

Handbook for CSS Sophomore Tutors 2020-2021

The Year's Schedule

The primary duty of a CSS sophomore tutor in Economics, Government, or History is to design an eight-week syllabus, conduct a weekly tutorial (as a discussion class), and read and comment on the student papers that come in at each tutorial. Each tutorial runs for an eight-week trimester, then starts over again with different students; by the end of the second semester the syllabus has been taught three times, and all (normally 30 students) of the CSS sophomore class have taken all three tutorials.

In early August, the summer mailing with the syllabus and at least the first week's assignment will be sent to the CSS sophomores for the social theory colloquium and also for their first tutorial.

In September each tutorial group meets for an orientation session in conjunction with the CSS All College Meeting (usually on the first day that Wesleyan classes start in the fall), and the first tutorial sessions are held on the following Friday. The first essay is due at the Week 1 tutorial meeting.

In late October or early November, the first tutorial finishes and another begins, and this happens again in February. The second tutorial sequence is interrupted by Winter Break, normally after Week 5, and resumes on the first Friday of the spring semester. The last week of the third tutorial is normally in the second week of April.

Following the week 8 class of the first tutorial and the week 8 class of the second tutorial, there will be pre-tutorial meetings with the new students in the upcoming tutorial group.

In addition to the tutorials, CSS sophomores take the colloquium in Modern Social Theory in the fall semester. In terms of its class meeting schedule, the colloquium operates as a regular semester-long course.

At the end of the year, the students undertake a Comprehensive Examination (discussed below) in all subjects: Economics, Government, History, and Social Theory.

Tutorials and Tutorial Papers

Whenever possible, the weekly tutorial sessions meet from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Fridays. Enrollment is limited to CSS sophomores, generally with 10 students to a tutorial group. Before class each week each member of the tutorial writes a 5-7 page paper on a topic which the tutor may make as broad or specific as she or he wishes. The tutor returns the papers with comments to the students in time for the comments to assist in the preparation of the following paper, thus normally on the Monday or Tuesday following the tutorial session.

➔ New sophomore tutors need to know that if a CSS sophomore is late in handing in even one paper that this is treated as a serious problem. The CSS sophomore year is so intensive that any such problem must be told to the co-chairs (and other sophomore tutors) right away. If a student has two missing

papers, after substantial consultation, the student could be asked to leave the CSS. For more on this policy, see below under Late Papers and Absences.

The Colloquium

The colloquium, consisting of the full CSS sophomore class (usually 30), is normally taught from 1:20 to 2:40 on Monday and Wednesday. While teaching styles differ, it is common to ask the students to either write a short paper on the reading each week, or give a quiz in class, and to return this work promptly with comments intended to help the students to prepare effectively for the following week.

Preceptors

A student preceptor (teaching apprentice) is assigned to each tutorial and to the colloquium. The preceptor's main responsibilities are to run a pre-tutorial session each week, normally on Wednesday evening for the tutorials and on Sunday evening for the colloquium, on the subject of the week's work, and to read and comment on some or all of the tutorial essays, depending on the tutor's preferences. Preceptors also make themselves available for individual consultation with students.

Preceptors are chosen from among CSS juniors and sophomores by the tutors at the end of the previous year. Students recognize the appointment as a high honor and as a chance for an unusual learning experience, and to be a leader in the CSS. They are formally designated as teaching apprentices, enrolled in a teaching apprentice tutorial (ungraded) in the fall semester. In the spring, they are paid weekly as course assistants. The Social Theory preceptor receives a smaller amount, for Comps Review, because the Social Theory colloquium ends in the fall. It is important, for everyone's sake, for the sophomore tutors to monitor the preceptors' workload, and to take care not to overwork them. Some tutors define "overwork" as anything beyond a 10-hour weekly commitment for a preceptor. At the same time, preceptors should not be allowed to coast throughout the year, without working hard themselves. However, generally the problem has been that the preceptors work too hard for the sophomores at the expense of their own studies. The tutors, especially the relevant sophomore tutors, need to help the preceptors find the right balance and this balance will be somewhat different for each of the four preceptors in the four different subjects.

Evaluations

Weekly tutorial papers are not graded, however extensive comments on the papers from the tutor (and often by the preceptor as well) provide continuous feedback to the students.

More formal written evaluation follows at the end of each trimester. At the end of October or in early November when the first trimester ends, the tutor may conduct an individual evaluation session of approximately 20 minutes duration with each student in the class, during which she or he offers a constructive oral evaluation of the student's performance. (These sessions have sometimes been conducted with one or more other sophomore tutor(s) or one of the co-chairs, as this provides useful information about the ongoing progress of students in the sophomore class and allows the program to

identify and address potential problems before they become intractable. At the end of the second and third trimesters, only the student's most recent tutor will meet with her or him to give an oral evaluation.) The student, in turn, may offer suggestions on the design and conduct of the tutorial and give their initial responses to the CSS.

