Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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M.A. in Political Science, December, 2017, University of Missouri-St. Louis
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Party Blight in Rural Missouri: Causes and Consequences of Local Organizational Decline

Date: June 24, 2019
Time: 1:00 -2:30 pm
Place: Social Sciences Building 344 (Political Science Conference Room)

Abstract
Political parties are fundamental institutions to representative democracies, and they have been an integral part of the American political fabric since the early 1800s. Changes in the political landscape have pressed social scientists to engage in a now long-running academic debate as to whether political parties are in a state of reform and adaptation in the modern campaign environment, or if they are in an overall state of decline. While there has been considerable attention given to national and state party organizations, very little is known about how local party organizations are faring in the modern campaign environment. This dissertation examines the state of local political parties in rural communities in Missouri, areas that have become more ideologically polarized in recent election cycles. This study uses a mixed-methods research design; multiple forms of data have been collected from public documents and archives, personal interviews, and participant-observation. This study seeks to address the questions, are local political parties in rural Missouri in a state of decline? What are the causes of local party decline in rural communities? Is there a relationship between local party strength and electoral outcomes in rural communities? Finally, what are the implications and consequences of local party decline in rural communities? This study finds that in some rural communities, local party organizations have become so inactive as to be functionally non-existent. This dissertation introduces the idea of “party blight” to describe a process of organizational exodus from rural communities, and it further details the emergence of “filler organizations” in rural counties where local parties have become latent.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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