Political Science students create PAC

The best way to learn campaign finance law? Use it.
That's the philosophy behind the project in Professor Doug Koopman’s Parties and Elections class. Students are gaining hands-on experience in many areas by creating a Political Action Committee.

The PAC, named Young Americans for Generational Equity (Y-AGE) was formed to pursue generational equity in the areas of education, environment and entitlements.

“Our goal is to create an interest in people our age, motivate them and help legislators hear our voice,” said sophomore Catie Kawchak, the PAC’s treasurer.

Students worked together to come up with the issues the PAC would support, which presented a challenge for a class made up of people with diverse political ideologies. They chose issues of generational equity because of their effect on the entire generation.

Students in the class have contributed in various ways to start Y-AGE, some doing research on the issues Y-AGE supports while others were involved in fundraising and still others created the PAC’s website (yagepac.org).

Y-AGE will endorse candidates that align with the issues it supports at both the state and presidential levels. While Y-AGE doesn’t have the finances of some other PAC’s, Koopman said this allows the students to explore other ways to have an impact, including web networking.

The class plans to continue Y-AGE after the class ends.

Senior Melissa Rick said she and other graduating seniors in the class will continue working on the PAC from various law and graduate schools next year.

Rick and Kawchak said working on the PAC has been a valuable experience.

“It really builds a sense of self-efficacy in students and gives them a real foundation to go on from here,” said Rick.

Department welcomes new faculty member

This fall, the Political Science department will welcome a new faculty member.

Dr. Joel Westra will bring his interest and research of international organization, security and law to the international relations program.

“He comes to Calvin with a rich background in both teaching and research in the area,” said Professor James Penning. “We’re really glad to have him.”

Westra received his BA in political science from the University of Houston and his MA and PhD in political science from the University of Chicago where he also spent one year as a visiting lecturer in the Committee on International Relations. Prior to his arrival at Calvin, Westra spent two years as a post-doctoral fellow in the John G. Tower Center for Political Studies at Southern Methodist University.

Westra will teach a variety of classes, including Terrorism and International Security and International Political Economy.

Westra said he, his wife Julie and their two dogs eagerly await their move to Grand Rapids this May.

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D.C. trip offers variety of experiences

The students in DC this semester hold many different internships.

The Henry Semester not only allows students to gain experience working in their areas of interest in the nation’s capital, but also provides a unique learning environment. Students take two classes during the semester taught by Professor Bill Stevenson, the leader of this year’s semester.

“After talking with the neighborhood association, we decided to create a welcome basket for new residents,” she said. “To promote the community garden we used a plant pot and included a seed packet.”

Other groups were involved in clean-up projects and volunteered in athletic facilities for underprivileged kids.

Penning said the project allowed the students to find concrete ways to apply what they were learning in class.

“It connects the abstract concepts of urban politics and society with the real world of human beings and needs,” he said, adding that the neighborhoods benefit from the students’ work as well.

“The community gets to see the college cares about the community that surrounds it.”

“It’s really a win-win situation for all involved,” he said.

Students in Professor James Penning’s Urban Politics class this semester learned about the topics they studied in class by interacting with the people they affect.

Groups of students adopted four area neighborhoods – Eastown, Garfield Park, Baxter and Fulton Heights – and got to know them better throughout the semester. The class completed inventories of neighborhood housing and local businesses and also attended neighborhood association meetings and engaged in services projects in order to develop a deeper understanding of each community’s needs.

Senior Bethany Bertapelle’s group worked in the Fulton Heights neighborhood.

“It’s a wonderful experience!”

Urban Politics class adopts area neighborhoods

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Junior Austin Knuppe is at the Heritage Foundation under Dr. James Jay Carafano, their Homeland Security and Counterterrorism expert. Most of his work involves research on legislation involving Homeland Security, such as border security and immigration issues. Initiatives suggested in the Department of Homeland Security’s budget for this fall.

Knuppe also plans events for Dr. Carafano and does administrative work like updating the Heritage Foundation’s national security website.

