Elections inspire projects, events

The 2008 presidential election offered an opportunity for political science classes to actively engage in the topics they were reading about in their textbooks.

“Very few departments at Calvin College see their subject culminate into a grand event such as an election” said junior Brandon Graf. “This national election gave a great real-world example of a working political system for political science students.” The semester included debate parties sponsored by various student organizations, forums, and an Election Night party at which faculty and students gathered to watch the election results come in. Several classes also worked on projects relating to the election.

Graf and his classmates in the Parties and Elections class taught by professor Doug Koopman created a web site called thinkforourselves.org to give college-age students information about the two main candidates and urge them to get out and vote.

“We wanted to create our own issue oriented campaign commercials to inform voters about the two main candidates’ positions on certain issues,” said senior Brette Davis. “We were targeting well-educated college age students just like ourselves because we feel that they are not always informed as

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Westra leads Pre-Law program

Dr. Joel Westra is serving as interim head of the Pre-Law program at Calvin College. Approximately 100 students are part of the program, which provides introductory fall meetings, law school forums, speakers, internships and advising to students preparing to attend law school after they complete their undergraduate degrees.

Westra is leading the program this year on an interim basis with the possibility that it will become a long-term position. He said filling the position with a political science professor is a good move for the program.

“I, and the department as a whole, thought that this was a good thing because there are so many interested students in the department,” he said. About one-third of the pre-law students at Calvin are majoring in political science.

Westra said he is particularly excited about the position because he brings a unique perspective to the program. While Westra was in

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Students Attend Model UN Conference

The weekend before Thanksgiving, fourteen Calvin College students joined approximately 1400 other college students from across the nation at the American Model United Nations (AMUN) Conference in Chicago.

The conference, designed to simulate the operation of the United Nations, involves nearly four days of intensive, back-to-back simulations of various United Nations committees and commissions.

Approximately 100 participating colleges from the United States and abroad represent 130 countries. The delegation from Calvin represented Chile. Teams represented the country in the simulated General Assembly and its 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th committees, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and the Economic and Social Council for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

“The Model United Nations is a great educational opportunity to learn the intricacies of international relations,” said senior Nathaniel Valk, one of the students who participated this fall.

“Participation in the simulation allows one to learn how the UN functions and to become familiar with UN processes.”

The ECLAC team, consisting of sophomore Ana Stutler and senior Dan Holtrop, were voted “Outstanding Delegations” by their peers.

“Every commission gives out three awards,” said Stutler. “Participants write down the delegations they think did the best job and should get the award. So, we won.” Stutler and Holtrop said that the Model UN experience is a valuable one.

“I think the value comes from having a concentrated study of a particular country,” said Holtrop, “but also a study of the region that you’re in and the policies it deals with.”

“In the actual simulation one becomes quickly familiar with the process of negotiation and creating consensus on a topic,” said Valk. “As there are roughly 192 students at the simulation, the strategies for advocating the country’s policy which you are representing becomes a major asset.”

The ECLAC simulation in which Stutler and Holtrop took part worked on two issues at this year’s model UN: macroeconomic growth and the role of women in regional development.

The Calvin participants are students in POLS 285, the model United Nations course offered each fall. This year the class was taught by Professor Doug Koopman. Next year, it will be taught by Professor Amy Patterson.

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they should be and often follow the crowd when it comes to voting decisions.”

The web site focuses on issues that the class decided were important to the college-age demographic.

“After brainstorming, we came up with four issues that we wanted to focus on,” said Davis. “We chose economy, healthcare, and energy because college students commonly feel that these are important.”

Another political science class, “Persons in Political Community,” also explored the two candidate’s position on the issues of the campaigns.

The class, taught by Professor Simona Goi, compiled information that eventually became a special pullout election guide in Chimes, the campus newspaper.

“The idea was to get the students to work on concrete issues that had to do with some of the themes we explored in class,” said Goi.

“It was intentionally organized by issue rather than by candidate so they would focus on issues and proposals rather than on personality.”

