The School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences  
Program Research Activity Newsletter  
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**Political Science**  
**Thomas Brunell, Professor of Political Science**

Dr. Thomas Brunell is currently working on several papers explaining political polarization in the modern U.S. Congress. This topic is currently the organizing principle of American political science. Ultimately, he and his co-authors will produce a book on the subject as well. Additionally, Dr. Brunell is working on a solo book on political gerrymandering in the U.S. Since the Vieth v. Jubelirer Supreme Court decision in 2001, political gerrymandering has been in legal limbo - it is not unconstitutional, but the Court indicated it was simply waiting for the right metric for gerrymandering, so the specter of unconstitutionality remains. In the book he explains and calculates a handful of useful and easy metrics to measure asymmetry in the seats/votes relationship for the US Congress and various state legislatures.

**Public Policy and Political Economy**  
**Jonas Bunte, Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Political Economy**

Bilateral loans are an important tool of international relations. A total of 13,468 government-to-government loans have been granted between 1970 and 2013, with an average lending volume of $96 million. These elations constitute a network. In a joint project with Brandon Kinne, Dr. Jonas Bunte has been analyzing the political dynamics that characterize the strategic interdependence within this network. Their approach explicitly models the various mechanisms through which the network itself offers information to potential creditors and estimates what effect it has on the extension of new loans. The authors find that political dynamics – not economic factors – strongly influence the decision to extend new loans. For example, they show that creditor governments obtain information from the network that helps assess potential borrowers' political will to repay loans, which – unlike the economic capacity to repay – is an unobserved characteristic. In addition, the network provides creditor governments with information on a prospective borrower’s strategic value. This explains why creditor governments converge on the same set of highly connected debtors.

**Public and Nonprofit Management**  
**Evgenia Gorina, Assistant Professor of Public and Nonprofit Management**

Dr. Evgenia Gorina has recently started working on a project that examines fiscal implications of annexation in American cities. Though annexations are often pursued to increase revenues by expanding the tax base, physical expansion also means an increased demand for public services and a resulting increase in government expenditures. The project focuses on the role of revenue authority and revenue structure in predicting fiscal effects of annexation. The models show that municipal annexation does have a potential for positive effects on local fiscal condition, but these
effects diminish when a municipality has a limited revenue generating authority or does not make an appropriate revenue arrangement to diversify revenues away from property tax.

Another recent project of Dr. Gorina and her colleague from Tulane University reexamines the effects of school finance reforms on spending inequality across the U.S. The project focuses on the interaction of court-ordered and legislative reforms with state-level tax and expenditure limitations (TELs) that apply to school districts. By carefully classifying TELs, the researchers intend to show that some TELs were more effective in limiting spending than others and that TELs reinforced the reform effects by restricting spending in affluent school districts. This research should inform policy design and education finance research by emphasizing the interaction of the school finance reforms with the fiscal institution of TELs in reducing spending inequality among school districts.

Concurrently, Dr. Gorina is revising several manuscripts. Among them is a paper on local government pension funding to be resubmitted to Public Budgeting and Finance; a paper on the effects of community, and organizational and national belonging on political participation to be submitted to the European Journal of Population; and a paper on the economic outcomes of Central Asian migration in Russia to be submitted to the Journal of Development Studies. In addition, she is currently working with survey data of the International City and County Management Association and data from Annual Surveys of Government Finances of the U.S. Census Bureau to construct a dataset for two new projects that will study the effects of the form of municipal government on city spending and pension funding before and after the Great Recession.