→ At the end of each trimester (and at the end of the Social Theory colloquium) the tutor files a written evaluation for each student, normally one page, single-spaced, thus one or two paragraphs and at least 250 words. This satisfies the CR/U evaluation that the instructor of an ungraded course would normally file with the Registrar. These evaluations are filed in the CSS office (not with the Registrar), where they are consulted by other tutors and CSS Co-Chairs who need to learn something of student's academic performance in writing a letter of recommendation, deciding fellowship nominations and the like. Send your evaluations to the CSS Administrative Assistant very soon after the end of the tutorial. The Administrative Assistant will then send the evaluations to the sophomores by email and will also save copies in the students' files.

During the year, each tutor submits to the Registrar only CR/U grade reports of students after their tutorials. The only grade the Registrar receives is the Comprehensive Exam grade, sent in by the CSS Office and recorded on the student's transcript in a special way.

→ Late Papers and Absences

Sophomores must attend all tutorials with a completed paper. Likewise, they must attend every session of the colloquium and submit assignments for the colloquium when due. Absence from classes undermines a common learning experience, and failure to finish papers on time breaks the chain of effort and criticism on which the tutorial method depends. **Absence from any tutorial or the colloquium for any reason or failure to complete a paper on time must be reported to the CSS co-chairs and will result in the student being placed on warning within the major. A second absence or late paper within that tutorial sequence or the colloquium for any reason will result in the student being put under review. Depending on the circumstances, a review for failure to attend class can result in separation from the CSS major.** A review for late papers initiates late paper procedures. See: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/css/formajors/latepapers.html>. Failure to comply with these procedures or a third late paper will normally result in separation from the major.

The Sophomore Comprehensive Examinations

The Sophomore Comprehensive Examinations begin in late April. Well before that time, the sophomore tutors, in consultation with the CSS co-chairs, determine the external examiners who will be conducting the exams. These are often CSS alumni in academic careers and/or colleagues of the sophomore tutors at other universities. Sets of discipline-specific exam questions are devised in consultation between the sophomore tutors and examiners based on the specific syllabi. The eight days of written examinations consist of separate exams in the four subjects, for each of which the student is asked to write (usually) 2 five-page papers. The examiners separately grade the completed exams, generating "field grades" on the A-F scale. The examiners travel to campus to conduct two days of

orals with the students, after which they make any needed adjustments (upward only) in the field grades and collectively arrive at a Comprehensive grade for each student on the CSS's special scale: High Distinction, Distinction, Commendable, Satisfactory, Conditional Pass, and Unsatisfactory. Details about this are circulated as the Comprehensive Exams approach. The field grades are reported to the students and recorded in their files, but they are not made public. Only the Comprehensive grades are submitted to the Registrar for entry onto transcripts.

Tutors' Meetings

In connection with the work of the co-chairs, the CSS's main means of governance is the tutors' meeting, which not only dispatches routine business but regularly adjusts and reforms the College's program and procedures. There are usually two tutors' meetings a semester, and sometimes more, depending on issues that arise. Participation in these meetings is understood as part of every tutor's responsibilities.

Advising

Generally, the sophomore tutors in Economics, Government and History will serve as faculty advisors for the year to a small number of students from their first-trimester tutorial. However, increasingly, an effort is being made to share the advising load among all the active CSS tutors.

It is important to understand the credits and course load for the CSS sophomores:

- Credits for CSS sophomore courses: Each eight-week tutorial carries course credit of 1.5. The Social Theory colloquium carries a course credit of 1.0. Thus, each student will earn 5.5 credits within the major during sophomore year. CSS students have completed half their credits toward the CSS major by the end of the sophomore year.
- Economics Prerequisite: All CSS students must have taken Economics (either ECON 101 or ECON 110, or equivalent AP or IB exams) and have received an average grade of C- or better. A few students are admitted into the CSS each year who have not yet completed this prerequisite; they must then take the relevant course and pass with C- or better by the end of fall semester of the sophomore year. (A student who has taken an introductory Economics course in the year but has not achieved a grade of C - or higher must take another Economics course, which will normally be a 200-level elective, and achieve a grade of CR.) Failure to complete the Economics requirement will result in separation from the College.
- → The course load of a CSS sophomore: **In the fall, when a CSS sophomore takes the Social Theory colloquium as well as the tutorial sequence, she or he normally takes one course outside the CSS; ideally this is a course far removed from the social sciences, however, on occasion, it must be Economics for students who have not yet completed their Economics prerequisite. In the spring, CSS sophomores may take two outside-CSS courses.** Students are advised that only one (if any) should be in the social sciences in order to

give the students some variety. Due to the Comprehensive Exams in late April/early May, it is often wise for students to avoid courses where the main work (perhaps a research paper) is due at the end of the semester. All this is laid out in more detail in Registration Notes for sophomores, distributed in August and available on the CSS website.

