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Letter from the Department Chair

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Letter from the Department Chair

LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

The student-produced *Res Publica* has become such a part of our lives that we almost take it for granted. Almost. But when we read top-notch articles such as those you will find here we are reminded of just how much work the students have invested in conceiving, researching, and writing these explorations of timely and even vital questions, and we see how much talent is on display here. This work is not taken for granted. The students who have contributed to and produced this issue of our long-running journal are justifiably proud of their accomplishments, and we on the faculty hope you will take the time to read their work.

This issue of *Res Publica* offers several articles on representation, broadly defined. This should not surprise, given that our students are busy discovering their places in the world, and those activities lead them to think much about how they and their peers are finding their voices and presence among policy makers in the U.S. and abroad. In an increasingly connected world, both the velocity of ideas and the scope of participatory venues have grown. Nicole Jovicevic's article about online activism probes some of these forms of participation in ways that raise interesting questions about the expanding possibilities of linking virtual and in-person involvements. Examining representation in more institutionalized settings, Lindsey Alpert analyzes malapportionment in the U.S. Senate and its possible effect on legislative productivity, and Molly Willeford studies women in Sub-Saharan Africa as a way to explore similarities and differences across descriptive and substantive representation.

A pair of papers report on how European countries are dealing with external pressures in a constantly changing world. Preslav Mantchev writes on Belarus and its ironic use of centralization as a tool to defend itself from Moscow's resurgent territorial assertiveness. Maggie Zeisset reflects on the recent loss of Nordic openness to immigrants, especially Muslims. These are both timely essays that thoughtfully demonstrate the vibrancy of the international side of our department's programs.

Madalyn Browning-Perry studies Congress. Her paper updates an influential piece of 1990s scholarship on committees to show how, despite polarization, important committees still reflect diverse points of view. This finding may not be sufficient to rescue Congress from its low public approval ratings, but it makes a fine read nonetheless.

As we look forward to our new political research seminars this coming autumn, we are excited about the possibilities for students to enroll in multiple venues where they can potentially produce work of this quality on more than one topic. As *Res Publica* enters its third decade, we remain as confident as ever that students will continue to seize these expanded opportunities, add to our collective understanding of how the world works, and continue to make us proud.

A big thanks and congratulations to Melissa Guzmán and Austin Aldag for shepherding this 21st issue of *Res Publica* from idea to print, and to their two associate editors, Sam Kasten and Molly Willeford. Bravo!

Greg Shaw