Princeton School of Public and International Affairs

Class of 2025

Guide to Senior Independent Work

2024-2025

Table of Contents

Senior Thesis

Senior Thesis Deadlines

Thesis Proposal Form Due   <u>**Friday, September 20, 2024**</u>

You must submit your [thesis proposal form](#), signed by your advisor, via email to gharriso@princeton.edu by **12noon** on Friday, September 20, 2024.

First Semester Progress Report Due   <u>**Monday, December 9, 2024**</u>

You must submit your [first semester progress report,](#) signed by your advisor, via email to gharriso@princeton.edu by **12noon** on Monday, December 9, 2024.

Complete Draft   <u>**Monday, March 10, 2025**</u>

A complete draft of your thesis is due to your thesis advisor and to gharriso@princeton.edu by **12noon** on Monday, March 10, 2025 (or earlier per any agreement with your thesis advisor).

Thesis Due   <u>**Friday, April 4, 2025**</u>

An electronic copy must be submitted to gharriso@princeton.edu by **12:00noon.** Upload a PDF of your thesis for archiving at MUDD Library via the centralized University [Senior Thesis Submission Site.](#)

Oral Examinations   <u>**May 7 – May 8, 2025**</u>

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

Ambitions

The undergraduate major offered by the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) is a multidisciplinary liberal arts major designed for students who are interested in public service and becoming leaders in local, state, or national government, international organizations, non-profits, and non-governmental organizations. The curriculum is flexible and draws on theoretical foundations, real world cases, and analytical tools of multiple affiliated disciplinary departments and SPIA's practitioner faculty to emphasize the myriad ways that public policy serves communities and their needs.

Students may take classes in and conduct independent research on a wide range of international and domestic topics, including democratic backsliding and human rights abuses in authoritarian regimes; access to health care and education in refugee communities and forced migration settlements; technology innovation in the Global South; poverty, policing, and mass incarceration in the United States; military and security policy, environmental policy, alongside dozens of other topics.

Our faculty come from anthropology, civil and environmental engineering, computer science, economics, ecology and evolutionary biology, history, mechanical and aerospace engineering, politics, public policy, psychology, and sociology. We also have many career public servants, political appointees, or other practitioners, who teach courses for us and advise senior theses. Their input is essential for exposure to real-world challenges and perspectives on policy needs and implications, and for making links between the academic literature and practical applications of public policy.

The SPIA senior thesis differs from other departmental or disciplinary theses in two ways. The first is the necessary addition of a policy-related discussion, impact, or recommendation. Where a thesis takes the form of a traditional research paper (e.g. prevalence of voter suppression in the last election), it is expected that at least one chapter will focus on the relevance to policy (e.g. a discussion of existing state or local policies that enabled or prevented voter suppression).

The second is that there is no typical SPIA senior thesis. The range of questions SPIA majors are interested in and methods they employ are matched by the breadth of scholarly and policy expertise of SPIA thesis advisors. Whether the thesis is a hypothesis-driven empirical analysis that engages deeply with the scholarly literature or is centered on the assessment of a policy, it is still expected to be an intellectually rigorous and original analysis of a question or an argument.

An excellent SPIA thesis will be well organized, clearly written, and:

- Focus on a testable original research question in an area related to public policy; or assess or make an argument for or against a policy or set of policies; or provide the context, implications, and effects of public policy or program
- Include a sophisticated empirical and evidence-based analysis of a hypothesis or an argument

- Include a comprehensive review of academic or other literature and reports relevant to the topic, program, or policy
- Apply appropriate research method(s) to analyze relevant data or policies
- Draw evidence-based conclusions from the analysis that apply to the relevant public policy debate

Developing your Topic

Focus:

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 and/or an argument. The question must be answered, or the hypothesis/argument 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 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 or an argument is inherently weak (e.g., 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/argument might be: The nuclear threat from North Korea has promoted closer Chinese-Japanese relations on a wide range of issues. The hypothesis/argument should specify concepts that are sufficiently concrete to allow you to identify variation over time or across 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 and to whom 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.

