

*Princeton School of Public  
and International Affairs*

*Class of 2023*

*Senior Thesis*

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# Senior Thesis Deadlines

**Thesis Proposal Form Due**

**Tuesday, September 20, 2022**

You must submit your thesis proposal form, signed by your advisor, via email to [gharriso@princeton.edu](mailto:gharriso@princeton.edu).

**First Semester Progress Report Due**

**Monday, December 5, 2022**

You must submit your first semester progress report to your advisor and to [gharriso@princeton.edu](mailto:gharriso@princeton.edu).

**Complete Draft**

**Friday, March 3, 2023**

First drafts of all of your chapters are due to your thesis advisor (or earlier per any agreement with your thesis advisor).

**Thesis Due**

**Thursday, April 6, 2023**

An electronic copy must be submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office ([gharriso@princeton.edu](mailto:gharriso@princeton.edu)) by 4:00 p.m. Upload a PDF of your thesis, for archiving at MUDD Library, via the centralized University [Senior Thesis Submission Site](#)

**Oral Examinations**

**May 10<sup>th</sup> – May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

The University's requirement for a senior comprehensive examination is satisfied by an oral examination based upon your thesis.

## Goals

The intent of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs undergraduate curriculum is to prepare students to produce clearly written, well-organized, methodologically sound, and substantively defensible senior theses on a current and significant public policy issue. Every thesis should do the following:

- Identify a knowledge gap or public policy research question;
- Generate a logical and testable hypothesis;
- Identify or collect evidence that will allow you to test your hypothesis;
- Apply appropriate research method(s) to analyze your data;
- Draw evidence-based conclusions from your analysis that apply to the relevant public policy debate.

## Developing your Topic

Your thesis topic must focus on a public policy issue that is of current domestic or international concern. You must pose a specific public policy question framed as a testable hypothesis. The question must be answered, or the hypothesis tested, through the analysis of relevant research evidence. The answer to the policy question should lead to public policy conclusions, that is, they should result in findings that could impact the decisions of policymakers dealing with the issue on which you are focused.

In addition to answering a specific public policy question, a thesis that includes policy recommendations should include an analysis of all policy options and defend the specific recommendation; the defense should deal not only with substantive considerations, but also those of political feasibility and practical implementation.

Your topic should examine a debatable issue that requires evidence for its evaluation. If everyone agrees with you, if there is no scholarly controversy, if the answer is obvious, or if you haven't posed a testable or answerable question, then you do not have a valid topic. A thesis that is not driven by a research question is inherently weak (for example, a thesis that is primarily descriptive or simply compares the relationship between x and y without first posing a question about the relationship). Since such a thesis does not have a question to answer, it does not require any specific evidence or evaluation and has no persuasive authority. Furthermore, it will not be clear to either you or the reader when you have done enough (or the appropriate) research or reached a logical end to the thesis.

For example, you may wish to study nuclear capacity in North Korea. But this is a general topic, not a specific issue for investigation. A research question might be: What is the impact of nuclear developments in North Korea on Chinese-Japanese relations? A hypothesis might be: The nuclear threat from North Korea has

promoted closer Chinese-Japanese relations on a wide range of issues. The hypothesis should specify concepts that are sufficiently concrete that you can identify variation over time or cases. In this example, one would need to define what constitutes measures of the nuclear threat from North Korea and what measures will be used to assess the outcome of closer Chinese-Japanese relations (i.e. diplomatic meetings, positive public opinion, formal agreements).

You should be able to explain to the reader why you are asking your question and why your findings will be of significance or interest – this is your response to the reader who says “So What?” You should tell the reader about the issue that generated your topic, why will it matter if we know the answer to your question, and what your thesis will add to our knowledge.

