

# Isabelle DeSisto

Fisher Hall, Princeton NJ 08540 | 617.549.3752 | id1983@princeton.edu | [isabelledesisto.com](http://isabelledesisto.com)

---

## Education

- Fall 2021 – **PhD student in Politics at Princeton University**  
Centennial Fellowship recipient
- 2020 – 2021 **MPhil in Politics and International Studies** *with distinction*  
University of Cambridge  
Funded through the Eben Fiske Studentship at Trinity College.  
Dissertation: “Explaining Divergent Foreign Aid Flows to Belarusian and Ukrainian Children After the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, 1986 – 2011.” Supervisor: Dr. Ayşe Zarakol.
- 2016 – 2020 **A.M. in Regional Studies: Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia**  
**A.B. in Government**, *summa cum laude*, GPA: 4.0/4.0  
Harvard University  
Secondary Field in Spanish and Certificate in Latin American Studies.  
Thesis: [“From the ‘Island of Freedom’ to the Iron Curtain: Rethinking the role of soft power in Soviet-Cuban educational exchange programs.”](#) Advisor: Dr. George Soroka.
- 

## Research Experience

- Jun-Oct 2020 **Research Assistant**  
Harvard University Department of Government  
Surveyed Spanish-language and English-language newspapers, governmental reports, and academic work on infrastructure projects and corruption in Latin America for Professor Alisha Holland.
- Apr-Jun 2018, **Research Assistant**  
Jul-Oct 2020 Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University  
Used print and electronic sources to compile a database of instances of U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian cooperation for a data visualization project.
- Jun-Aug 2019 **Independent Researcher**  
Moscow, Russia, and Havana, Cuba  
Developed a three month-long research project for my senior thesis. In Moscow, collected documents in four state archives and conducted 7 interviews with former Soviet diplomats and professors. In Havana, conducted 57 interviews with Cuban diplomats and graduates of Soviet universities. Funded by Harvard.
- Jun-Aug 2018 **International Fellow**  
For Families Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)  
Compiled a report about the impact of gender and power dynamics on maternal and early childhood health issues in Kyrgyzstan. Helped to write and analyze data from a quantitative survey about behaviors and beliefs related to health and gender. Translated documents between Russian and English.
- Sep-Dec 2017 **Research Assistant**  
Harvard University Department of Government  
Supported a research project on Russian foreign policy, led by Dr. George Soroka. Used EastView database to analyze articles published in Russian language journals. Transcribed and studied speeches by Russian politicians.
- Jun-Jul 2017 **Research Intern**  
Central Bank of Armenia (Dilijan, Armenia)

Analyzed economic data from Armenia and other developing countries. Completed a research project on capital growth and financial vulnerabilities in emerging market economies.

---

## Awards

- 2020 **Jorge Pérez-López Student Award Competition 3rd Prize Graduate Award**  
Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy  
Prize of \$400, awarded for my essay “Atoms for Autonomy: Explaining the Cuban reaction to the Chernobyl nuclear accident.”
- 2020 **Sophia Freund Prize**  
Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
Prize of \$1,000, awarded to seniors graduating *summa cum laude* with the highest GPA.
- 2020 **Thomas Temple Hoopes Prize**  
Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
Prize of \$5,000, awarded for “excellent undergraduate work” for my senior thesis.
- 2020 **James R. and Isabel D. Hammond Prize in Latin American Studies**  
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University  
Prize of \$500, awarded for the best undergraduate thesis related to Spanish-speaking Latin America.
- 2020 **Gerda Richards Crosby Prize**  
Harvard University Department of Government  
Prize of \$500, awarded to an honors candidate for the degree of A.B. in Government, who has demonstrated “excellence in meeting the requirements of (the) concentration” (best honors student in the department).
- 2020 **Government Department Thesis Symposium Audience Prize**  
Harvard University Department of Government  
Voted best undergraduate thesis presentation at the Government Department Thesis Symposium.
- 2020 **Runner-up in *All the Russias* Graduate Student Essay Competition**  
NYU Jordan Center  
For my essay titled, “Remembering the Children of Chernobyl: How HBO’s ‘Chernobyl’ Series Revived the Cuba-Chernobyl Connection.”
- 2019 **Charles Joseph Bonaparte Prize**  
Harvard University Department of Government  
Prize of \$2,500, awarded to juniors who have displayed the “highest distinction” in the Government concentration, show an interest in American Government, and “give promise of helping in after life to promote higher standards in government and citizenship.”
- 2019 **Phi Beta Kappa, Junior 24**  
Harvard University  
One of only 24 students elected to the academic honor society in the spring of the junior (third) year. Selected on the basis of “scholarly achievement and breadth of intellectual interest.” Elected marshal.
- 2017, 2018 **John Harvard Scholar**  
Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
Awarded to Harvard College students in the top 5% of their class.
- 2017 **National Post-Secondary Russian Essay Contest – Bronze Medalist**  
American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR)
- 

