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Amy Patterson Becomes New Department Chair

On August 1, 2009, Dr. Amy Patterson began a three year term as the new chair for the political science department. Patterson is “honored that the department has confidence in me for the chair position. I am grateful that I have such an excellent group of individuals to work with in the political science Department. I look forward to the many things that I will learn about the college while serving as chair. Our department works very collaboratively in decision making and setting departmental priorities. As we undergo some staffing transitions and possible curricular changes during the next few years, I look forward to working with everyone in the department.”

Last Spring, from April 14-17, 2009, Patterson attended the conference of the Network on Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa. The network, composed of about 35 scholars and practitioners from Africa, Europe, and the U.S., held its conference at Justo Mwale Theological College in Lusaka, Zambia. Patterson was asked to deliver a keynote address based on her research in Zambia and Ghana.

The presentation, “Church Advocacy on HIV/AIDS: A Comparison of Zambia and Ghana,” examined the role of Protestant churches in shaping AIDS awareness campaigns, accessing funding for particular programs, and influencing national and donor policies on prevention, care, support, and treatment. Currently, the presentation is part of a larger book project Patterson is completing.

The Network, in existence for three years, is planning an intensive working seminar for July 2010. Patterson will also participate as part of the planning committee for the 2010 event.

Kimberly Casey Joins the Political Science Department

The department is pleased to welcome a new faculty member this fall, Professor Kimberly Casey. Casey, originally from San Jose, California, attended Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California where she received her B.A. in history. She went on to achieve her M.A. in religion. While a graduate student she taught elementary school. Later after moving to Oklahoma, she managed a college bookstore and began teaching general humanities, history, philosophy, and English courses.

After her two boys were a little older, Casey decided to switch her intellectual focus to politics and history, so she enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Casey graduated in August of 2009, and left the next day for her position at Calvin. Casey knew “about Calvin by reputation and was very pleased to be able to come here for a year.”

She is currently working on publishing her dissertation on the effects of kinship on electoral politics as well as writing a conference paper on women and politics in Missouri.

This fall, Casey is teaching Introduction to Political Science and American Public Policy.
Pre-Law Begins New Mentoring Program

For about a year, alumni have been working on starting a new program that would provide mentoring relationships between current pre-law students and Calvin alums in the legal profession. This fall, the program was implemented with the help of Professor Joel Westra, Calvin’s Pre-Law advisor.

The mentoring program was created with the purpose of assisting upperclassmen, particularly seniors, in preparing for law school. Through a general mentoring relationship, students will be able to discuss their calling and vocation, as well as how to survive law school, with individuals practicing law in various capacities.

Students were matched up with mentors from the local area, with a few mentors from more distant areas that keep in contact with their mentees through email and phone calls. The mentors are attorneys who are relatively younger in age. The goal is to have mentors who are not far removed from law school, but who have made partner in their firms. Job shadowing is encouraged, but not necessary, due to confidentiality issues within law firms.

Westra was really thankful for a smooth start to the mentoring relationships. Currently, fifteen students have been matched with alumni in the program.

Depending on student demand and alumni willingness to participate in the program, Westra hopes to expand the number of mentoring relationships to additional students in the future.

The Paul Henry Institute

Henry Institute Lectures this Fall

- September 17, 2009: Mark Noll, Professor of History at Notre Dame spoke on “God and Race in American Politics”
- September 30, 2009: Tamrat Layne, former Prime Minister of Ethiopia spoke on “Transformation in Jesus”
- October 20, 2009: Christine Bodewes, Human Rights Lawyer in Kenya spoke on “Perspectives on the Slums of Nairobi, Kenya: What is the Role of the Churches?”

New Publication: The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics

Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, James L. Guth, Editors

Religion is, and has always been, a powerful force in American politics. Over the past three decades, the study of religion and politics has gone from being ignored by the scholarly community to becoming a major focus of research. But much of the analysis in the media about religion’s role in the political arena is greatly oversimplified and is not easily accessible to non-specialists.

The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics bridges the gap by examining the considerable research conducted up to this point and assessing what has been learned, what remains unsettled due to conflicting findings, and what important questions remain largely unaddressed by current research endeavors. Its chapters, written by noted scholars in specialized fields, summarize the latest views on particular topics, important findings, insights, and theoretical advances; outline current debates in scholarship; and raise important but understudied questions.

Topics cover the full range of America’s history, from its founding to the present day, and plumb the depths of every aspect of the nation’s politics, from voting patterns and social movements to the role of clergy in political activism and the influence of religion in all three branches of government.

The Handbook is unique in the breadth and detail with which it explores the fascinating and multifaceted relationship between religion and American politics. Scholars, students, journalists, and curious readers alike will find this book to be an indispensable source of information on the topic.


Oxford University Press, 2009
www.oup.com, 800/451-7556
This study, *The Disappearing God Gap*, examines the role of religion throughout the 2008 presidential campaign, rather than simply how religion served to shape voting on Election Day itself.

