The School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences  
Program Research Activity Newsletter  
March, 2015  

**Criminology**  
**John Worrall, Professor of Criminology**  
Dr. John Worrall is working with two criminology graduate students, Zachary Powell and Michele Meitl, on a study designed to answer the question, “Do federal law enforcement consent decrees reduce use of force and civil rights violations over the long term?” A panel data analysis will be conducted, which is typical for data containing repeated observations on the same units (in this case police departments). The analysis uses data from the federal courts’ “PACER” (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) database and involves pulling records of all use of force/civil rights violations filed against agencies that are under or have gone under consent decrees, going back to 1990.

The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, passed following the 1991 Rodney King beating in Los Angeles, gave the U.S. Department of Justice authority to sue any police agency in the U.S. if it displays a “pattern and practice” of using excessive force and/or violating people’s civil rights. This compels offending police departments, under what is called a “consent decree,” to correct their inappropriate practices. Twenty-two cities around the U.S. have since entered into consent decrees with the Justice Department. Several are currently under consent decrees; several others have exited consent decrees. To exit a consent decree, the agency must satisfy a number of requirements. Researchers have not, however, explored whether consent decrees have lasting effects—effects that last well after the Justice Department parts ways with a previously offending agency.

**Economics**  
**Daniel Arce, Professor of Economics**  
In “Indirect Ethics and Backdoor Bailouts: The Case of AIG,” Daniel Arce (University of Texas at Dallas) and Laura Razzolini (Virginia Commonwealth University) assess the ethics of the U.S. government’s indirect bailout of the bank counterparties of American International Group (AIG) during the 2008 financial crisis. In particular, they focus on the government’s policy that AIG pay investment bank counterparties 100 cents on the dollar for collateralized debt swaps held with AIG. When the indirect bailout is jointly compared with a counterfactual where the government directly bails out the banks, subjects judge the indirect bailout to be far more unethical. On the other hand, when the two scenarios are judged separately, subjects consider a direct bailout of banks to be more unethical. This suggests that ethical judgments of indirect versus direct action exhibit a type of preference reversal that is dependent upon whether the
evaluation mode is joint or separate. Such preference reversals raise the issue of the extent to which ethical judgment takes place with respect to subjects’ preexisting moral constructs, or if instead moral criteria are constructed within the context of eliciting ethical judgment. Moreover, if ethical judgments are not stable across evaluation modes, then either subjects are applying different ethical principles in the separate and joint treatments, or they are unable to apply the same principle uniformly over the treatments. Insidiously, organizations that understand these results can hide ethically dubious actions from the public eye via indirect action.

Geospatial Information Sciences
Denis Dean, Dean of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences and Professor of Geospatial Information Sciences
Dr. Denis J. Dean, Dean of EPPS, still tries to find time to work with students and publish in the scientific literature. He recently completed a project involving Vaishnavi Thaker, a PhD student from India, and Neeraj Sirdeshmukh, a former Bachelors and Master’s student who graduated last semester. This project investigated a common problem encountered in commercial geographic information system (GIS) software packages. The algorithms used in these systems can produce incorrect results when the software is used to find the least costly path to follow when you are planning a route cross country. For example, suppose you need to build a new road that connects a manufacturing plant to an existing road. GIS can be used to find the least costly route for that new road, but there can be a problem. Suppose that the new road had to cross some thin linear feature like stream, and the cost of crossing that stream is very high – you may need to build a bridge, or place culverts in the stream, or some such. Under these conditions, it is possible for existing commercial GIS software to produce misleading results that do not accurately reflect the stream crossing costs.

Dr. Dean and his students developed an alternative approach that overcomes this problem in commercial GIS software, and tested their technique on real-world data from the U.S. Geological Survey. They found that their approach produces realistic results where the standard technique fails, and that their approach does not take any longer to find its solutions than does the existing technique. The results of their study have been accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of Transactions in GIS.

Political Science
Banks Miller, Assistant Professor of Political Science
Dr. Banks Miller is working with a colleague Dr. Brett Curry (Georgia Southern University) on a new project, “Judicial Specialization and the Diffusion of Precedent”. Most federal judges are generalists, meaning that they make decisions in a wide variety of cases. Yet some federal judges specialize, writing opinions disproportionately in particular areas of law. Their research seeks to understand whether these specialist judges are more (or less) influential than their generalist
peers. Specifically, Dr. Miller and Dr. Curry seek to uncover whether or not opinions written by judges who are subject matter specialists are cited more frequently across the Courts of Appeals and in law reviews than those authored by their non-specialist counterparts. The authors found that specialists are no more influential than generalist when the audience is other judges, but they are substantially more likely to be cited in law reviews than are generalists. These findings will serve to underscore the disconnect others have observed between the judiciary and law reviews by showing that law reviews represent a truly different audience, and that citation to judicial opinions in that audience is guided by factors unique from those that are pertinent to federal court judges as they author their own decisions.

