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## Letter from the Chair of Political Science

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## Letter from the Chair of Political Science

### Letter from the Department Chair

Each spring, over the past twenty nine years, Political Science students at Illinois Wesleyan have published *Res Publica*, our journal of undergraduate Political Science research. It is a rare pleasure to welcome you to this year's edition. *Res Publica* is entirely written, edited, and produced by students. Its unbroken record of publication over twenty nine years (and counting) is a testament to the tradition of academic seriousness, intellectual curiosity, and analytical capability nurtured by the department. I would like, at the outset, to congratulate and thank our authors and editors for their own commitment to this tradition, and for the effort and attention to detail that they have brought to maintaining it. Without their work, this letter would be pointless.

The questions we ask as social scientists are ineluctably informed by, and generally seek to illuminate, the socio-political conditions, and the normative pre-occupations of the day in the spaces we occupy. The editors of this issue of *Res Publica* have assembled an intriguing set of papers that probe these conditions in domestic and international settings. From a variety of perspectives, and in a variety of locations, these authors are all concerned with relationships between political engagement, the quality of citizenship, and the obligations of public authorities. The results are thought-provoking. In an analysis of narco politics in Mexico reminiscent of Charles Tilly's notion of the state as a protection racket, Itzel Mendoza shows how critical social services might come to be provided by criminal organizations when the state lacks probity and capacity. More locally, Maya Patterson asks whether the ability of poor citizens to access fundamental social entitlements such as food assistance might affect their propensity to participate in the political process. In a similar vein, Cade Herrmann examines the dynamics of education funding at the state level, with a particular focus on standardized tests as a metric of educational potential (and therefore reasonable investment). Finally, Zoe Hovde examines how it is that the Cuban-American community, increasingly diverse in both socio-economic and generational terms, manages through strategic political action to maintain a domestic position of political privilege over other ex-pat communities and also ensure that the U.S. government maintains a debilitating economic embargo against Cuba.

In a broad sense, all of these papers address classical, and incessantly contested, questions about the social contract in modern polities. And, while methodologically diverse, they do so through close and careful analysis of empirical data. As such, they are examples of engaged and rigorous social science scholarship. It is a mark of their excellence that, even as they answer particular empirical questions, they raise new social-theoretic questions for debate. The authors have every reason to be proud of their work.

In a similar vein, our editors, Chase Beitz and Melinda Burgin, are to be commended for assembling such an engaging collection of ideas and arguments. We appreciate that this has consumed long hours of their already busy schedules. I am happy to assure them that they have done marvelous work, and it was all worth it. I hope that, as you read this issue of *Res Publica*, you will join me in congratulating all those involved in producing it.

William A. Munro  
 Betty Ritchie-Birrer and Ivan Birrer Ph.D Professor  
 Chair, Department of Political Science