Third Biennial Calvin Pre-Law Program Chicago Trip

Nine Calvin students participated in the Pre-Law Program’s Chicago trip in October 2017, taking the early morning train from Grand Rapids to spend two days immersed in visits, tours and meeting as they considered possible legal careers. The activities included in the trip have expanded each time the Pre-Law Program has sponsored the event, with learning opportunities organized for the students at various locations.

When they arrived in Chicago, the group started with a visit to Loyola University School of Law, where the group met with the admissions director and a faculty member and toured the school with a 3L student. The afternoon was spent at the annual Chicago Law School Forum (sponsored by the Law School Admissions Council) where students attended informational sessions about topics ranging from “Taking the LSAT” and “Writing a Personal Statement” to “Financing a Legal Education.” Hundreds of admissions and recruiting representatives from accredited law schools around the country also attend the Forum, and students spent time meeting with the representatives to learn more about specific law schools they were interested in.

In the early evening, the group spent several hours at Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP. In a conference room at the firm, overlooking Lake Michigan, the students met with firm partner and Calvin alumnus Case Hoogendoorn and four additional attorneys, hearing about their law school and career paths and daily work in their area of the law. They also gave the students advice about becoming an attorney and practicing law as a Christian calling.

“This trip provided experiences that expanded my choice of law schools. I was able to look at schools outside of the top 10 that are great schools. I also appreciated meeting with some lawyers who were very devoted to folding their Christianity into their vocation.”

Ben Anema, Calvin Freshman

To begin the second day, Jon Van Gorp and Ben Shoemaker, Calvin alumni attorneys at Mayer Brown, arranged for the group to visit the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. The students met with U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Durkin in his chambers, followed by spending time in the courtroom hearing formal motions and then touring the court building. The afternoon was filled with valuable information from attorneys at Mayer Brown LLP, including perspectives on practicing law from Shoemaker and four additional lawyers at the firm. The attorneys talked openly with students about why they decided to pursue a law degree, their work for the firm, and their perspectives on working in the legal field.

Pre-Law Advisor and Calvin Political Science Professor Joel Westra noted that the biennial trip to Chicago is a valuable and exciting experience for the students who participate. “For most of the students, this is their first opportunity to sit in a room with real-life attorneys, asking questions about their occupations, their decisions to go into the legal field, how they chose where to go to law school, and so much more. It brings a reality to the students’ future path and education decisions, which is very valuable as they move forward at Calvin. We always coordinate the trip with the LSAC’s annual Chicago Law School Forum, but we have been able to add so many additional valuable aspects to the time spent in the city, including talking with numerous attorneys who practice different types of law, observing the U.S. District Court in action and meeting personally with a District Judge, and visiting Chicago law schools. The students are always very excited to talk about their experiences on the way back to Grand Rapids, and we believe that the knowledge they gain on this trip definitely helps to prepare them for future career decisions as they continue on at Calvin.”

Kathryn Post, Calvin Senior

Before this valuable and formative experience, I had never been to visit a law school, attended a law school forum, or had the opportunity to speak to practicing attorneys in a variety of fields. Hearing from lawyers first-hand about their reasons for going into law and their likes and dislikes about the occupation helped me to actually visualize myself as a future lawyer for the first time.”

Kathryn Post, Calvin Senior

Law as Vocation Interim Class Offered in January of 2018

Pre-Law Advisor Joel Westra led an Interim class during January 2018, bringing in 19 Calvin alumni attorneys during the three week session to speak with 22 participating students. The class focused on exploring concepts of calling and vocation by learning directly from legal practitioners about the many different kinds of law-related work they perform and some of the basic legal principles used in their work. The course incorporated lectures, seminar-settings, films, a courtroom visit with U.S. District Court Judge Robert Jonker, question-and-answer sessions, and classroom discussions about faith, vocation, and various ways in which Christianity bears upon the practice of law. The class was the third time Calvin has offered a law-related Interim course, and was co-taught with Randy Vogelzang from the Calvin Development Office.
Pre-Law Luncheon Series in 2017-18

The Pre-Law Program continued the Luncheon Series for students in 2017-18, as small groups met with individuals who practice law in various capacities. The program gives Calvin students who are considering legal careers the opportunity to explore the choice of law schools, learn about various specialties, and consider potential paths. About 50 students attended the following lunch events:

An Attorney’s Role in Property Law
Peter Wendel (Pepperdine School of Law)
An Attorney’s Role as In-House Counsel
Lisa Buursma (Bissell Company)
An Attorney’s Role in Labor and Employment Law
Nate Plantinga (Miller Johnson)
An Attorney’s Role in “Doing Justice”
Perrin Rynders (Varnum Law)
An Attorney’s Role as a FBI Special Agent
Nate Knapper (FBI, Human Trafficking & Violent Crimes Against Children squad)
Law and International Relations
David Hooker (Notre Dame Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies)
An Attorney’s Role in the Health Insurance Industry
Julie Westra (Spectrum Health System)

Support Calvin’s Pre-Law Program

The Pre-Law Program welcomes your active involvement in supporting activities for students, as well as your financial assistance to sustain the Program.

