brown LLP by Calvin alumni and firm partner Jon Van Gorp, and Ben Shoemaker, a firm associate in Litigation & Dispute Resolution. Ben (2010 Calvin graduate) and a number of other attorneys from the firm in different specializations spoke with the students about law schools, legal careers, and law firm practice. The following day, students attended the annual LSAC Chicago Law School Forum, talking with admissions representatives from among the hundreds of American Bar Association (ABA)-approved law schools at the recruiting fair. Students also attended sessions related to law school admissions, financing, and LSAT testing.

For more information about how you can support the Calvin Pre-Law Program or pre-law students financially, contact Melanie Lyons at 616/526-7745.