Department of Politics Spring 2026 Highlights

Campus Update

April 23, 2026

The Spring 2026 semester was a remarkably full one for the Department of Politics. From a the launch of a new lecture series on Ukrainian history and culture to hosting Catholic high school students debating Arctic sovereignty on our campus to Ave Maria students connecting to important governmental and research institutions in in Washington, D.C., the semester offered alumni much to celebrate. What follows is a chronological round-up of the highlights. Welcoming Bishop Vitaliy Kryvytskyi of Kyiv-Zhytomyr On January 29–30, 2026, Ave Maria University had the honor of welcoming Most Reverend Vitaliy Kryvytskyi, S.D.B., Bishop of Kyiv-Zhytomyr (Ukraine), for a two-day campus visit. Faculty from the Department of Politics assisted in hosting His Excellency, with Dr. Lidiya Zubytska serving as translator and accompanying the Bishop throughout his time on campus. The visit carried particular weight given the ongoing suffering of the Church in Ukraine. Bishop Kryvytskyi met with senior University leadership and celebrated Holy Mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel. As Dr. Seana McGuire, Vice President of Academic Affairs, expressed in a letter of thanks, those present were “profoundly moved by [his] witness to the faith amid the challenges facing the Church in Ukraine.” A Lecture on the American Administrative State On February 25, 2026, the Department of Politics hosted Dr. Ronald J. Pestritto — Graduate Dean and Professor of Politics at Hillsdale College— for a lecture on the rise of the U.S. administrative state and its implications for the constitutional order. Dr. Pestritto's talk offered a timely examination of self-government, executive power, and the role of expert agencies in American public life. Beyond the podium, Dr. Pestritto shared lunch with Ave Maria politics students, offering advice on graduate school and the life of a professional political scientist — a particularly welcome conversation given the ongoing partnership between Ave Maria and Hillsdale's Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship. Through this partnership, qualified AMU graduates are eligible for full-tuition scholarships toward Hillsdale's Master of Arts in Politics, making advanced study in American political thought an accessible next step for our students. Launching the Szczerbaniuk Lecture Series: Exploring Ukrainian History, Music, and Culture This semester, Ave Maria University celebrated the Inaugural lecture of The Dr. George and Catherine Szczerbaniuk Lecture Series: Exploring Ukrainian History, Music, and Culture — a new initiative bringing world-class scholars, authors, religious figures, and cultural experts to Ave Maria to engage with Ukraine’s political history, religious heritage, and living culture. The inaugural lecture, “The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: A History of Struggle & Perseverance,” was delivered on February 26, 2026, by Very Reverend Mitred Archpriest Dr. Mark Morozowich — Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest, Associate Professor of Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology at The Catholic University of America, and Director of the Bishop Basil Losten Center for Ukrainian Church Studies. Fr. Morozowich traced the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church’s path

through centuries of suppression and attempted erasure — particularly under Soviet rule — to its enduring witness today, drawing on both deep scholarship and a lived inheritance as a priest formed in the tradition from childhood. True to the series' two-day residency model, the visit extended well beyond the main lecture. The evening before, Fr. Morozowich led an informal student gathering titled "Lent Looks Different in the East," introducing theology students to the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts over pizza in Henkels 1011. Throughout his time on campus, he met with faculty, administrators, and students in smaller conversations — the kind of encounters that distinguish this series from a standard lecture event and that the program intends to make its signature. The University extends its deep gratitude to Dr. George and Catherine Szczerbaniuk, whose generosity and vision made the series possible, and looks forward to welcoming future guests as the series continues to unfold. Center for Catholic Citizenship: Spring Break in Washington, D.C. Over spring break 2026, the Center for Catholic Citizenship gave ten Ave Maria students a week in the nation's capital that few undergraduates get at any institution. The all-expenses-paid trip put students in rooms that usually require a badge: the White House, the Supreme Court, and the Capitol, along with the Washington institutions that shape policy from the outside — the Federalist Society, the American Enterprise Institute, and The Heritage Foundation. Among the week's highlights was a private meeting with Vince Haley, Director of the Domestic Policy Council, and a press conference observed live with Robert Kennedy, Secretary of Health and Human Services. Students also spent time learning about a variety of career paths — from lobbying and fundraising to prosecuting crimes — drawing a realistic picture of what it looks like to pursue vocation in American public life. What made the trip distinctive, though, was not only the access but the network that made it possible. Each meeting, each introduction, and each door opened traced back to Ave Maria alumni and friends who have carved out places for themselves in D.C. The successes of our alumni were celebrated over dinners that allowed current students to grow in friendship with those who came before — the kind of encounters that don't just advance careers but hand on a way of being Catholic in public life. The Center for Catholic Citizenship extends its heartfelt thanks to the alumni and supporters who make this trip possible. We are deeply grateful for all you give! Department of Politics at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast This past March, the Department of Politics made its first appearance at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast, the annual gathering that has drawn Catholic lay and religious leaders, public figures, and the faithful to the nation's capital since 2004. The 21st breakfast, held March 18–19 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., carried the theme "Join Us in Prayer for Our Nation: 250 Years!" — a fitting reflection on the Catholic contribution to American life as the country marks its semiquincentennial. Representing Ave Maria University were Dr. Lidiya Zubytska and Dr. Dan Davy, Vice-Provost, joined by two students from our Department. For the students, the breakfast offered a rare opportunity to witness the intersection of faith and public life at the national level. The Department is deeply grateful to benefactor Chris Payne, whose generous gift made our AMU representation possible. His support is a reminder of how the Ave community continues to form the next generation of faithful leaders in American public life. Politics Students at the Spring 2026 Interdisciplinary Research Symposium On April 11, 2026, Ave Maria University hosted its Spring 2026 Interdisciplinary Student Research Symposium, organized by the AMU Chapter of Phi Kappa Phi and featuring student scholarship from twenty different majors. Among the day's five afternoon panels, the Department of Politics was the only discipline represented by a full three-person panel composed entirely of its own majors — a strong showing from a growing department. The Politics panel featured research