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 on this topic?
- What is my specific research question and hypothesis/argument?
- What type of 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?

Getting Started:

You will probably begin your search for a thesis topic with only a general area of interest. You must then review the literature in this area 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 our 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/specify 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 and the Stokes Librarians 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 a complete draft is due to your advisor by early March** (see current deadlines on page 3). During March you should be revising, refining, and rewriting as necessary.

Thesis Advising

Your thesis advisor will serve as your main sounding board and guide for your thesis. It is important to select an advisor who is a good match with your working style, and it is equally important to set expectations early on in the advising

relationship. Thesis advisor evaluations are available in the Undergraduate Program Office (114 Robertson Hall) during business hours.

When meeting with potential thesis advisors, discussing the following points will help you understand what kind of working relationship you'll have with your advisor:

- Discuss methodology you intend to use for the thesis, and your level of familiarity/comfortability with this method.
- What is your and their preferred method of communication?
- Discuss a meeting schedule that works for both you and your potential advisor (For example: bi-weekly in the fall semester and weekly in the spring)
- How does your potential advisor provide feedback? Do they provide line-by-line feedback or general points?
- Is your potential thesis advisor CITI certified and able to serve as a PI for an IRB protocol, where relevant and necessary?

If you have trouble finding and/or communicating with your thesis advisor, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Undergraduate Program Office (UPO).

Other resources to help with your senior thesis journey are our UPO academic advisors, the SPIA writing advisors, Stokes Librarians and more. Please review resources at the end of this guide, or reach out to the UPO for more information.

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.

For the Class of 2025, Fall break funding applications will be due Thursday, September 26, and winter break funding applications will be due Sunday, November 17. Funding is reviewed and approved by the SPIA Curriculum Committee.

Thesis Organization

A thesis may take many forms. To familiarize yourself with the range of topics, approaches, and formats of theses, you may 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 1929 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.

General organization:

- Title page:

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.

- Second page:
  - Dedications (optional)

- Third page:
  - Acknowledgements

- Fourth page:
  - Table of Contents

- Fifth page:
  - 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/argument, 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.

- Introduction:
  - 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 or argument and how

you will answer or address it in subsequent chapters.

- Literature review:
  - A typical thesis will proceed to a discussion of how social and natural science disciplines (economics, politics, history, sociology, psychology, environmental studies, etc.) have examined the issues similar to the one you have chosen and establishes the broader context for your question by citing the relevant literature. Government, nonprofit, or NGO reports and analyses may also be relevant to your topic and argument. 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.

- Research findings:
  - 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. Graphs and charts should be in color.

- Conclusion:
  - The final chapter reviews main conclusions and provides broader discussion of the implications of your analysis or argument 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.

- Last page: Honor Code
  - The last page must contain the Honor Code with your signature:

    "This thesis represents my own work in accordance with University regulations."

    Your signature

<u>An excellent senior thesis can be 75 pages or less. No thesis should be longer than 115 pages.</u> 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 table of contents
2) the abstract
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

Manuscript Instructions

For purposes of consistency in formatting, we recommend:

- numbering your pages
- use 1-inch margins on the left, right, top, and bottom
- use a 12-point size type and a readable font (avoid the use of multiple fonts and type sizes)
- indent paragraphs and avoid paragraphs longer than a page.
- double-space all text (except long quotations, footnotes, and bibliography
- including the Honor Pledge, and your signature on the last page (see below).

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:

<u>PRIMARY HEADING</u>

<u>Secondary Heading</u>

Thesis Milestones

Thesis Proposal Form

You must submit a [thesis proposal form](), signed by your advisor, to the Undergraduate Program Office ([gharriso@princeton.edu]()) by the deadline indicated on page 3. The form, which is available on the [Program Office's website](), requires a brief description of your topic, your research question/argument, 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,]() signed by your advisor and emailed to the Undergraduate Program Office ([gharriso@princeton.edu]()) in early

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
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.

