

Princeton School of Public and International Affairs

Guide to Junior Independent Work

2026-2027

August 2026

Table of Contents

Junior Independent Work Deadlines	3
Goals	4
Elements of a Public Policy Paper	4
JP Grading Standards	6
Extensions and Late Penalties for Junior Independent Work	7
Manuscript Instructions	7
Title Page Format	7
JP Advising	8
SPIA Writing Advisers	8
Principles of Ethical Interviewing	9
Citations and Bibliography	14
Academic Integrity and AI	14
Research Resources	15

Junior Independent Work Deadlines

Important Notice: Extensions may be granted only by the student's residential college dean. Extensions must be requested and approved in advance of the Junior Paper deadline. Extensions may be subject to late penalties.

FALL 2026

(ONLY FOR THOSE STUDYING ABROAD AT UCT FOR SPRING 2027)

JUNIOR PAPERS DUE TO INSTRUCTOR

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2026

SPRING 2027

JUNIOR PAPERS DUE TO INSTRUCTOR

TUESDAY, MAY 4, 2027

Goals

Junior Independent Work in the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs is designed to teach students:

- to conduct research and analysis
- to think analytically about a public policy issue
- to critically review existing policies and their impacts
- to present evidence in a clear, logical, and well-organized manner

The Junior Independent Work requirement is fulfilled through completing the curriculum's core course of SPI 397 (Junior Independent Work Seminar).

In SPI 397 (Junior Independent Work Seminar), a faculty member supervises a small group of students engaged in research on a specific topic in public and international affairs. Faculty will introduce students to the existing state of knowledge and available evidence for research within a well-defined topic that is timely and important in the area of public policy. Supported by the separate coursework required in the junior independent work seminar, students will complete their junior paper.

Elements of a Public Policy Paper

Junior papers should be double-spaced and **must not exceed 24 pages** (or fewer as required by the Director), **including** appendices and footnotes. This limit does not include pages for the title, table of contents (if any), and bibliography.

- A public policy paper is analytical, not descriptive. The paper should specify a clear research hypothesis, justify its significance in scholarly and other relevant literature and relevance to public policy, compare alternative hypotheses, assess evidence in support of a conclusion, and provide specific public policy recommendations.
- Define the question you are examining.
 - What is the evidence of the problem/issue?
 - Why is it significant?
 - How does your question relate to existing theories?
- Include only as much background or descriptive material as is necessary for the reader to follow your paper. You are not writing a history paper or an article for an encyclopedia. If a fact or observation does not advance the flow of the paper, leave it out. The test is whether it would matter if the reader skipped the information.
- Develop a clear argument that specifies how a particular public policy input or underlying condition affects your outcome of interest. Note that your argument

should not represent a normative prescription, but rather an effort to explain the underlying process that generates patterns of behavior that we observe.

- Analyze empirical evidence to assess your argument relative to alternative explanations or “null hypothesis” that there is no pattern. The paper should include a full citation of sources and description of methodology.
- Are there models for possible solutions to be found in the experience of other jurisdictions (cities, states, countries) or in the proposals of researchers? What are the pros and cons of these models?
- When making a recommendation, explain why you chose the approach. Is it clear how it can be implemented, how it will help resolve the problem, and what the drawbacks or criticisms might be?
- Beyond all else, think logically and write clearly and succinctly.

JP Grading Standards

A	The paper is an outstanding work that has <u>all</u> of the following qualities: ▪ is well-organized and exceptionally well-written ▪ presents a clear articulation of the issue and its significance ▪ demonstrates excellent research skills ▪ makes a logical and thorough presentation of evidence and analysis ▪ has conclusions that flow logically from analysis
A-	The paper is well-conceived and constructed, but does not evidence all of the qualities of an A effort.
B+	The paper is informative and generally well-written, but lacks some elements of rigorous research, analysis, organization, or thoughtful conclusion.
B to B-	The paper 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 paper demonstrates substantial flaws in logic, research, writing or understanding of the issue.
D	The paper demonstrates a significant lack of effort or has substantial defects in quality and clarity.
F	The paper demonstrates a complete lack of effort and no redeeming qualities.

Note: The A+ grade is reserved for work of truly unusual quality. It requires an 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 SPIA's honors calculations as if it were an A.