**Public Policy and Political Economy**

**Rubia Valente, Post-Doc Research Associate in Public Policy and Political Economy**

**Jennifer Holmes, Professor of Public Policy and Political Economy**

Dr. Rubia Valente and Dr. Jennifer Holmes are working on a study of Brazilian protests, “Vamos para Rua! – Taking to the Streets Protest in Brazil”. The unprecedented protests that unfolded in June 2013, in Brazil, surprised even the most observant Brazilian scholars. A local conflict over the public transportation fare hike took an unexpected turn and ignited a massive nationwide mobilization. These protests have perplexed many because Brazil is not currently experiencing the context of economic or political instabilities that have been associated with protests in other countries around the world. Using data from the World Value Survey, the authors developed a general analysis highlighting individual factors that were significant in explaining protest participation among Brazilians in 1991 and 2006 to shed light on possible indicators that could have predicted the recent mobilizations. Most of the studies on Latin American protest focus on resistance to neoliberal economic policies or responses to institutional weakness. In contrast, they found a change from materialism to post-materialism values, as theorized by Inglehart (1971), could more fully explain the recent protests in Brazil. The findings demonstrate that post-materialist values are a significant explanatory force in determining political participation in Brazil.

**Public Affairs and Sociology**

**Bobby Alexander, Associate Professor of Sociology**

Dr. Bobby Alexander is currently using critical ethnography to study Mexican immigrant women's identities and social relationships who go to church. He is particularly interested in their interactions with church authorities and other local social groupings (i.e., the family, workplaces, and community organizations) that are institutionally self-empowering. These include leadership roles and/or forms of engagement, along with assimilation into U.S. society. His research shows how this engagement is fostering a different model of women's equality and rights, drawing from the essence of concepts of women's rights found in classical feminist theory. Additionally, it challenges the exclusion of women from traditional religions and
cultures, who include many women of color. Dr. Alexander's work also draws from the literature on religion and development and religion and globalization devoted to the global South, and from his own multi-sited field research in Mexico and the U.S.

**Texas Schools Project**  
**Rodney J. Andrews, Assistant Professor of Economics and Director of the Texas Schools Project**

The earnings premium associated with having a college degree has been increasing over time. The gap in college completion rates between students in the top quartile of the income distribution and the bottom quartile of the income distribution has grown from 39 percentage points to 51 percentages points between the early 1980s and the turn of the 21st century. Indeed, there is research that suggests that the earnings premium associated with college explains a large portion of the rise in income inequality over the past several decades. Taken together, the above facts suggest that policies that support the college attainment of economically disadvantaged students is of the utmost importance.

In ongoing research, Dr. Rodney Andrews – along with his coauthors Scott Imberman from Michigan State University and Michael Lovenheim from Cornell University – are examining the effects of the University of Texas at Austin’s Longhorn Opportunity Scholarship program and Texas A&M-College Station’s Century Scholarships program. Both of which are targeted recruitment and support programs enacted by Texas’s flagship institutions that focus on Texas high schools with a high concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The programs offer financial aid and a suite of services – e.g., tutoring and smaller classes – that endeavor to help students succeed in a challenging collegiate environment.

There is evidence that suggests that students at higher quality colleges graduate at higher rates and have higher earnings than students at colleges of lower quality. Using quasi-experimental empirical methods, Dr. Andres and his colleagues are evaluating the effects of these targeted programs on the academic and labor market outcomes of low income students. Preliminary estimates show that the programs have an effect on college choice, choice of major, and earnings. The authors’ work suggests that these programs provide low income students the opportunity to avail themselves of the benefits offered by high quality colleges and universities.

Results from this study have been presented at the Southern Economic Association annual meeting in November 2014 and the annual meeting of the Association for Education Finance and Policy in February of 2015. This work will also be presented at the Institute for Research on Poverty’s Summer Workshop at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This work is funded by the Greater Texas Foundation and The Russell Sage Foundation.