Complete Draft Thesis

You must submit your complete draft thesis to your advisor, cc'ing Georgette Harrison (gharriso@princeton.edu), in early March.

Thesis Submission

12pm (noon) on Friday, April 4, 2025 is the SPIA thesis deadline for the Class of 2025.

An electronic copy must be submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office (gharriso@princeton.edu) by the 12:00 p.m. (noon) deadline. Upload a PDF of your thesis for archiving at MUDD Library via a centralized University Senior Thesis Submission Site.

Lateness Penalties and Grace Periods

Any senior who meets the deadlines for the first three thesis milestones (as outlined below) will be granted a 3-day grace period on the thesis due date (i.e. we will waive the late penalty). Students are still encouraged to regard the thesis due date as the official deadline and to consider the grace period as cover for unanticipated delays during the final stretch leading up to submission. All materials must be submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office (gharriso@princeton.edu) for official submission. Please copy your thesis adviser on all communications to the UPO.

1. Senior Thesis Proposal form due by **12pm (noon) on Friday, 9/20/2024**
2. First Semester Progress Report due by **12pm (noon) on Monday, 12/9/2024**
3. Complete Draft due by **12pm (noon) on Monday, 3/10/2025**

One-third of the thesis final grade (e.g. A to an A-) will be deducted for a thesis turned in anytime from 12:01PM, April 4 – 12:00PM, April 8.

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 12:01PM, April 8 – 12:00PM, April 12.

The thesis final grade will be reduced by a whole letter grade (e.g. A to a B) if turned in anytime from 12:01PM, April 12 – 12:00PM, April 16.

For those to whom a grace period has been granted, your thesis will be due by 12noon on Monday, April 7:

One-third of the thesis final grade (e.g. A to an A-) will be deducted for a thesis turned in anytime from 12:01PM, April 7 – 12:00PM, April 11.

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 12:01PM, April 11 – 12:00PM, April 15.

The thesis final grade will be reduced by a whole letter grade (e.g. A to a B) if turned in anytime from 12:01PM, April 15 – 12:00PM, April 19.

In either instance, 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 <u>only</u> 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 Faculty Chair of the Undergraduate Program. After this deadline, extensions may be granted only by the Dean of your residential college.

<u>Under no circumstances will extensions be granted for any reason connected with computer problems</u>. 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:

- an intellectually innovative, sophisticated, and original analysis that draws clear evidence-based conclusions and links the findings to a policy debate
- high level organization and writing skill
- rigorously engage with existing scholarly, professional, and policy debates related to topic
- clear articulation of a research question and hypothesis and/or argument
- thorough presentation of evidence to assess hypothesis and/or argument and compare with alternative explanations

A-   The thesis is a well-conceived work of solid scholarship that has a clear question, hypothesis and/or argument and is well organized yet lacks the quality of evidence, originality, 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 a thorough assessment of the research question, but fails to rigorously engage with scholarly literature and policy debates, and neglects 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

Given the range of appropriate SPIA senior theses, topics, and questions, the grading guideline is meant to orient readers toward a set of expectations rather than dictating a strict rubric since not every thesis will evaluate a hypothesis or causal relationship using the scientific method.

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 both readers' grades are only 1/3 of a letter grade apart, the first reader's grade (the thesis advisor) is the final grade.

- If the readers' grades differ by one full grade (e.g., A to B) or less, the average of the two grades 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 final grade.

The Undergraduate Program office will determine any penalty for lateness, which will be included in the final 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 both 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 time is 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. You should be prepared to respond to the major points or questions 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.

The oral exam is intended as an oral presentation, without use of PowerPoint or other slides. If necessary for understanding, PowerPoint presentations should only be used 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 questions. 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 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 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 who wish to include work from a prior course should complete the [Thesis Multiple Submission](#) form and submit it to the Undergraduate Program Office one month prior to submitting their thesis. We recommend synthesizing prior work rather than simply copying prior produced work. In addition, please note clearly that what you are citing is work that was produced in a previous course, which was graded.

