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Letter from the Department Chair

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Letter from the Department Chair

LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

April 16, 2010

Dear Readers:

Welcome to *Res Publica's* Volume XV. Fifteen years is long enough to suggest that the value of student research is no fluke in the Department of Political Science. Our students' commitment to creating new knowledge is clearly an established part of our institutional culture. And to that, all I can say is Bravo!

The papers in this volume are remarkable for their depth and breath. From Bloomington's Westside to the Caucasus, from Afghanistan and Kazakhstan to Congress, the papers escort the reader from the local to the global and back. Readers will encounter a variety of substantive issues including the careful methodological question of how cell versus land-line telephone service impacts survey data and the broader debate over the role played by gender in the representation of women and gender-related legislation in the United States.

This year's effort also confirms a trend that emerged two years ago of publishing works produced by students in advanced courses taken before the senior seminar. Both Samantha Kaplan and Sara Ghadiri's papers are of this sort. They suggest that the culture of critical thinking and original research is spreading by seeping down into the curriculum taken by third and even second year students.

The addition of the three top micro-essays on John Locke's theory of toleration from last fall's Modern Political Thought class is unique to this volume. Editors Erin Strauts and Emily Vock felt that the essays would offer some representation of the purely political theory part of the curriculum, which as a required course taken in preparation for the seminar is not frequently covered in the journal. Explorations on the nature and proper bounds of toleration are classic material for theory papers, and no subject better confirms the fact that ideas have consequences. Locke's idea was in part responsible for helping Europe out of a centuries-long vicious cycle of religious war. Political scientists have long argued that institutions matter, but in building them, clearly ideas matter first. The essays use the claim-objection-rejoinder format to consider whether Locke's formulation of toleration theory still works for multicultural nations today.

Erin, Emily, and the associate editors have worked hard on this volume. They, and all the student authors, deserve our appreciation. The fruits of their labor are now ours to ponder and enjoy.

Sincerely,

Jim Simeone
Department Chair