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., Public Policy Administration, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2018
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The Public Muse in Congress: The Punctuation of American Federal Arts Policy

Date: Monday, November 6, 2023
Time: 12:00 – 1:00 pm
Place: 347 SSB

Abstract
In 1989, American federal arts policy changed suddenly and drastically when the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) gained unprecedented attention in Congress for controversial grant awards that supported two visual artists. Prior to this, federal arts policy was an insulated subsystem run by experts applying high art aesthetic standards to grantmaking. Informed by punctuated-equilibrium theory (PET), this investigation of congressional rhetoric shows that Republican policy entrepreneurs during this time effectively set a new, more negative tone about federal arts policy by harnessing conservative culture wars messages. The change in tone preceded federal arts policy’s arrival on the broader congressional agenda that resulted in substantive changes to policy, including prohibiting the NEA from supporting “obscene” artwork and fellowships for individual artists, diversifying advisors and grant panelists, restricting types of grant funding, and more. These policy changes effectively addressed the vagueness of the agency’s enabling legislation, introduced a new decision-making paradigm to the grantmaking process, and increased public accountability. The federal arts policy subsystem was punctuated and it’s likely that political polarization, and especially the efforts of Republicans, amplified the macro-political intervention. By the end of the crisis, American federal arts policy had achieved a more democratic partial equilibrium. The punctuation of the American federal arts policy subsystem, especially changes to the policymaking process, continues to define American federal arts policy to this day.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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