- **Transcripts:** The transcript of a student who completes the CSS sophomore year lists the student's courses for the year without grades, even if a course was taken for a grade at the time. The only grade shown for the year is the Comprehensive Exam grade.
- The transcripts of CSS students do not show a GPA or class rank (as this would be misleading because this would omit the results of the sophomore year and its Comprehensive Exam).
- **General Education:** Due to the heavy load of required courses for CSS sophomores, students are not required to fulfill Stage 1 expectations by the end of sophomore year. However, they must satisfy them and be on their way toward Stage 2 by the end of the junior year. They must satisfy General Education requirements, Stage 1 and Stage 2, in order to graduate from the CSS.
- **Faculty Advisors:** The CSS assumes that, whenever possible, the sophomore tutors will serve as advisors to their students into their junior and even senior year, since the continuity of contact is valuable.

Student Morale

The CSS sophomore year imposes a good deal of stress on many students. Not only is the workload heavier than in many other majors, its rhythm is unfamiliar and unrelenting; it can induce episodes of near panic. A steady diet of criticism, no matter how constructive, is hard on some psyches, especially when there are no grades to provide positive reinforcement or at least a concrete measure of progress. Some students who join the CSS because of its reputation for training in writing and argumentation later grow restless at the nearly exclusive diet of social science. The CSS is not for everyone, and one or more students may drop out as the year goes on. These students should receive some advice from the CSS before they go, including an exit interview with the co-chairs.

The CSS tries to offset its stresses with mechanisms of support, some of which the tutors themselves can best provide. If possible, it is good to arrange office hours on the day before the tutorial (that is, on Thursday) so as to be available to help the students organize their thinking as they prepare to write. Many tutors have found that it is good to have individual conferences with students about half-way through each tutorial (especially during the first tutorial) to better understand the students and bridge any gaps in communication. This also explains the practice of oral evaluation after the first trimester.

The Life of the College

Perhaps the strongest support the CSS offers its students is its community life. Part of this community is academic. The CSS sophomores have one class together in the fall semester, the Social Theory colloquium, and this serves more than an academic function. The students in each tutorial group are encouraged to rely on one another. The sophomores often form strong bonds that last until Graduation and well beyond. In the spring, by tradition, students prepare for the Comprehensive Exams in small groups-Comps Groups-that share the burden of reviewing and connecting the large amount of diverse material covered since September. This is a common endeavor.

Another side of College life is social. At 4:00 p.m. on Friday afternoons, when tutorials let out, food and drink are laid out in the CSS Lounge for unwinding. At noon, on Mondays, lunch is served in the Woodhead Lounge for all CSS students and tutors, including a talk or discussion, ending at 1:00 p.m. Apart from these two weekly occasions, there are a number of special events each year: an evening Banquet with an outside speaker each semester; a Holiday Party in December; and a Picnic in May. Regular participation of tutors at these events is expected. In addition, the CSS typically hosts a CSS Visitor for a week each semester and also holds a number of other events with speakers and visitors at other times of the year.

The CSS admissions process begins in the fall. First there is an Info Session for first-year students in December. A second Info Session is held early in the spring semester. Interested first-year students apply for admission to CSS early in February. Each applicant is interviewed by a team consisting of a CSS tutor and two current CSS students in mid-February. Typically, admissions decisions are made by tutors at a decision meeting before Spring Break. All CSS tutors are asked to participate in the admissions process by speaking at the Info Sessions, by assisting with the interviews and writing evaluations, and by participating in the decision process.

As representatives of all the CSS students, there is a House Committee with members from each of the three classes, chosen in the fall of each year. The House Committee is generally highly useful to the co-chairs, tutors, and other students in helping with social events, suggesting speakers, passing on curricular suggestions, and generally maintaining good morale. To give one example, the House Committee and other current students play an important role in recruiting and interviewing applicants for the following year's sophomore class.

The community dimension of the CSS also finds expression in occasional discussion meetings held with all members of a class or with the entire College. These meetings may deal with transient subjects, urgent morale problems, major CSS reforms, and/or current events.

Cecilia Miller
CSS Chair
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