Part II

Writing & Research Assistance;
Interviewing & Formatting Guidelines

SPIA Writing Advisors

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 Advisors for assistance in conceptualizing and organizing your thesis, developing your arguments, and reviewing your writing. The SPIA writing advisors can best help you if you meet with them early in (as well as throughout) the process. They can reached at spiawriting@princeton.edu.

Principles of Ethical Interviewing

Conducting Expert Interviews

Conducting research for a senior thesis at SPIA often involves talking with public officials and other experts who have in-depth knowledge about government policies or programs. Knowledgeable informants can provide unique insights that help you hone in quickly and efficiently on key underlying issues in your research. It is important for you as the student researcher to conduct these expert interviews in a responsible manner and in compliance with federal regulations and University policy.

As a policy researcher, you need to gather and report facts with integrity, accuracy, and fairness. One aspect of ethical research revolves around the use of sources and understanding when and how to name those sources and when it is appropriate to keep them confidential.

Firstly, naming sources and their relevant title and/or role is a fundamental practice in policy research, just as it is in good journalism: it adds credibility and transparency to your thesis. Generally, it is important to attribute information to its source whenever possible. By naming sources, you enable your readers to evaluate the reliability, credibility, and perspective of the information presented. It also provides an opportunity for readers to conduct their own research or seek additional perspectives on a given topic.

However, there are circumstances where protecting the identity of sources becomes necessary. These situations typically arise when revealing a source's identity would put them at risk of harm, retribution, or jeopardize their livelihood. As part of your interview, you need to discuss with your expert informants whether and how they want to be named or described in your thesis. Confidentiality is often crucial for whistleblowers, individuals sharing sensitive personal information, or those involved in illegal activities who want to expose wrongdoing while safeguarding their own safety. Confidentiality is also important when conducting human subjects research, as explained below.

To decide whether to name or keep a source confidential, you must consider several factors:

- *Public interest*: Is the information provided by the source in the public interest? Will it contribute to a better understanding of important issues or expose significant wrongdoing?

- *Source reliability*: Is the source trustworthy and credible? Can you evaluate the veracity of the information and assess the source's track record and motivations?

- *Alternative means*: Can the information be verified or corroborated through other sources or evidence? You should make reasonable efforts to substantiate the claims made by their sources.

If you decide it is necessary to keep a source confidential, you must take measures to protect that person's identity. You should employ encryption tools, communicate through secure channels, and store information securely to minimize the risk of inadvertent exposure.

The decision to protect sources should not be taken lightly. The researcher must balance the need for transparency and accountability with the potential consequences that exposing a source might have on their safety and the quality of their future reporting. Naming sources fosters transparency and accountability and should be your default position. If necessary, protecting sources' confidentiality can enable important revelations and safeguard individuals in vulnerable positions.

Human Subjects Research

There are many instances where conducting interviews or observing people for your thesis is regarded as *human subjects research.*

If the information you are gathering for your thesis qualifies as human subjects research, then you must obtain approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before you conduct interviews or start collecting data. The IRB plays a crucial role in ensuring the ethical treatment of human participants in research studies. Its primary responsibility is to review and approve research proposals to protect the rights, welfare, and well-being of individuals involved in research conducted by faculty, staff, and students. As aspiring researchers, it's vital for you to understand when your work qualifies as human subjects research and when IRB oversight is necessary. Here are some key considerations:

- *Involvement of human participants*: Human subjects research typically involves individuals who are the focus of the study, whether through interviews, surveys, observations, or experiments. This includes collecting data from living individuals through various means.

- *Systematic collection of data*: If you are conducting research that systematically collects data from human participants, it is likely considered human subjects research. This applies whether the data are gathered

through surveys, interviews, experiments, or even analyzing existing data that can be linked to specific individuals.

