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UIS holds first symposium on Lincoln and political science

By **CHRIS DETTRO**

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The University of Illinois Springfield this weekend is serving up a familiar Springfield topic, but with a slightly different twist.

The inaugural Wepner Symposium on the Lincoln Legacy and Contemporary Political Science got under way Friday with six open-to-the-public sessions at UIS's Public Affairs Center. It will conclude today with sessions at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum and the Hall of Representatives at the Old State Capitol.

"The purpose of the symposium is to generate and stir up some new thinking about this very great president," said Matthew Holden Jr., the Wepner Distinguished Professor in Political Science at UIS. "Lincoln has slipped out of political science."

Both Holden's chair and the symposium were made possible by a \$1.2 million unrestricted estate gift from a Springfield couple, Wilbur and Margaret Wepner, longtime supporters of UIS.

"We were looking for the right person to tie Lincoln and political science together," said UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen in opening the symposium. "He (Holden) is the perfect person for this."

The symposium allows political scientists to present recent research related to Abraham Lincoln and to connect the work to the broader discipline of political science.

The first discussion featured Tim Miller, associate professor of political science at UIS; his daughter, Katrina Miller-Stevens of Old Dominion University; and Stephen Skowronek of Yale University.

The Millers' paper argued that Lincoln was a political scientist and used research by Lincoln biographers to back up the claim.

They said that Lincoln had a keen analytical mind and focused on logic, reason, calculation and the law. He also followed the ideals of statesman Henry Clay with a faith in people and the common man.

Lincoln also greatly expanded the power of the presidency.

"Political scientists don't just study, they participate in government," Tim Miller said. Lincoln also was involved in the transition from the Whig Party to the Republican Party.

"We say that he was a political scientist," Miller said. "You bet. Sorta."

"We understand the dangers of the cherry-picking," he added. "They say researchers are able to establish something if that's what they set out to do."

Skowronek argued that Lincoln is not a good role model for presidential leadership.

"There is a lot to like about Lincoln," he said, but just because his qualities and actions were successful in historical context doesn't mean they would be successful in every situation.

"Lincoln transformed America," he said. "Should every president transform America? The compulsion to make a rule out of the exception is wrong-headed and dangerous."

For many politicians, Lincoln "doesn't serve as a guide, he provides justification," Skowronek said. "His ideas are best admired from a distance and in their place."

The symposium continues with a roundtable discussion, "Lincoln Studies and Political Science: What should scholarship now take up?" from 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. today at the ALPLM and "What Shall We Teach the Young?" from 10:15 a.m. to noon at the Old State Capitol. The second session will give participants an opportunity to discuss what there is to be taught on the Lincoln legacy in middle school and high school social studies.

The keynote speaker will be Rogers Smith, a Springfield native and professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

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