

Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies

Introduction

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Founding Editor

Welcome, readers, to the inaugural volume of the *Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies* (KUJIS). In an attempt to highlight the amazing work of undergraduate researchers tackling global and international issues from a breadth of perspectives, this journal aspires to be a multi-disciplinary home for research on topics from any appropriate tradition; e.g., International Studies, Political Science, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Economics, Sociology, or Gender Studies.

The impetus for the journal is a particular trend I have witnessed in undergraduate publishing over the years, both in our own Global and International Studies program here at the University of Kansas (KU) and undergraduate study in general, which is the timing of article submission could not come at a worse time in the scholars' studies. Often, I have seen the most sophisticated research articles come to fruition for students completing formal undergraduate theses, normally but not always, as a part of a capstone experience in their programs. This structure means students have been toiling away for one or perhaps two semester on a rigorous, challenging, frustrating, and rewarding project they finish just in time for graduation. Then, in the summer, after getting their diploma, and attending graduation parties, and thinking about next steps, undergraduate researchers need to spend a little time finalizing their manuscripts to fit publication requirements for submission.

I think you could guess that the motivation to do more work on the senior thesis during the sunny and free days of the postgraduate summer is at its nadir.

Thus, even though I see one or two students each year have the endurance to complete those final steps and publish in terrific undergraduate journals around the country, I have continually witnessed many high quality theses remain only excellent course artifacts when they could be so much more. Since my Global and International Studies students' final capstone articles follow the traditional research article format, designing a journal that closely fits those parameters was straightforward and hopefully will provide them the final push of motivational convenience to see the highest quality final projects make their way into print and out into the world.



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The goals for KUJIS are two-fold, then, one near-term and one in the long-term. In the immediate future, I hope the journal is a showcase of the amazing work the students in KU's Global and International Studies program complete during their senior years. The venue can host more fantastic pieces that might otherwise have been left aside during that crucial period after completing the degree and moving on to their next adventure. Eventually, having undergraduate researchers submit articles from a variety of programs at KU, and from universities in Kansas outside of this institution, and even from schools around the country outside Kansas is one future goal of the journal. I realize that sounds a bit lofty in the introduction of the very first volume, but an editor can dream after all.

The first step of those plans, therefore, is to introduce said amazing authors of this initial volume of the journal. Before providing some notes on the individual articles, a little context on how these projects developed overall may help to evaluate the pieces. I advise the undergraduate scholars in the program while they conduct projects in two semesters, starting from scratch in August and having the manuscript done by May. Often they report the process is the first attempt to complete the entire authentic research cycle wherein they had to: find conversations about their topic in the relevant literature, create their own question contributing to those discussions, formulate a feasible research design by finding their own data to answer that question, and then write a formal proposal laying out their plans. That process is the first semester. Then, they execute the data collection and analysis, contemplate disciplinary implications from their results, and produce the actual manuscript in the spring. I am always impressed by the quantity and quality of work the first-time researchers can produce on such an accelerated timeline.

The first article by **Cate Manning**, "**Rhetoric vs. Reality: Political Motivations Behind High Speed 2 (HS2) Decision-making**," is an example of a researcher investigating how politicians talk about major infrastructure projects occurring within their tenures. When a significant High Speed train project found itself on the chopping block, **Manning** examined if the leaders involved were railing against the project, excuse the pun, due to empirical realities or political expediency. Following that paper, **Fabiana Paola Salas Valdivia** also looks at the differing perspectives of a central problem in "**NGOs reports vs. Reality: Indigenous Peruvians' real-life challenges**." The question here is how accurately NGOs are identify the challenges Indigenous Peruvians are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. The author raveled to Peru over winter break to do in-person interviews revealing opinions on education, identity, and environmentalism that show how complicated these issues are.

A second article in Latin America follows, with **Ainsley Powell** examining images, dialogue, and plot lines in Colombian films to uncover any potential processes of North Americanization in the movies. After explaining

how the theoretical perspective has developed in the field, **“Mirror, Mirror, on the Big Screen: North Americanization in Colombia through Film”** applies those metrics to ten films within the last decade. The article by **Keira Dobbs** is fourth, tackling issues that continues to draw attention to researchers focused on politics in the media: state censorship, self-censorship, and the freedom to express one’s opinion. In **“Silence on Xinjiang: Freedom of Expression on Chinese Social Media,”** Dobbs tackles social media use and how threats of “fake news” are wielded to control controversial narratives.

Finally, two articles on European politics close the volume. In **“From Ostpolitik to Putinpolitik: the AfD’s Affinity for Russia,”** Rachell Orce initially was interested in patterns of German politicians being influenced by the Russian State. Once a clear geographical pattern immediately appeared, Orce took a deeper dive to see how the discourse of popular politicians on the right express their ideological proximity to Russia. To borrow an old cliché, last but absolutely not least is **Levi Brabec’s** work in **“Meilė Yra Visiems: The Evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania.”** Using reports from community organizers, joined with semiotic analysis of social media images from over a decade, Brabec arrives at an interestingly contradictory conclusion of where LGBTQ+ issues have gained greater tolerance (and where they have not). The six articles in this first volume ought to highlight the breadth of topics welcomed in the journal as well as the variety of disciplinary perspectives and research techniques.

To close this introduction, I would like to thank two groups of people for providing so much assistance to this project. First, in the University of Kansas libraries, **Marianne Reed** and **Eric Bader** have patiently taught me about open source journaling, wisely advised on many components you can see in the journal and on the website, and completed a tremendous amount of heavy lifting in the final formatting and production of the volumes. Although people often use the phrase “it would not have happened without them” in these kinds of situations, it has likely never been more accurate. And, of course, a tremendous thank you to my volunteer student editors: **Shea Marney, Isabel López, Kennedy Mulvaney, Marina Bontrager, Andrew Fewins, Grace Yearout, Hannah Loub, Bhavya Gupta, and Eilish Frissell.** On top of all the actual work these seniors have with courses, organizations, part-time jobs, and the like, they graciously signed on to experience all the wonderment of a minutia-driven, time-consuming experience of manuscript copy editing without the pesky distraction of actual financial remuneration—all while helping me figure out how to do this stuff for the very first time. They deserve more plaudits than I could ever fit in a single letter of recommendation.

So readers, I leave you to peruse the articles that now follow, and I believe that you will enjoy them as much as I have enjoyed working with the authors. I also hope that you are inspired to contemplate submitting your own work to the journal someday (or motivating your students to do so).