- *Identifiability of participants*: Research that involves identifiable information about individuals, such as names, addresses, social security numbers, or any other personally identifiable data, usually falls within the scope of human subjects research. Anonymized or de-identified data, where individuals cannot be identified, may not always require IRB review, but caution should be exercised to protect participants' privacy.

If your research is intentional and systematic, designed to contribute new knowledge, and involves human participants, you will likely require IRB review and approval. When the results of your research aim to be generalized or applied to a broader population beyond the immediate study participants, IRB approval is typically necessary. The intent to contribute to broader knowledge is a key factor in determining whether IRB review is required.

Princeton's IRB takes a broad interpretation of what is "human subjects research." If you are conducting any interviews or a survey, Princeton IRB requires that you get an initial "human subjects determination" from their office. In general, your thesis advisor will serve as the "Principal Investigator" for your IRB review submission. Exceptions to this rule are described below. If you are uncertain about whether your interviews or data gathering activities qualify as human subjects research, please consult your faculty advisor **and** email a brief synopsis of your proposed research plan to irb@princeton.edu, cc'ing your advisor. The synopsis should mention that the research is for a senior thesis, and it should include (1) a one-sentence description of the purpose or goal of your research, (2) your proposed procedures, (3) a representative list of questions you intend to ask, and (4) your advisor's name and department. For example:

> *I am writing to request a human subjects determination for a proposed senior thesis project. My goal is to study policies regarding access to religious services for incarcerated individuals. I plan to discuss with corrections officials their policies on prisoner access to religious advisors; whether there are official chaplains associated with the prison (and details on the numbers and types); and the process for prisoners to request and access religious advisors. For those incarcerated, I intend to discuss if they knew of the policies for access to religious advisors; whether they had ever met with religious advisors; and their description of the process. In the thesis, corrections officials will be identified by name (for those who consent to be named) and inmates will be identified by pseudonym only. My advisor is Prof. Valerie Gutierrez in the Fine Arts Department.*

You must <u>not</u> conduct <u>any</u> interviews before you have (a) determined whether you need IRB approval for your research, and (b) received IRB approval in cases where it is required. If the IRB responds to your initial inquiry and determines that you do not need full IRB review and approval, you may move forward with your interviews. However, if the IRB determines that your research will need review and approval, you will need to provide a fuller description of your proposed thesis research as described on the IRB website. You can access the form you need to complete for review online.

It's important to note that seeking IRB approval is intended to ensure ethical conduct and protect the rights and well-being of human participants. IRB review helps to minimize potential risks, ensure informed consent, and maintain confidentiality and privacy. IRB approval protects human subjects as well as the investigator and the University. In addition, many scholarly journals require IRB approval for publication. As a rule, the IRB does not review or approve studies that have already been completed.

As a student researcher, you need to familiarize yourself with the IRB's guidelines and adhere to the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy, and confidentiality when working with human subjects. The IRB process not only safeguards participants but also enhances the validity and credibility of your research. Understanding when IRB approval is necessary and how to navigate the review process are essential parts of the research skills you will be encouraged to develop as a SPIA concentrator.

You can find additional information about the IRB review process [here](#).

Avoiding Mistakes in the IRB Application Process

Students and their advisors sometimes make mistakes when going through the IRB review process. To get through the process quickly, it is best for you and your advisor to avoid making these common mistakes. Otherwise, the review and approval process could needlessly delay the start of your research.

(1) *Your advisor is not eligible to serve as a principal investigator (PI)*.
Students are not eligible to submit applications for IRB review on their own. At Princeton, applications for IRB review can only be submitted by faculty or staff members who are eligible to be principal investigators. If your advisor is a visiting lecturer, he or she may not be eligible to serve as the PI for your application. The list of University faculty and staff who qualify as PI's can be found [here](#)..
For this situation, you must find a faculty or staff member who is PI-eligible and willing to serve as a co-advisor for your research.

