

Dr. Joseph E. Hower is the recipient of the Harold N. Glassman Distinguished Dissertation Award in the Humanities for his dissertation, “Jerry Wurf, the Rise of AFSCME, and the Fate of American Liberalism, 1947-1981,” which he defended, with Distinction, in July of 2013. Dr. Hower earned his Ph.D. in History, with an emphasis on U.S. History since 1607, American Labor History, Labor and the State in Modern Latin America, and Law and Labor in Modern America. He was mentored by Professor Joseph McCartin.

Dr. Hower’s dissertation explores the political ramifications of the rapid advance of public employee unionization after World War II through a study of Jerry Wurf (1919-1981), organizer, local leader, and eventually national union president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), one of the largest and yet least studied unions in postwar American history. Drawing on union records, personal papers, and a wide range of printed sources, Dr. Hower argued that the growth of unions like AFSCME simultaneously bolstered liberal forces and contributed to the emergence of popular conservatism. Organizing around government workers’ aspirations for equity and dignity, Dr. Hower posits, AFSCME surged to the forefront of a burgeoning public sector labor movement that fought for civil rights for African Americans and comparable worth for women, rebuilt the Democratic Party in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, and reinvigorated class-based, state-centered liberal social and urban policy. One of his referees stated that his dissertation “Dr. Hower’s manuscript is an outstanding piece of not just labor history but of urban and political history as well.”

Dr. Hower is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Southwestern University, and a Visiting Research Associate at the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

The Graduate School is very proud to award Dr. Hower the Glassman Dissertation Award in the Humanities.