You will probably begin your search for a thesis topic with only a general area of interest. You must then review scholarly work in this area in order to develop an issue worthy of investigation and to find out whether sufficient primary and secondary sources exist for you to do meaningful research. Consult with your advisor, talk to the librarians, and review the Research Guide at the end of this manual to help you with your research. You should not be overly dependent on information that you will have to develop yourself; while interviews and surveys can greatly improve the quality of a thesis, they both rely on access and availability that may or may not be available when you need it. If you are planning to have interviews or surveys as a central component of your thesis, it is essential to begin early and have a backup plan. During this initial process, it is not unusual for students to revise topics or adjust their research aims.

Only some topics can be explored in the time you have available. It is important that you make sure that the topic is manageable given the deadlines. Again, consultations with your advisor are essential on the issue. You should conduct the bulk of your research during the fall semester so that you are ready to begin writing in January (though we encourage you to do some writing while you are in the research phase). **We strongly advise that you begin submitting drafts of your chapters to your advisor by late January and aim for a complete draft by late February (see current deadlines on page 3.)** During March you should be revising, refining, and rewriting as necessary.

In developing your topic, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my general area of research?
- What have scholars and practitioners written about this topic?
- What is my specific research question and hypothesis?
- What evidence will I need to support my claim or answer my question?
- Where will I find data?
- Do I have confidence in the validity of my sources?
- Which methodologies are appropriate for the relevant analyses of the evidence?
- Can I complete the research and writing by the established deadlines?

## Thesis Organization

A thesis may take many forms. To familiarize yourself with the range of topics, approaches, and formats of theses, you may wish to review [copies of recent prize-winning SPIA theses](#). You may also access The [Senior Thesis Catalog](#), which is a catalog of theses written by seniors at Princeton University from 1926 to the present, and are available at the [Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library](#). While these theses should be of assistance, ultimately your thesis advisor is the person best suited to providing guidance on the appropriate approach for your thesis.

A thesis should begin with an introduction to the public policy issue and its context. This chapter will also provide a brief overview of the full research design – what is your question and how you will answer it in subsequent chapters. A typical thesis will proceed to a discussion of how social science disciplines (economics, politics, history, sociology, psychology) have examined the issues similar to the one you have chosen; this section, the so-called literature review, establishes the broader context for your question by citing the relevant literature. Clearly develop your own argument and state how it differs from existing scholarship – you may be extending on well-known theories, testing their application in new areas, or developing a completely new perspective on the problem. The following chapters typically describe your research findings, which may include presentation of statistical analysis or case studies. All variables and data sources should be clearly documented with appropriate discussion of the sample and estimation procedure in the main text, while an appendix may include details on coding procedures. The final chapter reviews main conclusions and provides broader discussion of the implications of your study where you draw relevant policy conclusions. Again, if you conclude with formal policy recommendations, you will need to include an analysis of the policy options, a substantive defense of your chosen approach based on your research evidence, and a discussion of its political feasibility and practicality.

An excellent senior thesis can be 75 pages or less. No thesis should be longer than 115 pages. Any page after 115 may or may not be read by the second reader. A thesis longer than 115 pages will not be considered for a SPIA thesis prize.

The 115-page limit includes:

- 1) the abstract
- 2) the table of contents
- 3) ancillary material such as tables and charts
- 4) all footnotes

The page limit does *not* include:

- 1) the title page
- 2) the dedication
- 3) the honor code statement
- 4) the bibliography

## Thesis Proposal Form

You must submit a [thesis proposal form](#), signed by your advisor, to the Program Office by the deadline indicated on page 3. The form, which is available in the Program Office, requires a brief description of your topic, your research question, your hypothesis about the evidence, and the nature of the evidence you expect to use.

## First Semester Progress Report Form

You must submit a first [semester progress report form](#) to your advisor and to the Program Office during the first week of December (see deadlines on page 3.) The form, requires 1) a brief description of the proposed thesis (250 - 500 words), 2) a research plan, 3) an outline, and 4) a bibliography. In addition, you will identify your work to date (such as background readings and compilation of evidence) and your progress as measured against your research plan. You should also identify any problems or issues that you have encountered that have or may limit your progress.