(2) *Your advisor is eligible to serve as PI, but has not gone through human subjects training*.
If your advisor has not gone through training in basic human subjects protections, then he or she cannot serve as the PI for your IRB application. For this situation, your advisor must go through the online [training](#) and be certified or you must find a faculty or staff member who is PI-eligible and willing to serve as a co-advisor for your research.

(3) *Your application is missing information or documents.*
At Princeton University, the IRB uses a paperless application system that you can access [online](#). If the IRB requests that you complete the full application for a comprehensive review, then you must (a) answer all of the IRB's questions about your proposed research, and

(b) upload any supporting documents you will use for your data collection, including your consent form, your questionnaire or list of interview topics, and any letters or email messages you will use to recruit subjects. If any of these supporting documents are missing or your answers to questions are inadequate, your application will be returned to you for corrections.

(4) *Your advisor does not sign the application*.
After you complete a full IRB application, a request goes out automatically by email to your advisor. Your advisor must then log into the eRIA system, open the application and review it. At this point, the advisor can return the application to the student because it needs additional work, or they can sign the application electronically and forward it to the IRB for review. However, if the advisor does not respond to the request for review and signing, the application will not reach the IRB for review.

(5) *You do not respond to the IRB's request for additional information or documents*.
If the IRB writes back to you and your advisor to say that you need additional information or modifications to your application, it is important to respond quickly. If you are unclear about what information is needed, you should consult with your advisor or ask the IRB directly (irb@princeton.edu). Be sure to flag IRB's email address to ensure the emails are not filtering to your SPAM folder as this will cause further delay.

IRB Review: Obtaining Consent from Survey Respondents or Interviewees

If you are applying for IRB review for your research project, one of your first tasks will be to decide how to obtain consent from the subjects you are working with. Documenting consent is important because it demonstrates you have explained the nature of your project to the people serving as respondents in a survey or allowing you to interview them or observe them. The subjects for your study should know they are participating voluntarily and that you as the researcher will respect their preferences for being named as an informant or for keeping their identity confidential. In some cases, you might use a paper consent form to document their preferences, but in cases where a paper form isn't practical or feasible, you can use a verbal script to inform your research subjects before you begin interviewing or observing them. The IRB offers a template for a paper consent form on its website. These are most appropriate when you are interviewing or observing people in person. If you are conducting a web-based survey or an online experiment, then a web-based version of the consent form is recommended. A third alternative is the verbal consent script, an example of which is shown below:

Sample Verbal Script for Obtaining Informed Consent

Hello, my name is [your name]. I am a senior at Princeton University in the School of Public and International Affairs. I am conducting research that will be used in my senior thesis.

I am studying [description of the research]…

[Example 1]
   …the budgetary process in the state of New Jersey. I would like to ask you a series of questions about your role in formulating the state budget and your broader understanding of how spending priorities are set.

[Example 2]
   …policies related to affordable housing. I am very interested in your opinions and interpretations of how effective policies and programs in New Jersey have been in increasing the supply of affordable housing and reducing homelessness.

The information you share with me will be of great value in helping me to complete this research project.

This [interview, discussion, etc.] will take about [approximate amount] of your time.

[Insert one of the following depending on whether participant identifiers are collected]

[Example 1 – Named sources]
   Please tell me how you would like to be identified in my thesis: by name and title or as an anonymous source.

[Example 2 – Identifiers collected and kept confidential]
   There is a small risk of a breach of confidentiality, but I will make every effort to keep your identity and what you tell me strictly confidential. I will not link your name to anything you say in the text of my thesis.

[Example 3 – Identifiers will not be collected]
   There is no risk of a breach of confidentiality. I will not link your name to anything you say, either in the transcript of this [interview, discussion, etc.] or in the text of my thesis.

Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can, of course, decline to [discuss any issue, answer any question, etc.] and you may stop participating at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your

participation in it, please feel free to contact me, my thesis advisor or our university research office at any time.

