

**Dr. Ethan Amidon**

**Judith Enyeart Reynolds College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Research  
Symposium**

**Time and Date of Talk: April 25, 12:15-1:15 PM, TBD**

**Title of Talk:** An examination of the county-level political considerations associated with declining reliance on the death penalty from 1990 to 2010.

**Speaker Biography:**

Dr. Amidon's primary area of research focuses on the political, economic, and social considerations associated with the use of punitive punishment practices. More specifically, his research examines the political determinants of historical and contemporary reliance on incarceration and the death penalty. His research also examines racial and ethnic disparities in sentencing. As an example, Drs. Amidon and Jennifer LaPrade recently submitted a report to the Supreme Court of Missouri's Commission on Racial and Ethnic Fairness that examined racial and ethnic disparities in sentencing across Missouri counties from 2010 to 2021. Drs. LaPrade and Amidon have also received funding through the Health Forward Foundation to further investigate the sources of the racial and ethnic disparities that were documented in their initial report.

**Abstract of Talk (150-250 words):**

Theorists have placed considerable emphasis on the role that political factors play in shaping jurisdictional use of the death penalty. However, scholars have yet to empirically examine whether these political explanations account for reliance on this punishment across counties in the United States. Furthermore, empirical research that has examined the political factors associated with the dramatic decline in the use of the death penalty in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has been limited. In order to address these gaps in the literature, this study examines whether the variables derived from three political perspectives are associated with use of death sentences across 2,572 counties in the United States from 1990 to 2010. The results from this study indicate support for the key propositions within the partisan politics, religious fundamentalist sentiment, and economic threat hypotheses. However, in contrast to the results from prior studies, no support was shown for the direct relationship between the size of African American populations and local reliance on the death penalty.

**Interdisciplinarity:**

This study examines a wide variety of political, economic, and social factors that have been found to be associated with the imposition of death sentences across jurisdictions in the United States.