

# International Studies Senior Capstone Experience: Presentation of Findings at the Annual Poster Symposium

-----

Compiled by Prof. Andrew Oros  
Director of International Studies  
(v.10/17)

As part of their senior capstone experience, International Studies majors are required to present the findings of their project (whether thesis or self-designed project) as an oral poster session at the annual symposium held each April (with a smaller session in late November/early December for fall graduates as necessary). The specific date and time will be included in the SCE memo distributed to rising seniors. All seniors are required to attend the symposium. Please plan accordingly, as there will be no exceptions. **NO GRACE PERIOD WILL BE GRANTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.** All IS majors will be invited as well – and friends, parents, and others also are welcome. Refreshments will be provided. Seniors are invited to a celebratory drink with Prof. Oros immediately following.

Seniors will attach their “poster” (typically up to 10-15 separate sheets of paper) to poster display boards that will be available for set-up from 30 minutes prior to the start of the session. The display boards measure 4’10” (four feet, ten inches) across and 5’10” high (though that’s from the ground up – so the usable area is more like 3’ high based on what can be seen without stooping down). The display boards are stored next to the vending machines on the first floor of the Toll Science Center, which you may want to view before the day of the poster session.

Students are responsible for all materials related to the poster preparation and display – such as color print-outs (if desired), large poster sheets (if desired), push-pins to attach the sheets to the poster display board, etc.

The format of the evening is that students will stand next to their poster boards and answer questions/explain findings to the “audience” (usually including the SCE advisor) who walk among the different displays. Light appetizers, desserts, and drinks will be available to participants and guests. Seniors are expected to have their displays set up before the announced start time and to remain with their posters until the end time. Professional dress is expected for presenters. Photographs will be taken for the IS web-site and other College media.

# Poster Session Guidelines & Tips for Completion

## *What is a Poster Session?*

A Poster Session is an advertisement for your research, pitched by you to an audience (an individual or small group) who stop by to view your posted results. It combines printed text and graphics with an interactive oral explanation by the researcher. Your “poster” (most often a set of slides/sheets of paper rather than a single large poster sheet) should quickly and efficiently communicate your research to viewers. Poster Sessions allow you to present data and conduct extended, interactive discussions of your research with others. Additionally, you may prepare a short summary on your research to deliver a few times over the course of the hour – a short of opening “pitch” to spark further questions.

The goal of the poster is two-fold: 1) present your research; and 2) present an argument for the validity and importance of your research.

**All posters must include the following 5 components:** (1) the title of your thesis/project and an abstract, (2) a statement of the research question(s) of the study, (3) a statement about the methods used to investigate the question(s), (4) a summary of your research findings (data tables, charts, photos, quotations of important figures, etc), and (5) broader conclusions/relevance of the research (a “take-away” point). Some of these points may be conveyed over multiple slides/sheets of paper.

## *Preparation Strategies for Poster Sessions*

A poster requires careful planning about **how** to depict specific information and how to organize text and graphics to capture your audience’s attention. Students should work with their advisers on several versions of the poster and presentation “talking points” to finalize what material is included and what material is excluded.

The final material that goes on a poster is quite unlike what most researchers and writers generally write for other contexts. The poster session calls for much more attention to visual impact than other forms of writing do. Moreover, the restricted space of a poster requires careful condensing of ideas that we would write about at length in other forms of written presentation. Remember, as well, that the visual posters are supplemented by your own oral commentary – so not every bit of data you know need be printed (and, indeed, *can't* be given space limits).

Unlike your thesis, portfolio, or written component of your self-directed project, a standard poster session will include the equivalent of only about 3 pages of single-spaced text or graphics in 12-point font (i.e., before formatting for the poster slides for maximum visual “pop”). This means you must focus as narrowly as possible on the central ideas you seek to convey. You just won’t have room to explain relationships among ideas in great detail, so pick out what is central to your topic and concentrate on that narrow focus.

All posters should employ a combination of text and graphics. A poster graphic may speak for itself – but often a title/heading/caption helps the audience understand the content of each slide or component of the poster. Overall, you should keep written explanations to a minimum.

## *Here are some bullet-point tips in summary:*

- Use graphics whenever you can on a poster.
- Use text to convey key points.
  - Make your text easy to read by chunking information in bullets, lists, or short paragraphs and use clear headings throughout.
  - Avoid long blocks of text.
  - Use a single font.
  - Avoid italics or elaborate script fonts – which can be hard to read from a distance.
- Consider the visual attractiveness of your poster. Use color in the poster and a clear contrast between heading and narrative fonts.
  - Remember: we track vertically from center to top to bottom, and horizontally from left to right. This means that you should put the most important message in the center top position followed by the top left, top right, bottom left, and finish in the bottom right corner.
  - Empty space is important in a poster: without it, your reader has no visual pauses to think.
- Look at your assembled draft poster from a distance: Can you read the main text headings?
  - Your poster title or topic could be displayed in 72 point font, for instance, with headings throughout the poster in 48 point font.
- Always look at trial printouts of the poster text before you decide that you don't need any more revisions for clarity and readability – don't rely on how images look on a computer screen.
- Consider providing supplemental handouts that viewers can take with them to review later – like the handouts prepared for the IS Seminar presentations.
- Prepare some “talking points” and/or a short “script” to guide your oral narrative to your drop-by audience.
  - Consider jotting down key points on note cards.
- Enjoy this “capstone” opportunity to present the results of your year-long research project!
  - Project confidence in your hard work and findings.
  - Use the preparation as a chance to reflect on what you might have done differently were you to start over.
    - Consider sharing such tips to rising seniors and prospective majors so they may benefit from your experience!

## *Evaluating Your Poster Session*

Although the SCE in International Studies is graded only pass-fail-honors, you will receive feedback on your poster session from your SCE advisor, and it is possible to fail the SCE based on not completing a poster session or completing it at an extremely low level of quality.

Here are some areas by which your advisor will evaluate your poster:

1. Is **the aesthetic presentation** clear and coordinated?
2. Does the student provide **a clear abstract** that summarizes the main argument and findings of the SCE?
3. Does the poster offer a compelling and clear **introduction** that spells out the major research question under study?
4. Does the student situate the research questions or paper's focus within a compelling **body of literature**?
5. Does the student clearly and succinctly explain the **methods** used to complete the research study?
6. Are the **major findings** easy to understand and not too lengthy?
7. Is there a concise and well-developed **conclusion** based on the research conducted?
8. Are **sources properly cited**?
9. Does the **student ably present his or her findings orally** when asked questions?