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

Eric B. Royer

M.A. in Political Science, December, 2015, University of Missouri, St. Louis
M.A. in International Relations, May, 2010, Webster University
B.A. in Political Science, August, 2008, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

Does Truth Promote Peace?
Toward a Greater Understanding of Truth Commissions as Transitional Justice Mechanisms

Date: November 22, 2017
Time: 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Place: 344 SSB

Abstract
This study explores the societal effects of transitional justice in post-conflict situations. In particular, an emphasis is placed on exploring whether truth commissions exhibit a positive or negative effect on key indicators, including democracy, human rights, economic development, and the durability of peace. Truth commissions have been popularized as an attractive peacebuilding mechanism and are now suggested in virtually every contemporary post-conflict situation. Three central research questions are examined. First, do truth and reconciliation commissions “work”? In other words, are they associated with a reduction in communal violence and improvements in democratic institutions, human rights protections, and economic development? Second, must truth commissions be coupled with transitional justice mechanisms that are retributive in nature in order to exhibit a positive societal effect? For example, if policymakers couple a truth commission with a human rights criminal tribunal, will this increase its efficiency and societal effect? Third, and finally, are top-down approaches to transitional justice, such as truth commissions, becoming increasingly obsolete in the 21st century in comparison to more localized, traditional dispute resolution mechanisms? A mixed-method approach is used to explore these three central research puzzles. The quantitative section of this study uses a dataset on 1,100 transitional justice mechanisms between 1970 and 2010 to examine the first two research questions. The qualitative aspect of this study uses Rwanda’s gacaca courts as a case study to explore the effectiveness of bottom-up versus top-down approaches to transitional justice. These community-based courts were the face of Rwanda’s ambitious transitional justice project and charged with investigating all crimes committed during the genocide. To assess their effect, survey and interview data are used to draw connections and an overall picture of public perceptions toward gacaca and other forms of transitional justice in post-genocide Rwanda.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
J. Martin Rochester, Ph.D. (Chair)
Robert Barnidge, Ph.D.
David Kimball, Ph.D.
David Robertson, Ph.D.