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Politeia

The Department of

POLITICAL SCIENCE

CALVIN COLLEGE

Notes from the Chair



Once in a while Calvin professors get a friendly reminder to enter our activities into a database on the Provost's website. While we're assured the information is put to good use, faculty can sometimes see reporting as a bean-counting chore.

Still, I have to admit that one of the most heartening things I do as a chair is look up the results. For one thing, it tells the story that Calvin political scientists are excelling with their primary work: teaching and scholarship. But what strikes me even more is what shows up beyond our typical job descriptions, particularly in our faculty's engagement with students and the community outside the classroom.

Consider a few examples of our work over just the past few months:

- Mike Pelz produced a series of public commentaries on gentrification for the Center for Public Justice's *Capital Commentary* series (www.capitalcommentary.org).
- Becca McBride and Joel Westra have participated in several panels, media discussions, and church gatherings about the conflict in Ukraine.
- Kevin den Dulk has joined the board of the Michigan Center for Civic Education, which focuses on strengthening citizenship and civic knowledge among young people.
- Tracy Kuperus convened a workshop in South Africa on faith and citizen engagement, in which den Dulk also

participated.

- Kurt Pyle has worked with a student research assistant to chart campaign spending.

- Neil Carlson (the director of Calvin's Center for Social Research and a fellow political scientist) is busily developing an innovative poll to gauge local opinion on key policy issues.

You'll find several other examples of this kind of engagement within these pages. It reflects a serious desire by our faculty to be a part of the broader and much-needed conversation about what it means to live justly and think deeply as citizens. We hope you'll join us!

- Kevin den Dulk

Calvin Professors Discuss Citizenship and Faith in South Africa

From August 4th to August 8th, professors from across the country and the world gathered in South Africa to engage in a workshop entitled "Citizen Mobilization in South Africa: A Role For Christian Organizations?" Calvin College's own Tracy Kuperus, assistant professor in the International Development Studies program, led the event, which was hosted by The Beyers Naudé Center for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University. Professor den Dulk also contributed to this event as the final speaker giving a speech entitled "Faith-Based Rights Mobilization in Africa: Some Comparative Reflections."

The workshop included hearing from over twenty speakers from across the world, all discussing the role of Christian organizations in mobilizing citizens from around the globe. Many scholars and practitioners shared their unique perspectives making the workshop a great success. This event was co-sponsored by two Calvin College academic organizations: the Henry Institute and the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship. Both of these organizations were established to promote the fostering of Christian scholarship with a focus on public life.

Seniors Foster Their Passion for Research This Summer

The summer before their senior years at Calvin, both Alicia Smit and Ian Graham partnered with Calvin professors and the McGregor Fellowship Program on burgeoning research projects.

Ian spent his summer working on a large research project alongside the Political Science Department's own Becca McBride.

Graham was responsible for conducting research on two main projects, which he considers a great opportunity. "The first project focused on education in multicultural education classes, such as those in which I have participated," Ian explains. "Dr. McBride's work focuses on the way we educate, and how we may better include students from a variety of backgrounds." He notes that international students face a different set of challenges as they enter classrooms in the states. The challenges require "that educators employ a nuanced approach in order to reap the added benefits of diversity." SharedJustice.org, a blog focusing on social justice, published Ian's work on international education this summer. Ian then continued on to work with McBride on a second project focusing on international adoption. "Dr. McBride has analyzed the impact of global states, learning about policy diffusion in the international system," Ian states. "International adoption laws have spread in the post-World War II system. As states observe neighboring states implementing adoption laws, they anticipate the advantages of implementation." Graham went on to present his findings to his colleagues including McGregor Fellows and Mentors.

One of those colleagues was Alicia Smit, who spent her own summer working for Professor Kristin Du Mez in the History

Department researching Hillary Clinton's religious background and how it influenced her political career. Alicia shares how the Methodist tradition and

Clinton's religious convictions propelled her into politics. "She fully embraced John Wesley's axiom: 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, as long as you can,'" Alicia explains. "For Hillary, this meant a life in the public sphere. From her work in Yale Law School studying children's rights to her time as Secretary of State, Hillary cited religion as an influential force in her life." Describing her research on Clinton as a time traveling experience that launched her back into the 1960's, Smit details a sort of one-way friendship that ensued with a person she's never met. How did Calvin assist in preparing her for such research? "Being a part of the Honors program certainly prepared me for this McGregor experience," Alicia cites. "The dedication to research and passion for projects were characteristics I cultivated in my Honors classes—both standard and contracted Honors courses. Through those courses I gained mental endurance and learned how to manage tasks and create my own schedule, which greatly benefitted me in my work this summer." Alicia not only grew in her research experience, but also in her understanding of religion and politics. She believes that this project was "a conversation starter that led to both challenging and amiable discussions, but discussions that always resulted in fruitful and fulfilling conclusions."



