

Exploring the Field: International Affairs Research

What does a career in research really look like?

- Research is a team effort. It requires collaboration with scholars and senior staff--you have to share expertise and work together to create quality work.
- Researchers do a lot more than just research. They engage in fundraising, grant writing, planning conferences, logistics, and more.
- Researchers find their way into the field from many different backgrounds. Some go straight into graduate programs before entering jobs at think tanks, while others have experience as practitioners or policy-makers before deciding to turn to research.

What are important traits of successful researchers?

- Curiosity and creativity with an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Strong writing skills and being open to edits and constructive feedback.
- Persuasion and the ability to confidently sell experience and your work.
- Any kind of job experience can be helpful, and any skills gained will contribute to your future work--from project management or finances to social media.

How much education do I need?

- Required credentials vary by position and organization, but many entry-level research positions only require a BA or MA.
- For think tanks, to be a senior scholar or fellow, a researcher usually needs a PhD, JD, or significant high-level policy experience.
- There are also significant opportunities for analytical work in federal service and the intelligence world, many of which do not require PhD's.
- Any additional education can help you to leave your options open and allow for changes in your career path down the line.

What impact does research have on policy and advocacy?

- Research should strengthen global knowledge and inform policy.
- Think tanks can work closely with the government to inform the policy debate and a politician's agenda.
- In order to have an impact, research needs to be shared widely and tailored for different audiences.
- Communication is key. Learn how to deliver your findings in a concise and simple way.
- Partnerships with NGOs and in the field are critical to bridge research and practice.
- Ensure that the problems and questions you are exploring are impactful.
- If you care deeply about the issue you are researching, you will devote more time to it and ultimately create a better product.