2016 Senior Thesis Abstracts

Defying Public Opinion: Understanding the Motivations of House Republicans During President Clinton’s Impeachment
Deepa Devanathan

People often view the impeachment of a president as the height of conflict between the president and Congress. In 1998 the House of Representatives impeached President William Jefferson Clinton. For the most part, other than a couple of members in both parties, members of the House voted along party lines on the two articles of impeachment that passed. Based on the clear division between the parties it is tempting to assume that the American public was also divided, Republicans versus Democrats, on the impeachment. On the contrary, public opinion clearly supported Clinton. This begs the question of why House Republicans, specifically moderates, would vote to impeach Clinton? Also, were the same people driving both the conservative movement leading up to the impeachment and the Clinton impeachment or were the two exclusive? This paper analyzes those two questions and it is my argument that social conservatives who led the conservative movement forced moderates to impeach Clinton by announcing for impeachment early and by removing all other choices, such as censure. This paper is one of the first attempts at understanding why moderate Republicans defied public opinion for such a significant vote, which leads to broader implications for congressional behavior and party organization.

The Separation of Powers and Significant Policy Change Following United States Supreme Court Decisions
Nicole Jordan

This paper aims to answer the following question: to what degree, and under what conditions, does the Supreme Court write opinions that cause significant policy change? To answer this question, I examine the number of Court decisions in a year, from 1945-2004, that caused significant policy change. Based on the separation of powers, I argue the Court will write fewer decisions that cause significant social change when it is ideologically distant from Congress, the president, or the public. I find support for my hypotheses and conclude congressional and presidential preferences affect the frequency with which the Court writes decisions that cause significant policy change. I also find ideologically moderate Courts write a larger number of decisions resulting in significant policy change.

Influencing the Influencers: Does Funding from Foreign Governments Affect American Think Tank Research?
Aryeh Mellman

Think tanks in the United States play a crucial role in formulating public policy. These institutions use their significant resources to sway the American people while also working with policymakers to implement their preferred policies. Recently, reports alleging that think tanks have agreed to support certain policies in exchange for funding from foreign governments have called into question think tanks’ independence, and raised questions of the U.S. government being indirectly influenced by foreign interests. While previous literature has addressed the influence of think tanks on government policy, my
research focuses on forces that exert influence on think tanks. By means of an observational study conducted with original research on think tank funding and research output, this paper examines whether think tanks are truly influenced by foreign funding, and finds that the results are mixed, showing at a weak influence at best.

**Are Sex Scandals Masculinizing? An Examination of the Relationship Between Gender and Political Scandals**

Nicole Williamson

Previous research on gender and political scandals has found that voters rank female legislators who have engaged in a sex scandal less negatively than male legislators who engage in similar sex scandals. This study seeks to explain this phenomenon by incorporating gender and candidate trait research. Trait research suggests that voters view political office as requiring masculine traits, and that voters evaluate more masculine politicians more favorably. In this study I test whether a sex scandal, a typically masculine act, is masculinizing for female candidates, which would explain less negative evaluations of female candidates than male candidates after a sex scandal – female candidates were slightly aided by unexpected masculinity. Using a survey experiment with hypothetical legislators, I find that female legislators involved in a sex scandal are viewed as more masculine than females not involved in a scandal. This masculinity may explain why female legislators tend to fare better than males following a sex scandal.