Alicia Smit and Ian Graham: McGregor Research Fellows

Alumni Update: Scott Genzink

Since graduating from Calvin College in 2013, Scott Genzink has worked on several highly popular campaigns across the country. Soon after graduation, Scott began work as a Field Organizer for first-time Senatorial candidate, Cory Booker. What started as a sixty-hour a week internship, quickly turned into Scott's first job. He stayed on with Booker's campaign through both the primary and general elections of 2013, participating in a team that saw the first African American elected to the Senate representing New Jersey. Through this position, Genzink made connections that led him to his current job in New York as Regional Field Director for the New York State Democratic Committee. He specifically works in New York's 11th Congressional District, working for Domenic Recchia this past election in his attempt to unseat incumbent Michael Grimm. The campaign, though unsuccessful this November, drew extensive media attention. Scott details how his time in the classroom at Calvin prepared him for working on political



campaigns and when asked what he gained from his time with Calvin professors, he replied that "professors taught me to think critically, to ask questions, and to work cooperatively." Genzink continued, "my double major in Sociology and Political Science meant that I spent a lot of time looking at data and studying human behavior, two things that are especially important in campaigns." To explain his favorite aspect of being a Political Science major at Calvin College, he commented that his experiences in various internships helped prepare him for the professional world of politics post-graduation, especially his work as an intern in Washington D.C. for a semester. What he enjoyed most about Calvin POLS, however, were the professors. Genzink states what he most appreciated, and what makes Calvin special, was the personal investment Calvin Political Science professors make in their students. We are excited to see all of the work that Scott is doing and look forward to his many accomplishments in the future.

Faculty Activity

On June 16th, 2014, *Capital Commentary* published Professor den Dulk's article entitled "Engaging the Domestic Church over Religious Persecution."

On June 30th, 2014, *Capital Commentary* published Professor McBride's article entitled "Adoption: Redemption or Exploitation?"

On August 22nd, 2014, Professor McBride and Henry Institute Fellow Todd Huizinga were interviewed regarding the Russia/Ukraine conflict by WGVU TV. The interview is a continuation of a past interview done at the start of the conflict, aired April 4th, 2014.

On August 25th, 2014, *Capital Commentary* published the final installment of Professor Pelz's four-part series on gentrification.

Professor Joel Westra was a panelist at the West Michigan World Trade Association Panel Discussion on "US and EU Sanctions on Russia: How They Affect You." The event took place at Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Grand Rapids on September 20th, 2014.

Professor Pelz and Professor den Dulk presented their research findings at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 31st– November 2nd, 2014. The paper was entitled: "The Effects of School Choice Policy on Faith-Based Schools Enrollment."

Student Engagement

Throughout the semester, our students have engaged in several different activities with faculty.

Derby Conversations: This semester, professors committed to providing a monthly event for students to share conversation and appetizers together at Derby Station. Many students are taking this opportunity to enjoy time with their professors outside of the classroom.

Model UN: Professor McBride led Calvin students as they participated in Model UN this November. Calvin represented Iran at the annual conference in Chicago. Model UN seeks to provide the opportunity for students to develop their knowledge of international politics and issues faced by nations of the world.

Election Night Party: The Political Science Department hosted a 2014 Election Night Pizza Party on November 4. Students gathered in the DeVos Center Lobby with pizza and pop to watch this year's results come in alongside professors and peers.

Leviathan: Professor McBride oversees Leviathan, a student-organized club that plans events to build community within the Political Science student population.

Research Poster Session: Professor Pyle's 'Foundations of Political Science Research' class shared their research projects via posters with faculty and students at the end of this term. The students worked on the projects all semester as they sought explanations for phenomena that interested them.

Pre-Law Students Engage Learning Opportunities in Chicago

On September 12th, 2014, nine Calvin College Pre-Law students boarded a train to Chicago to explore Pre-Law activities. Trip supervisors Professor Westra and Ellen Hekman led the group in a seminar with Calvin College alumnus Jon Van Gorp, who is a partner in the Chicago office of international law firm Mayer Brown. "When we arrived in the city, we went directly to the offices of Mayer Brown, a leading global law firm, where we spent several hours with attorneys there," Brooke Bonnema explained. "Having the opportunity to see hands-on what life in a large firm is like as well as hearing from brilliant, Ivy-League attorneys and getting advice was definitely an experience I will never forget." Fellow participant Ethan DeVries, agreed. "Meeting with the Senior Partner of Mayer Brown, I saw that many of my passions and ambitions were similar. His advice to continue to pursue those passions while an undergrad gave me confidence that I could succeed in a legal education." As Professor Westra, Calvin College's Pre-Law Advisor, explained, this is the first time the trip has occurred and students "enjoyed the opportunity and came away with a much better idea about what it would be like to work at a major law firm. The opportunities were not solely found in learning about life as a lawyer, but in discovering what it takes to get there. Seven different lawyers spent time us, explaining where they went to law school, why they decided to pursue a career in law and their

specific area of expertise. It was a unique and very valuable experience for the students."

