Self-governance is a fundamental aspect of democracy, and an essential foundation of societal cooperation and problem-solving in the United States. Vincent and Elinor Ostrom’s seminal research identified important pitfalls and opportunities for self-governance within complex societies (V. Ostrom 1971, 1994) and pinpointed key factors (“design principles”) associated with robust self-governance, specifically in semi-autonomous communities (E. Ostrom 1990, 2010). However, the enabling conditions for broad-scale self-organization and cooperation within complex, highly regulated systems, including government agencies, modern organizations, and partnerships, are poorly understood. It is therefore difficult to engineer self-governing systems (e.g., failures of emergent democracies, collaboratives), or sustain the adaptive, democratic cooperation many societies require (Shivakumar 2005). The current research presentation builds upon Sarker’s (2013) concept of state-reinforced self-governance, and theories of social-ecological resilience and adaptive governance (Chaffin 2016), to discuss preliminary legal design principles, whereby official governments may facilitate self-governance and encourage societal cooperation. Research opportunities and challenges are discussed.

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Presentations are open to the public (see our website for papers). You are welcome to bring your lunch. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu; 812/855–3151).