

From: Seth Perry, Director of Undergraduate Studies
Subject: Junior Conversations
Spring 2023

Junior Papers are due **April 17**. In order to receive comments and a grade for your Junior Paper, please email a two-page Junior Statement to Michelle Medici on or before **May 5**. Grades and comments will be available on **May 8**. The Junior Statement is explained in detail below; it will facilitate the second part of your Junior Conversation, which will be scheduled for **May 10th or 11th** (schedules will be sent well in advance).

The half-hour junior conversation is not really an exam. Of the two faculty members present, only the adviser will have read the JP. The second person is there to lend support and a fresh perspective. In roughly the first half of the conversation, the student will be asked to explain for the benefit of the second faculty member what they did in the JP, and its strengths and weaknesses will be discussed. In the second half, plans for the senior thesis will be discussed, and ideally a general topic or at least a direction for research will emerge. The student will be encouraged to begin preliminary research over the summer.

To get this conversation going, the first page of the Junior Statement should describe the senior thesis topic, as the student is thinking of it now. **Students may find it useful to draw from the Junior Colloquium's Dean's Date assignment for this.** Students may already have a clear idea of their area of research or the specific argument they intend to make in their thesis. Or, they may only know the general area (e.g. Jewish perspectives on the ethics of stem-cell research, William James's view of conversion, renunciation in early Indian Buddhism, interpretations of the pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.). In any case, the idea is to make clear what area they want to work in and what approaches they hope to take.

The second page of the statement should list, in tabular form, what the students feels they have done so far to prepare for their intended thesis research and what they expect to do over the summer and next year to advance that research. This should include relevant classes they've taken / plan to take, readings, places they have visited or plan to visit.

In putting together this list and planning for the Junior Conversation, the following questions may be useful; these questions may also be raised during the Junior Conversation:

1. **Area.** What work have you done and what work do you plan on doing to acquire the proper background in the historical period or cultural area of focus (e.g. contemporary America, ancient Egypt, Tokugawa Japan, medieval Christian thought)? Don't limit your selection of courses to those in the Religion department; religion is studied, from a variety of perspectives, throughout the university.
2. **Approach.** Are you sufficiently prepared to follow the approach needed for your topic? Should you consider courses in sociology, literary analysis, philosophical argumentation, etc.?
3. **Summer reading.** What are the five books in the area you should read before next Fall? If you don't know, decide which faculty members to ask (by e-mail) now, before the summer. Consult bibliographies and syllabi from Princeton courses.
4. **Research.** What will your sources be? Where are they? Do you need other libraries aside from those at Princeton? Inter-library loan? Research at special archives? Interviews or fieldwork? Will you need funding for research assistance?