(The respondent will be given an information card, when applicable, containing name, institutional affiliation, and contact information.) [See also sample text for card]

[Insert the following when audio or video recording the interaction:]
I would like to make an [audio/video] recording of our discussion, so that I can have an accurate record of the information that you provide to me. [I will transcribe the recording and will keep the transcripts confidential and securely in my possession.] [I will erase the recording after I transcribe it.]

Do you have any questions about this research? Do you agree to participate [Insert if applicable: 'and may I record our discussion']?

If so, let's begin…."

As you and your advisor complete the online application for IRB review, you will be asked to upload (a) your version of the consent form (i.e., the version to be printed on paper, the online version, or the verbal script), along with (b) your questionnaire or topic guide, and (c) any materials (e.g., letter, email message, or advertisement) used to recruit participants for your study.

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.

Academic Integrity and AI

Intellectual honesty is vital to an academic community and for fair evaluation of your work. While GAI (such as ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) can be used to generate ideas, summarize articles, develop computer code, or create images, all work in your senior thesis must be your own, completed in accordance with the University's academic regulations.

If/when GAI is used in the aid of your senior thesis, you must cite it like any other source you are using for this paper. Failure to cite the use of GAI puts your academic integrity at risk.

Research Resources

The Stokes Library has created useful research/library tips. Please review this information and feel free to connect with the Stokes Librarians directly or work with the Undergraduate Program Office for assistance.

[SPIA Library Guide](#)

[Above image is linked.]

Princeton Survey Research Center

- Assistance with survey design and implementation
- Consultation and guidance on sampling, development, data collection and processing.

The Survey Research Center's main purpose is to assist students, faculty, and administrators with the design and implementation of their own survey research projects. The SRC provides consultation and guidance on study design, sampling, instrument development, data collection and data processing. The Center has digital voice recorders, iPads, a 12-station computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) facility, a library collection on survey research methods, and a network of external resources.

Need assistance? Request assistance! (log in required)

Princeton University Data & Statistical Services

- Data and statistical consulting
- Assistance with selection of quantitative research methods, interpretation, analysis, conversion and visualization of data

Data and Statistical Services (DSS) provides data and statistical consulting. Experts are available to advise Princeton University students on choosing appropriate data, application of quantitative research methods, the interpretation of statistical analyses, data conversion, and data visualization. Subject specialists help choose appropriate data. The statistical packages supported by consultants are R/R Studio, Stata, and SPSS.

Need help with analysis or methodology?
Schedule an appointment

SPIA Writing Advisors

The SPIA writing advisors are available to read, review and provide feedback on the junior and senior independent work papers. The advisors are post-docs with extensive experience in the social sciences and policy writing, in particular.

To schedule a consultation, please reach out to spiawriting@princeton.edu

Program for Quantitative & Analytical Political Science

- Focused on theoretical and quantitative research in political science and policy
- Research consultations in specializations such as statistics, game theory, causal inference and more

The Program for Quantitative and Analytical Political Science (QAPS) was established in 2009 to support theoretical and quantitative research in political science and its dissemination. We support students through QAPS fellowships, host post-doctoral research fellows, offer statistical and formal theory consulting, hold quantitative skills workshops, throw conferences, and organize the Quantitative Social Science colloquium.

[Firestone Library](#)	[Mudd Manuscript Library](#)
• [Subject specialists](#) available for consultation in multiple areas of interest, including: Law, History, Politics, and much more • Multitude of different resources provided to all students. The Harvey S. Firestone Memorial Library serves as the main library on campus and assumes primary responsibility for humanities and social sciences collections and specialized research support services. It also houses many of the libraries centralized operations, Special Collections rare books and manuscripts department, and other services including the Data and Statistical Services Lab, Cotsen Children's Library, and the Center for Digital Humanities.	• [Exploring Special Collections](#) • [Archival Research Consults](#) The Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library is part of Special Collections within Princeton University Library and is home to the Princeton University Archives and a highly regarded collection of 20th-century public policy papers. You can Explore the Collections further or find more information on Visiting Special Collections throughout the website.