



School of Public Policy
Economics, Political Science, Sociology

**“The Social Construction of Criminal
Offenders and State Policy Responses to
Federal Punishment Directives in the
Tough-on-Crime Era”**

by

Garrick L Percival
University of Minnesota, Duluth

Abstract: In the “tough-on-crime” era Congress has used the power of the federal purse to diffuse through the U.S. federalist system stringent punishments on people with criminal convictions. Yet little is known about how political forces affect federally-induced punishments and how they are eventually distributed at the sub-national level. This research places emphasis on the social construction of criminal target groups and tests how social constructions of criminal offenders shape the design of criminal justice policy. An event history analysis of state policy responses to three federal punishment policy directives adopted in the 1990s that stripped felons of particular rights, privileges, and social supports, shows that the extent to which a dominant federal-level political construction of crime that places blame for criminality on the inherent dangerousness and individual failings of the criminal target group is challenged and contested at the state-level, affects the likelihood that states adopt a punishment regime that matches Congress’ punitive policy preferences.

Monday, January 24, 2011
4:00 – 5:00 pm
Owen Hall, Room 106