Extensions and Late Penalties for Junior Independent Work

Students who do not submit their individual research papers on the due date may receive a grade of **F** for the paper unless they have requested an extension in advance and received approval for it from the **dean of the student's residential college**. Extensions may be subject to late penalties.

One-third of a grade will be deducted from the final JP grade for each four days (or fraction of four days) that a JP is late. For example, the first four-day period, would result in one-third of a grade penalty (the reduction of an A to an A-, etc.). The second four-day period, would cost an additional one-third of a grade (e.g., A is reduced to B+, etc.). The grade would continue to be reduced by one-third for each additional four-day period or fraction of four days (including weekends) that the JP is late.

Manuscript Instructions

For purposes of consistency in formatting, we require:

- 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)

Title Page Format

Junior Independent Work Seminar Number and Title
Director's Name
Title of Paper
Student Name
Date
Student Honor Code Pledge

Note:

A copy of your JP will be available for a limited period of time in the Undergraduate Program Office (UPO) for review. Photocopying of JP's is strictly prohibited.

Writing & Research Assistance/Resources, Interviewing & Formatting Guidelines

JP Advising

Your JP adviser, who is also your Junior Independent Work (Policy Research) Seminar instructor, will serve as your main sounding board and guide for your junior paper. You will select your Junior Independent Work Seminar based on the topics that are available in a given semester. We encourage you to select a topic that is of interest to you and that you may wish to continue to develop for your senior thesis.

The background material for the basis of your junior paper will be covered in class, but you are encouraged to utilize office hours and other resources available to you including your UPO academic advisers, the SPIA writing advisers, Stokes Librarians and even other faculty with whom you have taken classes. Reach out to the UPO for more information on these invaluable resources and review the library and resource guides at the end of this manual.

If you have trouble communicating with your JP adviser, please do not hesitate to reach out to the UPO.

SPIA Writing Advisers

In addition to your consultations with your JP adviser, we strongly recommended that you meet regularly with a SPIA Writing Adviser for assistance in conceptualizing and organizing your JP, developing your arguments, and reviewing your writing. Your junior independent work seminar director will provide the names and contact information of the current SPIA Writing Advisers. They can also be reached at spiawriting@princeton.edu.

Principles of Ethical Interviewing

Conducting Expert Interviews

Conducting research for independent work at SPIA often involves talking with 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.

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 is a fundamental practice in policy research, just as it is in good journalism: it adds credibility and transparency to your independent work. Generally, it is important to attribute information to its source whenever possible. By naming sources, you enable your readers to evaluate the reliability and credibility 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 work. Confidentiality is often crucial for whistleblowers, individuals sharing sensitive 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 to keep a source confidential, it is your responsibility to 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, while protecting sources' confidentiality can enable important revelations and safeguard individuals in vulnerable positions.

Human Subjects Research

There are instances where conducting interviews or observing people for your thesis is regarded as *human subjects research*. If the information you are gathering for your research qualifies as human subjects research, then you must obtain approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). 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 your research. As aspiring researchers, it is vital for you to understand when your work qualifies as human subjects research and when IRB oversight is necessary.

So, when does research fall under the purview of human subject research? 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 connected with addresses, social security numbers, or any other personally identifiable information, falls within the scope of human subject 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, broadly applicable 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.

By contrast, expert interviews – with those in official positions, who observed particular events, or have a particular perspective from experience – that are not intended to represent the views or experiences of anyone beyond the person being interviewed are not likely to need IRB review. This is due to what is known as “the Final Rule’s journalism exclusion” in the nationwide guidance for IRBs. Thus, for example, an interview with a public official about immigration policy probably does not qualify as human subjects research, whereas interviews with recent immigrants about their experiences in moving to a new country almost certainly qualify as human subjects research and therefore needs IRB approval. Information gained in the first example is not generalizable to some larger population of public officials, but information gleaned from interviews in the second example is intended to be representative of the experiences of a larger population of immigrants. The IRB staff at Princeton has offered the following guidelines for senior thesis students and their faculty advisers:

- Activities at SPIA are likely to fall under the Final Rule’s journalism exclusion [*“scholarly and journalistic activities (e.g., oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship), including the collection and use of information, that focus directly on the specific individuals about whom the information is collected” (not generalizing to other individuals)*].
- Activities that *may not* fall under the journalism exclusion: studies with a large ‘n.’
- Activities that *will not* fall under the journalism exclusion: international activities.