## Research Funding

The Princeton School of Public and International Affairs provides thesis research funding for the summer between your junior and senior year and for fall and winter break during your senior year. Research funding opportunities will be available on the University's Student Activities Funding Engine, [SAFE](#). Fall break funding applications will be due in late September. Winter break funding applications will be due in late October.

## Thesis Abstract

You **must** include a Thesis Abstract (**only one-page, single-spaced**) to be placed after your Table of Contents page. It should summarize the topic, the hypothesis or research question, research methods, major themes and concepts, and the findings and general policy conclusions. The abstract should not be confused with your introduction. The abstract is a summary of what you have done, whereas the introduction generally tells the reader what you plan to do.

## Thesis Submission

Graphs and charts should be in color.

An electronic copy must be submitted to the Undergraduate Office, [gharriso@princeton.edu](mailto:gharriso@princeton.edu), by the 4:00 p.m. deadline. Upload a PDF of your thesis, for archiving at MUDD Library, via a centralized University [Senior Thesis Submission Site](#).

## **Lateness Penalties**

**Thursday, April 6, 2023** is the SPIA thesis deadline for the Class of 2023.

One-third of the thesis final grade (e.g. A to an A-) will be deducted for a thesis turned in anytime from 4:01PM, April 6 – 4:00PM, April 10.

An additional one-third of the thesis final grade (e.g. A to a B+) will be deducted for a thesis turned in anytime from 4:01PM, April 10 – 4:00PM, April 14.

The thesis final grade will be reduced by a whole letter grade (e.g. A to a B) if turned in anytime from 4:01PM, April 14 – 4:00PM, April 18.

The final grade would continue to be reduced by one-third for each additional four-day period or fraction of four days that the thesis is late.

## **Emergency Extensions**

The Princeton School of Public and International Affairs will grant extensions only for severe personal illness, accident, or family emergency. The request for an extension must be made in writing. Extensions to a date no later than the University's deadline for submitting senior independent work may be granted by the Director of the Program. After this deadline, extensions may be granted only by the Dean of your residential college.

Under no circumstances will extensions be granted for any reason connected with computer problems. Students should therefore save, backup, print their work in a manner designed to prevent last-minute crises.



## THESIS GRADING STANDARDS

- A The thesis is an outstanding work that has all of the following qualities:
- clear articulation of a research question and hypothesis
  - engages with existing scholarly and policy debates related to topic
  - thorough presentation of evidence to assess hypothesis and compare with alternative explanations
  - demonstrates first-rate research skills and use of sources
  - intellectually original argument that draws clear conclusions based on analysis and links the contribution of research to a policy debate
  - high level organization and writing skill.
- A- The thesis is a well-conceived work of solid scholarship that meets the first three elements of an A thesis, but falls short in the quality of evidence, originality of argument, or effectiveness of the writing expected for an A effort.
- B+ The thesis is informative and generally well-written, but lacks some elements of originality, sophistication or rigor. It may provide thorough assessment of the research question but fail to rigorously engage with scholarly literature and policy debates and neglect to fully consider alternative explanations. Theses in this range must be clearly written, but may be less polished writing and more superficial in the use of sources for evidence.
- B to B- The thesis is competent, but lacks one or more major qualities such as a clear articulation of the issue, a thorough research effort, a persuasive analysis or a fluid writing style.
- C+ to C- The thesis demonstrates substantial flaws in logic, research, writing or understanding of the issue.
- D The thesis demonstrates a significant lack of effort or has substantial defects in quality and clarity.
- F The thesis demonstrates a complete lack of effort and no redeeming qualities.

**Note:** The A+ grade is reserved for work of truly unusual quality. It requires a special, additional letter from the faculty member to the University's Committee on examinations and Standards explaining how the student's work exceeds the high standards established for an A.

An A+ grade is counted in the University's GPA calculations and the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs' honors calculations as if it were an A.