## Fellowships & Grants

- 2021 **Centennial Fellowship**  
Princeton University  
Full fellowship for five years of graduate study, including tuition and an enhanced stipend.
- 2021 **ASEEES Graduate Student Travel Grant**  
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies  
Award of \$500 to present at the ASEEES 2021 Convention
- 2021 **Rouse-Ball Fund Grant**  
Trinity College, University of Cambridge  
Award of 150GBP to present at the 2021 Midwest Political Science Association and Council of European Studies conferences.
- 2020 **Eben Fiske Studentship**  
Trinity College, University of Cambridge  
Full funding for tuition, fees, and living costs associated with a one-year master's program.
- 2020 **Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute Scholarship**  
Award of \$6,680 to fully fund tuition of "Ukrainian for Reading Knowledge" course.
- 2019 **David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Summer Research Travel Grant**  
Award of \$3000 for summer thesis research in Russia and Cuba.
- 2017, 2019 **Goldman Undergraduate Research Travel Grant**  
Award of \$2500 for summer internship at the Central Bank of Armenia (2017).  
Award of \$4000 for summer thesis research in Russia and Cuba (2019).
- 2019 **Government Department Chair's Undergraduate International Research and Travel Fellowship**  
Awards of \$750 and \$2000 for thesis research in Russia and Cuba.
- 2018 **Weissman International Internship Program Grant**  
Award of \$5500 for summer internship at For Families Kyrgyzstan.
- 2017 **Institute of Politics Summer Stipend**  
Award of \$1500 for summer internship at the Central Bank of Armenia.

---

## Publications

### *Academic*

- 2021 ["Children of Chernobyl and the Uneven Aid Crusade."](#) *Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University* website. July 13, 2021.
- 2021 ["Competing for Cake Crumbs: Why Chinese Mining Leads to Conflict in Kyrgyzstan but not Tajikistan."](#) *Central Asia Program* online paper. June 7, 2021.
- 2020 ["Expectations Versus Reality: Cuban Exchange Students' Encounters with Late Soviet Socialism."](#)  
Under peer review for special issue of *Cahiers du monde russe*.
- 2020 ["Atoms for Autonomy: Explaining the Cuban Reaction to the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident."](#)  
Forthcoming in *Cuba in Transition: Volume 30 – Papers and Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy*.

### *Book reviews*

- 2021 ["China's Muslims and Japan's Empire."](#) by Kelly A. Hammond, *The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs*, February 1, 2021.

2020 [“Book review: Walking the Cuban Tightrope: ‘We Are Cuba!’ by Helen Yaffe.”](#) *Startup Cuba*, October 14, 2020.

2020 [“Book review: La paloma y la ley.”](#) *Startup Cuba*, June 1, 2020.

#### *Popular:*

2020 [“Nazdarovie: Havana’s Soviet-themed restaurant.”](#) *Startup Cuba*, July 29, 2020.

2020 [“In Mr. Jones, Stalin’s Man-Made Famine Offers Lessons for the Present.”](#) *All the Russias*, NYU Jordan Center, July 16, 2020.

2020 [“Cubans Lured to Moscow Left Stranded by Virus.”](#) *The Moscow Times*, June 24, 2020.

2020 [“Remembering the Children of Chernobyl: How HBO’s ‘Chernobyl’ Series Revived the Cuba-Chernobyl Connection.”](#) *All the Russias*, NYU Jordan Center, March 18, 2020.

2019 [“My Summer Research in Moscow and Havana.”](#) *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, October 2019.

2019 [“My Weekend with Michael: Or, How I Survived a Hurricane on the Isla de la Juventud.”](#) *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, January 29, 2019.

---

### **Presentations**

2021 “Healing the Nuclear Family: Explaining Variation in Foreign Aid to Chernobyl Children.” Presented as part of the “From Family to Civil Society” panel at the Council for European Studies 27<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Europeanists (Jun. 23, 2021).

2021 “Healing the Nuclear Family: Explaining Variation in States’ Foreign Aid Programs for Chernobyl Victims.” Presented as part of the “COVID-19, Health Crises and State Capacity” panel at the Midwest Political Science Association conference (Apr. 16, 2021).

2021 “Rethinking the Role of Soft Power in Soviet-Cuban Student Exchanges.” Presented as part of the “Cold War Politics” panel at the Midwest Political Science Association conference (Apr. 15, 2021).

2020 “When Expectations Meet Reality: The Complex Dynamics of Soviet-Cuban Educational Exchange Programs.” Presented as part of the panel “Conflicting Visions: Navigating the Anxieties of the Soviet-Cuban Relationship” at the 52nd Annual ASEEEES Convention (Nov. 6, 2020).

2020 “Atoms for Autonomy: Explaining the Cuban reaction to the Chernobyl nuclear accident.” Presented at the 2020 conference of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (Aug. 15, 2020).

2020 “Atoms for Autonomy: Explaining the Cuban reaction to the Chernobyl nuclear accident.” Presented at the Taras Shevchenko Conference for Ukrainian Studies at Indiana University (Mar. 7, 2020).

---

### **Professional Affiliations**

Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEEES)

Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)

Council for European Studies (CES)

Latin American Studies Association (LASA)

Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA)

---

### **Relevant Skills**

Language: Russian (fluent), Spanish (fluent), Ukrainian (intermediate)  
Technical: NVivo, RStudio, QGIS software, Microsoft Excel

---

## **References**

Available upon request