The book, forthcoming from Oxford University Press in February 2010, is the product of a team of scholars linked to Calvin College’s Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics, including Corwin E. Smidt (Calvin College), Kevin den Dulk (Grand Valley University), Bryan Froehle (St. Thomas University), James Penning (Calvin College), Stephen Monsma (Calvin College), and Douglas Koopman (Calvin College). The volume seeks to ascertain, in part, whether the basis of religious voting in American elections is shifting from a historic pattern in which votes were largely shaped by religious tradition of affiliation to one in which religious traditionalism, regardless of denominational affiliation, serves to undergird one’s voting decisions.

The first part of the book examines how Americans view the role of religion in American public life, their expectations related to the religious character of candidates for public office, and their evaluations of the particular religious groups with which the different candidates are affiliated.

The second part focuses more specifically on the 2008 campaign, examining how different religious factors translated into partisan and candidate preferences and how the various candidates in the nomination (and election) process sought to attract the votes of different religious groups. It continues by examining efforts of candidates, religious organizations, and churches during the course of the election to mobilize religious voters in support of the nominees of the two major parties. It then investigates how such voters cast their ballots on Election Day.

The analysis compares the 2008 election to the 2004 election and examines the extent to which the 2008 election deviated from, or simply continued to reflect, patterns evident in the previous election.

The concluding part of the book assesses whether the “God gap” which was evident in the 2004 election continued to be evident in the 2008 election. There is an examination of how differences in evaluations of religious groups will likely continue to shape the prospects of presidential candidates who are affiliated with different religious faiths and faith traditions, and the extent to which religion is likely to continue to be an important factor in shaping election outcomes in the United States.

The study was based largely on the Henry Institute National Survey on Religion and Public Life. This national survey of 3,002 Americans was conducted during April 2008, with respondents reinterviewed during the three weeks after the election.

In 2008, Kyla Vanderhart graduated from Calvin and began serving as a full-time AmeriCorps member at Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While working at Bethany her job included finding mentors for children and teens in foster care and in refugee programs.

In October 2009, Kyla began a year-long internship with the International Justice Mission as a field office intern in Lusaka, Zambia. International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that secures justice for victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression. Kyla first traveled to Zambia in 2007, with Dr. Patterson, as a McGregor Research Fellow.

Kyla is very grateful for the well-rounded education that she received at Calvin in the Political Science Department because it helped prepare her for the future.

“Even though my work is not always related to the political realm, I feel as though I am able to apply the analytical skills I learned at Calvin to almost everything I do.”

Kyla also appreciates the international relations and McGregor Research Programs for helping open doors to her current internship. “It was much easier to obtain a placement in a country where I had visited and studied, rather than one where I had no experience.” Once she finishes her internship in Zambia, Kyla hopes to gain more experience abroad.
Pi Sigma Alpha is the national honor society for undergraduate and graduate students of political science. There are over 650 chapters across the country. Students of government, political science, public administration, and international relations are accepted into the membership when they attain high standards of learning and academic distinction in political science and overall educational work. This award is given to those Political Science or International Relations majors who have an overall GPA that places the student in the top third of his or her class. The student also needs to have completed 10 semester credits in political science with an average grade of 3.0 in those courses.

The Honorees are:
Lisa M. Breedveld
Jean M. Buteyn
Eric Dean Kamstra
Ashley E. King
Kelly Ann Larsen
Andrew J. Luth
Kevin Patrick Morales
Ana R. Stutler
Kayla Michelle Sulzer
Corey J. Velgersdyk
Eric J. Walcott

Spotlight on: Governments and Recessions

This fall, Professor Doug Koopman is teaching a special topics course in Political Science entitled, "Governments and Recessions: Then and Now."

This course examines how the American government has responded to economic downturns in the recent past and present. It reviews the history of such responses and their consequences, paying particular attention to the Great Depression and to the present economic difficulties of the early twenty-first century. The class also looks at the policies of Franklin Roosevelt and President Barack Obama. Students in the class attended a debate between Jonathan Alter, a contributing correspondent for NBC News, and Amity Shlaes, author of The Forgotten Man and syndicated columnist for Bloomberg on October 12, 2009.

Next Spring, Professor Stevenson will be teaching the "Ethics of Spying" as a special topics class.

Say You’re One of Them
by Uwem Akpan
A collection of short stories written from the perspective of African children; the stories deal with poverty, Rwanda’s genocide, inter-religious violence, and child trafficking.

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Andrew J. Luth
Kevin Patrick Morales
Ana R. Stutler
Kayla Michelle Sulzer
Corey J. Velgersdyk
Eric J. Walcott

The Glass Castle
by Jeannette Walls
Walls recounts her bizarre and miraculous journey through childhood and adolescence. At the mercy of two brilliant—and loving in their own ways—but completely dysfunctional parents, she and her siblings somehow manage to "grow up." This book will change the way you think about "family!"

- Bill Stevenson

Teams of Rivals
by Doris Kearns Goodwin
This book is a multiple biography of Abraham Lincoln and his key rivals --- Salmon P. Chase, William H. Seward, and Edward Bates. The book describes how Lincoln was able to skillfully lead a group of talented but diverse individuals during America’s greatest political crisis. Anyone interested in Lincoln or the Civil War will find this book a "must read."

-Jim Penning

Animal Farm
by George Orwell
Orwell explores utopia and corruption through the eyes of farmyard animals. This classic is fascinating and so hard to put down.

- Stephanie Brinks
Student Assistant