## THESIS GRADING PROCESS

The thesis is graded by the thesis advisor, who is the first reader of the senior thesis, and by a second reader assigned by the Undergraduate Program Office. The grade is calculated as follows:

- If the readers' grades are identical, that is the final grade.
- If the readers' grades differ by one full grade (e.g., A to B) or less, the average grade is the final grade.
- If the readers' grades differ by more than one full letter grade, the two readers consult to determine the final grade; if they are unable to agree, the Faculty Chair of the Undergraduate Program determines the grade.

The Undergraduate Program office will determine any penalty for lateness, which will be included in the grade reported to the Registrar.

### Oral Examinations

The University's requirement for a senior comprehensive examination is satisfied in the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs by an oral examination based on your thesis. Exact dates are found on page 3. While you will be informed of a specific time for your oral defense, you should still plan to be available on these days since there may be last-minute changes. The oral examinations are public; you may invite friends, other faculty members, and relatives to attend.

You are required to make a ten-minute oral presentation, that will be followed by ten minutes of questions and discussion with the examiners. It is important that you carefully prepare your presentation and time it in advance. You can expect to be asked to end your presentation promptly when your ten minutes are up. Your advisor will be one of the examiners, and the other examiner will in most cases be your second reader, but may be another member of the faculty.

Several days prior to the examination, you will receive comments on your thesis from your advisor and second reader. Since both examiners will be familiar with your thesis, your presentation should not summarize your work. Rather, you should be prepared to respond to the major points or criticisms raised in the written comments of your readers. Beyond that, you should use the thesis as a point of departure for a more general discussion of public policy issues. You may, for example, describe why you thought it was important to work on your particular topic, what kind of research on your subject remains to be done by scholars in the field, or what has happened that is relevant to your subject since you completed the thesis.

Some students also address questions raised by the thesis research or review particular issues of methodology or data analysis. Questions by the examiners may then address matters raised in your oral presentation, matters that are relevant to the content of your thesis, or broader public policy issues.

PowerPoint presentations should only be used to display information illustrating the importance of your topic, to demonstrate relevant data in different ways than described in the thesis, or to present data not included in the thesis that allow you to respond to your readers' written comments or criticisms. PowerPoint should not be used simply to summarize what you plan to say in your presentation or to reproduce material from your thesis.

## **Oral Exam Grading**

An **A** grade will be awarded for an oral examination with the following qualities:

- the student exhibits an articulate and confident manner appropriate for public speaking and the formal presentation adheres to the 10-minute limit.
- the formal presentation is well-organized and offers insights that expand on the content of the thesis and are responsive to the written comments of the readers
- the student provides thoughtful, informed responses to the follow-up questions.

Other grades will be awarded in accordance with the degree to which the presentation does not have these qualities.

## **Senior Thesis Prizes**

A thesis that receives a grade of A or higher and a statement of support from both readers (and is within the page limit) may be considered for a Princeton School of Public and International Affairs thesis prize. Prizes are awarded by a specially appointed School faculty committee that weighs the relative merits of all theses under consideration. Prizes are presented at our Class Day ceremony.

## **Multiple Submission Regulation**

Sometimes students wish to include in their thesis material that they produced for another course or for their JP. Please note the University's rule regarding multiple submission of material:

*Under certain conditions, the student may be permitted to rewrite an earlier work or to satisfy two academic requirements by producing a single piece of work, more extensive than that which would satisfy either requirement on its own. In such cases, however, the student must secure, **in writing**, prior permission from each instructor involved.*

Students should complete the [Thesis Multiple Submission](#) form and submit it to the Undergraduate Program Office one month prior to submitting their thesis.

## Manuscript Instructions

Include the Honor Pledge, and your signature on the last page (see below).

Use a 1-inch margin on the left, right, top and bottom.

Double-space all text (except long quotations, footnotes and bibliography).

Number your pages.