These are just a snapshot of the wide range of areas this year’s students are involved in. Other internships include the Department of State, the Korea Economic Institute, and the AARP.

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“I have been getting up early to get to work, especially with the high volume of news coming out of Darfur daily. Washington is such a busy city and so many people are engaged in working in the area. I have a 9 to 5 job, but am kept pretty busy on other days and our office doesn’t see much experience until after the weekend. The group also has time to explore the city on their own. I’ve attended protests, visited museums, national parks and the National Cathedral and also have time to explore the city on their own. I’ve attended protests, visited museums, national parks and the National Cathedral and also have time to explore the city on their own. “I’m glad to work in a small organization – we have 25 people on staff – that allows me to stay intricately involved with the work of the Coalition,” she said.

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Michael Wright: Political Science and China

Michael Wright fell in love with Mandarin Chinese in his freshman year at Calvin. Since then, his combination of political science and China studies has led to unique opportunities around the world.

Wright graduated from Calvin in 2001 with a major in Political Science and a minor in Asian Studies, one of the first two Calvin students to graduate with the then new minor. During his time at Calvin, he attended the Calvin Semester in China and spent a summer studying Mandarin at the Princeton in Beijing program.

After graduating, Wright spent a year studying at the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing Center in Nanjing China. While he was there, he took courses taught entirely in Mandarin on economics, Chinese politics and culture and US-China relations. At the end of the year, he was chosen by his classmates to present the commencement address in Mandarin on behalf of the international students.

Wright returned to the United States in 2002 and enrolled in a joint degree program, pursuing a Juris Doctor law degree at the University of Michigan and a Master’s in International Relations with a focus on China. During this time he interned at Chinese and international law firms in Beijing, Xiamen and Hong Kong. He completed both degrees in 2006.

After completing his degrees, he passed the Illinois bar exam and joined the Chicago office of the global law firm Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw LLP, where he works in the finance group as an associate attorney. The firm has recently opened a Hong Kong office and is expanding into Asia, and Wright is optimistic that opportunities to use his background in Chinese will increase as the firm expands into Asia.

While in Chicago, Wright hopes to become more involved with the Midwest US-China Association and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Senator Mark Jansen: Impacting Michigan

Since graduating from Calvin College, Senator Mark Jansen has lived out his commitment to help impact the world in various ways. The latest? Michigan’s State Senate.

Jansen was elected to the Senate in November 2006 as a representative of the 28th Senate District, which includes much of Kent County. He is a member of various committees and subcommittees, including the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Committee on Campaign and Election Oversight and the Committee on Family and Human Services, which he chairs.

Prior to his election to the Senate, Jansen served in the Michigan House of Representatives from 1997 to 2002 and the Gaines Township Clerk from 1992 to 1996.

Jansen said one challenging aspect of his job as a legislator is representing the many citizens of his district, especially when it comes to moral issues. “Good people disagree on some issues for various, well thought-out reasons,” he said. “Regardless, it’s a good process for me to go through. There are countless challenges to my beliefs as a legislator while representing 250,000-plus citizens from Kent County, the products of many differing religious beliefs.”

In 2003, Jansen began as director of special initiatives for Habitat for Humanity of Michigan. He leads a program called Vision 2020, where he brings together local community leaders, non-profits, for-profits and other parties interested in eliminating sub-standard housing in 20 Michigan cities by the year 2020.

The group has organized communities and secured grants to help local leaders to partner together to accomplish the goal of cooperation. Jansen says Vision 2020 is a way to assist both community leaders and the most needful members of society in a way that appealed to his desire to serve others.

“Habitat encourages a Christ-like model by asking each recipient to give some of themselves as others helped them,” he said.
Internship program gives non-profit experience

Five political science students are taking part in a new internship program that allows them to see what working in a non-profit organization is all about.

The Comenius Scholars program, in its first semester, uses a grant to create opportunities for students to secure paid, for-credit internships with organizations that typically would not be able to pay them.