On Saturday, the students attended the LSAC Law School Recruitment Forum. Brooke found this experience especially helpful. "Talking with the deans from various law schools across the country was definitely a unique opportunity," she explained, "and meeting admissions representatives helped me see what life at law school is like, as well as giving me a preview to choosing law schools. Professor Westra also noted that learning more about different law schools and how those school admission decisions are made is an especially beneficial experience.

Ethan and Brooke noted that the trip involved more than gaining practical knowledge of what life in law school and beyond would look like, but also provided an opportunity to build connections with others students in the same position. "Being able to get to know fellow pre-law students better (as well as our advisor, Dr. Westra) made me feel like I wasn't going through the scary process of applying to law schools alone," Brooke explained. Ethan agreed: "sharing the experience with like-minded Calvin students helped me process my thoughts." Overall, the first trip to Chicago was certainly a success, and as Professor Westra shared, the students came away with very positive responses.

THE PAUL HENRY INSTITUTE

The Church's Freedom and the Church's Witness

On November 13th, 2014 Dr. John Inazu discussed the freedom of the church for the annual Pius Rule of Law Lecture. During his lecture, Dr. Inazu discussed the strength and vulnerabilities of the legal and constitutional arguments for preserving the freedom of the church to proclaim her message in an increasingly pluralistic and secularized society. He asked how those arguments fit within the rule of law and our ongoing democratic experiment, especially considering the potential legal and theological implications that could follow.



Dr. Inazu is a professor of law at Washington University Law School in St. Louis Missouri, though he is spending the 2014-2015 academic school year as a Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. He is also an affiliate faculty member of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. Inazu received both his B.S.E. in Civic Engineering and his J.D. from Duke University and went on to receive both his M.A. and Ph.D in Political Science from the University of North Carolina. At Washington University, Inazu teaches criminal law, law and religion, and various other classes on the First Amendment, law and philosophy, and religion and politics. His book, *Liberty's Freedom: The Forgotten Freedom of Assembly*, was published in 2012 by Yale University Press.

Video of the lecture and an interview with Dr. Inazu are available on the Henry Institute website.

Department Picks

Belle Directed by Amma Asante

“Belle” chronicles a young woman’s coming of age in 18th century Britain. The heroin, Dido, enters the movie as a young girl around eight years old who has recently been orphaned by her slave mother’s death. Against social conventions, Dido’s British father rescues her from a life of slavery and delivers her to his uncle so she can be raised as his heir. Though she never again encounters her father, she is blessed with a sizeable inheritance upon his death. This inheritance becomes both a blessing and a curse—as a half-African daughter of a slave she is socially unacceptable as a wife. But as a rich British heiress, she is a financially desirable match. The characters bring life to this tragic, yet historically accurate, situation in a memorable performance of love and victory, intermingled with grief and tragedy. Dido herself cries that “my greatest misfortune would be to marry into a family who would carry me as their shame.” Although she ultimately marries an activist in the anti-slavery legal struggle, the amount of pain involved in finding this “happy ending” is tragic.



As the professor teaching *The Global Politics of Human Rights* this semester, the story had important political lessons for the causes and consequences of human rights abuses. It is clear that there are at least two levels of causes to Dido’s oppressive situation. For instance, on one level we observe Dido’s uncle, the head judge in the country, deciding on the legitimacy of laws that protected slave traders. The tension between protecting the functioning yet illegitimate basis of the economic system and formulating just laws brings life to some of the theoretical conversations we have in class. On the other hand, we observe individuals excusing and perpetuating unjust social structures that viewed women as commodities and marriage as a path to wealth. Because the problem was perpetuated at both levels, the solutions also had to be addressed on both those levels.

Overall, the movie inspired me to communicate to my students the power that individuals have, even in unjust social and political circumstances, to make a difference and drive change. Yes, it mattered that Dido’s uncle was a powerful judge who could change laws. But Dido herself, the character who was able to drive change, was marginalized by every structure within which she was embedded. She was not even allowed to eat at the table with her own family. Yet her strength of character gave her power when the structures marginalized her. We are all called to prayerfully consider how we as individuals can engage to make a difference, regardless of our level of power or degree of marginalization. This movie was a powerful story of our individual responsibility to push back against unjust structures and advocate for change.

Professor Becca McBride

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