Use a 12-point size type and a readable font. Avoid the use of multiple fonts and type sizes (other than footnotes, which may be in a smaller font). Indent paragraphs and avoid paragraphs longer than a page.

Within chapters, use only two levels of headings, either in bold or underlined and placed at the left margin or centered. The primary heading is all caps, the secondary is caps and lower case:

PRIMARY HEADING

Secondary Heading

Number your pages.

Pages should be organized as follows:

Title page (see format on next page)

Second page: Dedications (optional)

Third page: Acknowledgements

Fourth page: Table of Contents

Fifth page: Abstract

Last page: The last page must contain the following form:

This thesis represents my own work in accordance with University Regulations.

*Your signature*

## **Title Page Format**

**Thesis Title**

Student Name

Date

A Senior Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Princeton School of Public and  
International Affairs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

## **Part II**

### ***Writing & Research Assistance; Interviewing & Formatting Guidelines***

## **Writing Advisor**

In addition to your consultations with your thesis advisor, we strongly recommended that you meet regularly with the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs Writing Advisor for assistance in conceptualizing and organizing your thesis, developing your arguments, and reviewing your writing. The SPIA writing adviser can best help you if you meet with them early in (as well as throughout) the process.

## **Principles of Ethical Interviewing**

Princeton University has a legal responsibility to protect all human subjects in research done under University auspices, including that done by students for their independent work. In the context of the kind of research most often done by Princeton School of Public and International Affairs students, that means protection of the rights of respondents or informants interviewed in the course of research.

Your research plans may need the approval of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Human subjects research can encompass surveys, interviews, and questionnaires, but also can involve solely data analysis (no interaction with individuals). You should discuss with your adviser whether your research plan needs to be submitted to the IRB. If you are unsure, please email a synopsis to the IRB: [irb@princeton.edu](mailto:irb@princeton.edu). The "FAQ" section of the [IRB website](#) provides details about what to include in a synopsis. If an activity is human subjects research, IRB approval is required before implementation. The IRB does not grant retroactive IRB approval.

## **Citations and Bibliography**

You must cite your source of any fact or statistic not commonly known as well as the source of any quote, paraphrase or summary of the work, opinions or interpretations of an individual, publication or web site. The Princeton School of Public and International Affairs does not prescribe to any particular citation style. You may follow the guidelines of any generally accepted system of citation as listed below. You should consult with your advisor before making your choice.

Footnote citations must appear on the same page and not at the end.

The bibliography should appear at the end of the thesis. It is NOT necessary to group sources by type of material in your bibliography (i.e. books, newspapers, interviews grouped together). In fact, this makes it more difficult for the reader to trace your sources.

## **Library Research Tips** (as of August 2022)

Start your research early! Talk to your advisor and to librarians about your research!

We encourage you to email Stokes/SPI librarians for a research consultation. The library is located on the lower level of Wallace Hall, and the librarians are available in person or via Zoom.

This section covers library services (librarians and accessing materials), help obtaining data and analyzing it, citing your work, and links to a [Research Guide](#) which will be updated as library services change this year.

### **Librarians at the Stokes Library (lower level, Wallace Hall or ZOOM)**

[Elana Broch](#): Public Policy Librarian (education, census, demography, immigration, research methods)

[Joann Donatiello](#): Population Research (health policy, census, immigration and demography)

[Ameet Doshi](#): Head, Donald E. Stokes Library

[Ofira Schwartz-Soicher](#): Social Sciences Data and Sociology Librarian

### **Firestone Librarians (Subject Specialists)**

[Alain St. Pierre](#): African Studies, World History

[Steve Knowlton](#): African American Studies, American History

[Martin Heijdra](#): Head, East Asian Library

[Bobray Bordelon](#): Economics and Finance

[Fernando Acosta-Rodriguez](#): Latin American and Latino Studies

[David Hollander](#): Law & European Union

[Jeremy Darrington](#): Politics

[Thomas Keenan](#): Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

Check out the [Princeton Research Guides](#) created by Library [subject specialists](#). For example, [Economics and Finance FAQs](#) or [Public Policy Guide](#) from Stokes Library for information on resources for producing a well-researched paper and course-specific research guides for Policy task forces, research seminars, and the Methods Lab.