“We’ve had a lot of non-profit employers post internships that look really good but are unpaid,” said Laurie Lemmen, one of the program’s coordinators. “In the past we’ve had a lot of positions go unfilled because students can’t afford to work at an unpaid internship. We see the McGregor grant as a perfect opportunity.”

Calvin uses the grant money to pay for 75 percent of the student’s salary, while the non-profit pays for the other 25 percent.

Once accepted into the program, students are responsible for finding and securing their internship. A list of non-profits is available to students, or student may approach other organizations they are interested in interning with.

This semester, political science students are working in a variety of non-profit organizations, from Grand Rapids City Hall to Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

Senior Austin Graff works for Bethany Christian Services’ International Service sector. He works mainly with international adoption, helping with Russian-English translation, researching various adoption programs and working with Russia and Central Asia adoption programs.

Graff says the internship in international adoption relates greatly to his International Relations major, especially through his work with The Hague Treaty and how different countries’ legal systems relate to international adoption.

Senior Mandie Stehle’s internship is with Degané ministries, an inner city Grand Rapids ministry that offers services ranging from a food pantry to a service where people can come to get help in obtaining a state ID.

Stehle, who has a minor in Urban Studies, said the internship has helped her apply what she has learned in her classes to real-world situations.

“For me, it was really important to see different sides of how a city is run,” she said. “Degané is definitely a way to see people you wouldn’t normally see.”

Both Graff and Stehle say the program has been a good way for them to gain experience in their fields.

“I have been surprised to find how a non-profit is actively working on the political side of things,” said Graff. “Bethany Christian Services has an extensive network of lobbyists in DC fighting for orphan rights and advocating adoption.”

Stehle says the program is valuable for students who want to take their political science in different directions.

“For those of us who aren’t interested in running for office, it’s a good way to see the other job opportunities out there,” she said. “There are plenty of jobs you can do and apply your political science skills to without being a politician.”

Spotlight on: The Queen

Students in Dr. Amy Patterson’s European Politics class watched the film “The Queen,” a look at the reign of Queen Elizabeth II after the death of Princess Diana. The following are some of their responses to the film:

“The Queen is an excellent representation of a dynamic social and political issue in Britain: the role of the monarch. By representing Elizabeth as both deeply devoted and somewhat disconnected, the film shows the modern tension in having a ceremonial head of state as a separate role from head of government. Through an in-depth look at one of the country’s most recent critical events, the film successfully portrays the difficult role of the monarch in British modern society.” Abigail Rockey

“Understanding why the Monarch still exists today and the precariousness of the Queen’s position is perhaps the greatest lesson in the film. Vilified by history, the Queen is in fact a woman with feelings who plays a symbolic role intrinsic to British politics and tradition.” Kyla VanderHart

“In a profound way The Queen wonderfully dramatizes the relationship of the monarchy with the existing political structures and culture amidst an incremental value shift resulting from the death of Princess Diana. It not only exposes the relationship between the prime minister and the queen, but it also displays the political culture values of deference to authority and incrementalism.” Tommy Heyboer

Professors’ Picks

City of Quartz by Mike Davis

“Mike Davis’s award-winning (1990) look at the City of Los Angeles, California. To Davis, Los Angeles is ‘both utopia and dystopia.’ His book brilliantly analyzes Los Angeles’ history and suggests ways in which Los Angeles helps us to understand the future of urban America.” – Dr. James Penning

In Defense of Hypocrisy: Picking Sides in the War of Virtue by Jeremy Lott

“This book points out that none of us live up to the standards we set for ourselves. It’s a good thing to read before we start to criticize politics and politicians.” – Dr. Douglas Kooptman

The Places In Between by Rory Stewart

“Stewart traveled on foot from Herat to Kabul in January 2002, just a few months after the overthrow of the Taliban. His account of encounters and meals with the people of Afghanistan along the way is vibrant and candid, but also moving in its spare simplicity. His humility and his knowledge of the local languages give him the opportunity to speak with displaced soldiers, tribal leaders, teenagers in remote villages and aid workers who are trying to make sense of a land that is as tortured in its political history as it is rich in its cultural heritage.” – Dr. Simona Geb