The Liberal Arts Program presents

**Liberal Arts Guest Speaker Series**

**More than a Feeling: Personality and Congressional Behavior.**

**Dr. Adam Ramey**

30 November 2014
3:00 – 5:00 pm
Conf. Room 310

**ABSTRACT INFO:**
Political scientists have long considered the primacy of ideology, party affiliation, and constituency preferences in determining how members of the U.S. Congress make decisions. At the same time, psychologists have held that individuals’ ingrained personality traits play a central role in individual decision-making. In this paper, we seek to bridge these literatures by offering a rational-choice based characterization of how personality informs legislator decision-making, independently of policy preferences. Specifically, we draw upon decision-theoretic parameters associated with the “Big Five” personality model in the experimental economics literature to identify how different personality traits affect the legislative behavior — broadly defined — of members of Congress. Using Support Vector Machines (SVM) models to connect linguistic cues in legislator speech with known personality correlates of those cues, we use speeches recorded in the Congressional Record to estimate legislator personality across each of the “Big Five” dimensions. These results in hand, we study how legislators’ personality traits affect their behavior in Congress, focusing on the key tactic of bill sponsorship. Our results show that personality has a strong relationship with legislator behavior — even after controlling for legislator ideology.

**BIO:**
Adam Ramey is an Assistant Professor of Politics at New York University Abu Dhabi. He received his Ph.D. in political science at the University of Rochester in 2010. Adam specializes in the study of American legislative institutions, quantitative methodology, and political psychology. His research focuses on the applications of cutting-edge methodologies to the study of legislative and electoral behavior. He is currently writing a book with Gary Hollibaugh (University of Notre Dame) and Jonathan Klingler (Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse) wherein he and his coauthors develop text-based methods for measuring legislator personality from 1996-present. Using these measures, they examine how legislator personality traits impact the sorts of decisions they make, even after accounting for party and ideological preferences.

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