### **Data and Data Analysis Support**

You may be planning to conduct quantitative analysis for your research project. Once you identified a research question, you should identify a dataset that would be appropriate to answer it. You should start by reading previous literature (articles, books, etc.) about the topic, this will help you find datasets that were used by others to address similar research questions. Consulting a librarian may be helpful and will save you time.

- **How to find a dataset for your research**

- If you are looking for a specific dataset or would like to browse datasets available by topic, check the [Data and Statistical Services Data Catalog](#).



- Please feel free to contact [Ofira Schwartz-Soicher](#), Social Sciences Data and Sociology Librarian, she will gladly assist you finding data.
- [Elana Broch](#), Public Policy Librarian and [Ameet Doshi](#), Head of Stokes Library would also be able to assist you.

Once you have identified a dataset, you should download and prepare it (data wrangling) for analysis, and finally analyze the data, interpret and present the results. The library offers a number of services that could provide support throughout this process.

- **Where to find data analysis support**

- [Stokes Viz Hub](#) offers workshops focusing on data visualization, quantitative and qualitative data analysis and the digital research process. [Data analysis consultations](#) are offered as well. Our consultants are graduate students with research methods and programming expertise. They could advise you on choosing appropriate analytic method and implementing your analysis using R, Stata, Python. Qualitative research methods consultations are available as well.
- [Data and Statistical Services](#) provides experts' advice to students, faculty, and staff on choosing and applying appropriate research methods for your research, the interpretation and presentation of results.
- [Maps and Geospatial Information Center](#) provides access to paper maps, geospatial data, digital maps and geographic information systems (GIS) services. The center also provides research consultation and instruction to all levels of user experience in their facility or in your office or classroom.

### **Access to materials**

[Accessing electronic materials using the library from off-campus using SRA or EZProxy.](#)

[If materials do not exist electronically.](#) you can request items to be digitized by visiting our [catalog](#), searching the item for availability, then click on "Request Pick-up or Digitization" and follow instructions.

### **Research Materials not available at Princeton University Library**

Request books, videos, reports, etc.:

- Try [Borrow Direct](#) to request a book not owned by the Library or checked out to someone else. (BD is a group of Ivy and peer institutions' libraries that loan material to one another.) As of August 1, Borrow Direct is not operating. Check our [Research Guide](#) for updates.

Request Articles:

- [Request an article](#) not owned by the Library using [Article Express](#).

Recommendations for purchase, including data requests

- Contact a [Stokes librarian](#) who will consider purchase of materials based on subject and price.

## Citation/Bibliography Management Software

It is highly recommended that you use software to manage your citations and bibliography. Zotero, Mendeley, and Refworks are citation managers that help you to keep track of the sources you are using and format your references in a style that you choose.

Comparison information on these is available at <https://libguides.princeton.edu/bibman>. **For assistance or questions about citing sources contact the staff at the Stokes Library, (piaprlib@princeton.edu).** The librarians at Stokes Library recommend Zotero ([www.zotero.org](http://www.zotero.org)). Detailed instructions for installing and running Zotero are available at <https://libguides.princeton.edu/Zoteroandwriting>

## Citation Manuals

You can review information on both online and print citation manuals at this link: <http://library.princeton.edu/help/citing-sources>

Several style manuals are available online:

The Chicago Manual of Style

<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/book/ed17/frontmatter/toc.html>

American Psychological Association Style (via Academic Writer)

<http://library.princeton.edu/resource/27650>

The Stokes Library in Wallace Hall has a current copy of the most popular [Style Manuals on the Writing Shelf](#). For legal citation, Stokes has The Bluebook 21st ed., 2020.