If you live in the Grand Rapids area, contact Dr. Joel Westra for more information about our programs and opportunities to interact with students, including:

• mentoring a Pre-Law student
• allowing a student to job shadow for a day
• volunteering to be featured at a Pre-Law Lunch event
• offering an internship at your worksite for a Calvin student

If you live outside Grand Rapids, there still may be opportunities for mentoring remotely, summer job shadowing or internships for students in your geographical area, or leading a lunch event if you plan to be in Grand Rapids during the academic year.

Financial support will continue to provide great opportunities for Pre-Law students as they explore future career paths. Your donation for a specific program (see costs of some of our projects below) or a simple donation of any amount towards the program endowment is very welcome! Checks can be sent to the address below, or give online through this link: https://calvin.edu/go/pre-law

Pre-Law Lunch
Single lunch event $100
Series for the entire year $600
Pre-Law Intern Class $500
Pre-Law Lecture $150
Annual Pre-Law Newsletter $800
Pre-Law Chicago Trip $3,000
Pre-Law Day at Calvin College $3,000

Pre-Law Facts: Calvin Students and Alums

• 124 students participated in Calvin’s Pre-Law Program in 2017-18, with 29 of those students graduating this year. The Pre-Law Advisor participated in 65 advising sessions with current students, 41 sessions with alumni law school applicants, and 6 meetings with prospective pre-law Calvin students.

• In 2016-17, 7 seniors and 28 alumni took the LSAT (most recent year for which data from LSAC is available), a 67% increase over the previous year, reflecting an improving job market for law school graduates. These test takers had an average LSAT score of 155.6 (approximately the 66th percentile) against a national median score of 151 (on a scale of 120-180). This annual average score is lower than Calvin scores in recent years, as would be expected given the increased number of individuals taking the test.

• Of the 28 individuals who took the LSAT in 2016-17, 22 applied to law school, 20 were admitted to one or more law schools, and 17 matriculated.

• Top law schools to which the 2016-17 applicants were admitted included: University of Arizona, Emory University, Fordham University, George Washington University, Georgetown University, University of Georgia, University of Houston, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University of Notre Dame, Vanderbilt University, University of Virginia, Wake Forest University, and University of Wisconsin. Additional competitive law schools included University of Cincinnati, University of Colorado, Creighton University, University of Denver, Hofstra University, Michigan State University, Ohio Northern University, Pepperdine University, Santa Clara University, Southern Illinois University, and Wayne State University.

Job Shadowing for Calvin Students

On August 14, three Calvin students spent the day in Chicago with attorneys at two law firms. In the morning, Ewura Esi Brookman Amissah, Brooke Bonnema, and Todd Postma were met by Rita Feikema, who reserved time for the students with attorneys at Jenner & Block LLP, several of whom were Calvin alumni.

They learned more about corporate and securities law, mergers and acquisitions, corporate law, and litigation.

Calvin alumni Ben Shoemaker coordinated afternoon meetings for the group with lawyers at Mayer Brown LLP who work in litigation and dispute resolution, pro bono law, technology transactions, and finance law. The lawyers shared reflections on their legal specialties and on working at a large global corporate firm.

“The trip came at a critical point in my decision making process... I was unsure about the type of law I would pursue and whether I could see myself working at a firm like the ones we would be visiting. After talking with the lawyers, I am convinced that corporate law is certainly an interest of mine. Our conversations were down to earth and honest; the attorneys spoke highly of their firms and the perks their positions provided, but also mentioned the negatives that come with the job. The experience reaffirmed my decision to attend law school at a time when I needed it most.”

Todd Postma, Calvin Senior

Calvin Alumni Attorney Groups

Calvin alumni attorney groups are active in both Michigan and Chicago, providing networking opportunities, social events, and support for the Pre-Law Program.

In August, attorneys from both groups enjoyed a Cubs baseball game together in Chicago.

The Calvin Law Professionals of Michigan (CLPM) put together a "speed networking" event during the spring, bringing local attorneys and Calvin Pre-Law students together to talk about widely ranging topics related to a legal career. The group also sponsors periodic speakers and social events for members and area attorneys.

Anyone interested in more information or in becoming a member of these groups can contact the Calvin Alumni Association at alumni@calvin.edu. To join the CLPM online, go to: https://calvin.edu/go/clpm