Christopher Pallas holds a PhD from the London School of Economics, where he was a member of the Centre for Civil Society. A former Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa, he works on issues of civil society, democracy, and global governance, examining how NGO advocacy impacts the representation of low- and middle-income country populations in international policy making. His recent research also examines economic influences on NGO behavior. His work on civil society has been published in Global Governance, Development Policy Review, Review of International Organizations, and elsewhere. The material for this talk comes from his monograph Transnational Civil Society and the World Bank: Investigating Civil Society’s Potential to Democratize Global Governance, published by Palgrave in November 2013.

Talk Abstract: Global governance institutions are widely acknowledged to be undemocratic, privileging the voices and interests of Northern populations over those of the global South. This problem is particularly acute in the area of development policy, in which many Southern populations are not only marginalized during the decision making process but also disproportionately impacted by the resulting policies. A large body of literature suggests that transnational civil society organizations (CSOs) can act to remedy power imbalances within global governance. However, this literature tends to ignore evidence that civil society itself is divided by disparities in power and resources between CSOs. Drawing on evidence from civil society engagement with the World Bank, Dr. Pallas shows how CSO advocacy is heavily influenced by the pre-existing views of professional activists and the financial incentives created by their donors, and how CSOs exploit state power in advancing their policy agendas. He then examines the impacts of these dynamics on relations between groups within civil society and the consequences for the representation of marginalized populations.