Your Senior Thesis or Junior Paper adviser can usually make this determination. However, the IRB is the decisionmaker and overrides determinations made by others. If your adviser determines your interviews or data gathering activities qualify as human subjects research, or if your adviser is uncertain, you should request a *human subject determination* from the IRB. To do this, simply draft a short, one paragraph description of the research you plan to undertake, send it in an email to irb@princeton.edu and indicate in the subject line or the first sentence of the email that you are requesting a determination as to whether your proposed study needs IRB review. If your adviser determines that your project requires IRB approval, or if you and your adviser are uncertain, you should not conduct any interviews before you have (a) determined with the IRB whether you need IRB approval for your research, and (2) received IRB approval in cases where it is required.

It's important to note that seeking IRB approval is not meant to hinder your research but rather 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.

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 major.

You can find additional information about the IRB review process at <https://ria.princeton.edu/human-research-protection/resources-and-quick-links/ohrp-frequently-asked-que-1>

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 junior at Princeton University in the School of Public and International Affairs. I am conducting research that will be used in my junior paper.

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 JP: 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 JP.

[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 JP.

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 JP adviser 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.)

[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 adviser 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 website. The Princeton School of Public and International Affairs does not prescribe any particular citation style. You may follow the guidelines of any generally accepted system of citation with the approval of your adviser. You should consult with your adviser 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 paper. 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. According to Princeton University's [*Rights, Rules, Responsibilities \(2.4 Academic Regulations\)*](#), Princeton University students must confirm whether AI is permitted by an instructor and disclose the use of AI in any academic work. To learn more about when and how to disclose AI use, visit the Scholarly Integrity webpage on [Disclosing Generative AI](#).

All work (particularly the writing) of your junior paper must be your own, completed in accordance with the [University's academic regulations](#).

Students are expected to retain records of their work, including any AI-generated prompts, commands, chat logs, drafts, and related materials used in the completion of an assignment. If there are reasonable concerns regarding the authenticity or integrity of submitted work, students may be asked to provide this documentation to demonstrate their process and authorship. Failure to provide such records may be considered when evaluating compliance with course policies and academic integrity standards.

Please note that individual advisers may have more specific guidance around the use of GAI. As such, please follow the guidance set forth by your adviser and ensure proper citation.

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](#)

YOU AND THE LIBRARY

WHAT THE LIBRARY CAN DO FOR YOU

Princeton University Library (PUL) can help you:

- Find literature (books, journals, etc.)
- Develop a Search Strategy
 - So you know where to look!
- Find data and statistics
- Learn best practices for data management
- Determine appropriate methods for your research
- Troubleshoot and interpret your results

AND MORE!

Note that one person may not have all of these skills, but that's why we have different teams with specialized skills in the library.

For Example: While your subject librarian may not know the nuances of the statistical test you're running, we can connect you with data services experts in the library who can help you out!

Read on to find out how the library can help you!

Library Research Guides

Library Research Guides can help you with a lot, including: teaching you how to utilize library resources and showing you resources you weren't aware we had! Check them out here: <https://libguides.princeton.edu/>

And here's one just for you all: <https://libguides.princeton.edu/SPIA-Guide>

POP QUIZ!

Who Are Your Librarians?

(Some) Answers are on the next page...

1

[Above image is linked.]

SPIA Undergraduate Program

Quantitative & Qualitative Methods Resources

Data and Intelligent Systems (DaIS)



Data and Intelligent Systems (DaIS) is a new academic unit that will support Princeton's artificial intelligence and data science research communities.

Our mission is to support and expand research and education at Princeton in statistics, data science, artificial intelligence, and related fields.

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](#)

Princeton University Stokes Library



- [Research consultations](#) (quantitative and qualitative research and its methods)
- [Semesterly workshops](#) on programs like R, Zotero, data visualization and more!
- [Sage Research Methods Map Tool](#)

Stokes Library, located on the lower level of Wallace Hall, is the primary point-of-contact for Library Services for the Princeton SPIA Reserves and the Office of Population Research (OPR). The Library also houses the Ansley J. Coale Population Research Collection, and the Stokes Viz Hub.

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



- [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.

Mudd Manuscript Library



- [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.

SPIA Writing Advisers spiawriting@princeton.edu

Dana Abu-Haltam
Limited Availability

Mehmet Hecan
Office location: Wallace 348
Office hours: 10:30am-12pm
or by appointment