spanning three distinct subfields of the discipline. Freshman Grace Breen, advised by Dr. Lidiya Zubytska, presented “The Law and Religiosity: The Relationship Between Religious Language of States and Citizen Practice,” a comparative study of how the religious character of national constitutions relates to the practice of their citizens. Junior Helen Nguyen, advised by Dr. Seana McGuire, presented “Guarding the Constitution’s Authority: Why Originalism Matters in Supreme Court Interpretation,” arguing through a close reading of landmark cases for an originalist approach to American constitutional interpretation. Sophomore Seth Parks, advised by Dr. Lidiya Zubytska, presented his thesis research on “Bismarckian Realpolitik: How to Wield Political Power,” defending a pragmatic and ethical conservative realism in foreign policy. Together, their papers ranged across comparative politics, American constitutional law, and international relations — a snapshot of the intellectual breadth the Department cultivates in its undergraduates, and evidence of a research culture reaching students at every stage from freshman year onward. 4th Annual AMU Model United Nations On April 18, 2026, the Department of Politics hosted the 4th Annual Ave Maria University Model United Nations (AMUMUN) — a full-day diplomatic simulation that continues to grow in scale and reputation. Twenty-five high school delegates from five area schools — four Catholic diocesan schools and one local school — gathered on campus to represent over forty states, observers, and international bodies debating this year’s topic: “The Question Concerning Greenland,” a timely examination of Arctic sovereignty, NATO cohesion, and great-power competition. The day opened with a welcome from Mr. Dan Donaldson, Vice President for Enrollment, and introductory remarks from Dr. Lidiya Zubytska. Delegates then moved through bloc-forming sessions, resolution drafting, and final deliberations, culminating in a judges’ feedback session and awards ceremony. Behind the scenes, the conference was the work of Ave Maria students themselves: a core group of five students developed the academic content — including the topic brief, country position profiles, and crisis materials — while nine additional student volunteers helped run the conference on the day, handling registration, logistics, and support. The conference’s growth trajectory — from three schools in its first year, to four last year, to five this April — reflects the program’s rising reputation among area educators. The Department is grateful to the faculty, student leaders, volunteers, and judges whose time and talent made the day possible,and look forward to welcoming an even larger cohort next spring. Politics Major Presents at Florida Political Science Association Ave Maria politics major Ella Rose Gibson presented her research at the 2026 Annual Meeting of the Florida Political Science Association (FPSA), held April 18, 2026, at Saint Leo University. Her paper, “The Right to Refuse: The Negative Effects of the Involvement of the United Nations in Forced Sterilization and Population Control,” examined the human-rights implications of international population-control programs — a subject that sits squarely at the intersection of political science, bioethics, and the Catholic intellectual tradition. She was advised by Dr. Lidiya Zubytska. This marks the second time in the last three years that an Ave Maria University politics major has presented at FPSA — a notable achievement for an undergraduate and a sign of the Department’s growing research culture.

Read online for photos and videos:

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