Along with its educational benefits, the guide acted as a source of information for the campus community.
Alumni Mark Lemoine

Political Science alumni Mark Lemoine ’93 says he never underestimates the value of experiences, because it is his accumulated experience that brought him to where he is today.

Lemoine is working as Government Affairs Director at Spectrum Health in downtown Grand Rapids, where he lobbies lawmakers about issues pertaining to healthcare.

“I represent Spectrum Health at the local, state and federal levels of government,” said Lemoine. “I bring them ideas that we have that we would like them to consider.”

Lemoine says that he views his job as a way to educate legislators about issues they may not have had extensive knowledge of before taking office.

“It’s a great opportunity to impact change in a positive way,” he said.

Immediately after graduation Lemoine held several sales positions, where he said he learned skill sets college didn’t necessarily teach him, like listening to his client and identifying needs.

Lemoine then ran into someone working in the Michigan state legislature who he knew from his internship through Calvin. This led to three years of work in Lansing, including serving as chief of staff for a senator.

After several years, Lemoine joined Meijer, Inc. as Manager of Government Relations, where he began his lobbying work. He said this experience allowed him to build on the experience he had acquired in the public sector.

Lemoine then joined Spectrum Health, where he is a registered lobbyist on the federal level.

“It’s a responsibility I take very seriously,” he said. “Just because someone becomes an elected official doesn’t mean they have all the answers to the questions we’re facing.”

Lemoine says his role is especially vital with the increasing discussion about health care and the health care crisis. Fifty percent of the hospital group’s revenue comes from the federal government in the form of Medicaid or Medicare; Lemoine says the government is the single largest purchaser of health care today.

“For this reason, it is vitally important that we as an organization are engaged in those discussions,” he said.

On a day-to-day basis, Lemoine’s responsibilities include understanding what his colleagues are facing and monitoring discussions in Lansing and Washington, D.C.

“I develop relationships where I in essence become an adjunct health care staffer [for the legislator],” he said.

Lemoine says that through his work he sees a great opportunity to impact change in a positive way, and that this view of his job stems from his time at Calvin.

 “[The political science department] took what is generally referred to as a secular profession and taught us how to combine it with our faith,” he said.
Calling All Alumni

The political science department would like to have current employment, email, and address information on all Calvin College alumni who majored in political science.

Please email jsteigen@calvin.edu with your information.

If you do not want your information published in the Political Science Alum Notebook or on the website be sure and make a note of this in the email.

New Book on Religion and Politics

Professor Doug Koopman is editing a new volume with Amy Black of Hope College and Larycia Hawkins of Wheaton College. Titled “Religion and American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives,” it has historical documents, the best of current research, and newly commissioned essays by leaders in the field.

The volume contains an essay by Professor Corwin Smidt on the American religious landscape and how to understand and study the way the American people think of religion and politics.

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college he thought about going to law school, but after his advisor set up an opportunity for him to work in a law firm for two years as an undergraduate, Westra realized it wasn’t for him.

“I enjoyed it but not enough to go to law school,” he said. Instead, he went on to graduate school where his dissertation involved international law. Westra says this gave him an appreciation for law, but allows him to still function as an outside and see the positives and negative aspects of attending law school.

He adds that his wife is a lawyer so he knows a lot about going through the law school application process.

While there is not a Pre-Law major at Calvin, the college’s strong liberal arts core and challenging majors provide excellent preparation for pursuing a vocation in law.

More about the Pre-Law program and its activities can be found at its web site: http://www.calvin.edu/academic/prelaw/.

Professors’ Picks

The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dustbowl

Timothy Egan

The dust storms that terrorized America’s high plains in the darkest years of the Great Depression were like nothing ever seen before. In The Worst Hard Time, the Pulitzer Prize winning New York Times journalist and author, Timothy Egan, tells the epic story of this environmental disaster and its impact on the communities stricken with fear and choked by dust in the ‘dirty thirties.’” Highly recommended, particularly in our own “hard times.”

—Professor Penning

The Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal year 2009

“A horror story, particularly the deficit and debt.”

—Professor Koopman