Handbook for CSS Sophomore Tutors (revised 8/4/16)

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 (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 the course.

In September each tutorial group meets for an orientation session in conjunction with the CSS's general welcoming session (often on the day Wesleyan classes start), and the first tutorial sessions are held on the following Friday. The first assignment is sent out to the students early in August. The first essay is due at the Week 1 tutorial meeting.

In late October or early November one tutorial group 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 new semester. The last tutorial sessions are normally in the second week of April.

In addition to the tutorials, CSS sophomores take the colloquium in Modern Social Theory in the fall semester. The colloquium operates as a regular semester-long course.

At the end of the year the students undergo 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, with no more than 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 he or she 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.

The Colloquium:

The colloquium, consisting of the full CSS sophomore class (usually 30), is normally taught from 1:10 to 2:30 on Monday and Wednesday. While teaching styles differ, it is common to ask the students to submit a short reaction to the reading each week, or give a quiz in class, and to return this work promptly with comments intended to help the students 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, on the subject of the week's work, and to read some or all of the tutorial essays, depending on the tutor's preferences. Preceptors also make themselves available for individual consultation with students.

The 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. They are formally designated as Teaching Apprentices enrolled in a teaching apprentice tutorial (ungraded) in the fall semester. In the spring they are Course Assistants receiving modest compensation, though the Social Theory preceptor receives less than the others because the colloquium ends in the fall semester. It is important, for everyone's sake, for the Sophomore Tutors to monitor the preceptors' work load, and to take care not to overwork them. Some tutors define "overwork" as anything beyond a 10-hour weekly commitment for a preceptor.

Evaluation:

Weekly tutorial papers are not graded, but extensive comments on them from the tutor (and usually 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 15-20 minutes duration with each student in the class, during which he or she offers a constructive oral evaluation of the student's performance. In the past these sessions have sometimes been conducted with one or more other sophomore tutor(s) or one of the co-chairs (if available), 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. 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 the second and third trimesters, only the student's most recent tutor will meet with him or her to give an oral evaluation.

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 a paragraph or two in length. 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 chairs who need to learn something of student's academic performance in writing a letter of recommendation, deciding fellowship nominations and the like. Students have a legal right to see a filed evaluation. Send your evaluations to the CSS Administrative Assistant soon after the end of the tutorial. The Administrative Assistant will then send the evaluations to the sophomores by email, and also print out copies for 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 its assignments 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 [http://www.wesleyan.edu/css/formajors/latepapers.html](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 Comprehensive Examination:**

The comprehensive examination begins 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 exam. These are often CSS alumni in academic careers 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 syllabi. The week-long written examination consists of separate exams in the four subjects, for each of which the student is asked to write (usually) two five-page papers. The examiners separately grade the completed exams, generating "field grades" on the A-F scale. Then they travel to campus to conduct two days of orals with the students, after which they make any needed (upward only) adjustments 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 Fail (Details about this are circulated as the 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.

**Meetings:**

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. The College tries to hold at least three tutors' meetings a semester, and sometimes there are more to deal with issues that arise. Agendas are circulated in advance of meetings, and minutes of the meeting are circulated afterwards. Participation in these meetings is understood as part of a tutor's responsibilities.

**Advising:**

The sophomore tutors in Economics, Government and History serve as faculty advisors for the year to the ten or so students who are members of their first-trimester tutorial. It is important, therefore, to understand the credits and course load of a CSS sophomore.
• Credits for CSS 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.

• Economics prerequisite: All CSS students must have taken Economics (either ECON 101 or ECON 110, or equivalent AP or IB exams) and received an average grade of C- or better. A number of students are admitted into the CSS each year who have not yet completed this prerequisite; they must then take the 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 first year but has not achieved a grade of C- or higher (or CR) 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 by the end of the fall term in the sophomore year will result in separation from the College.

• The course load of a CSS sophomore: In the fall, when a CSS sophomore takes the colloquium as well as the tutorial sequence, he or she normally carries one course outside the CSS; ideally this is a course far removed from the social sciences, but often it must be Economics for students who have not yet completed their Economics prerequisite. In the spring two outside courses are available for choice (unless an Economics prerequisite remains); students are advised that one should be in the social sciences. 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 records of CSS students show a GPA (misleading because it omits the sophomore year and its comprehensive exam), but they have no Wesleyan class rank.

• 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 in order to graduate with the CSS major.

• Major advisors: The CSS hopes that, whenever possible, its 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 courses of study, 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 College because of its reputation for training in
writing and argument 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.

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 the first) to better understand the students and bridge any gaps in communication. This need 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 their own special class together in the first semester, the Social Theory colloquium, which serves more than an academic function. The students of each tutorial group are encouraged to rely on one another, and they often form strong bonds that last until graduation and beyond. In the spring, by tradition, students prepare for the Comprehensive exams in small groups that share the burden of reviewing and connecting the mass of material covered since September. There is a lot of common endeavor.

Another side of College life is social. At 4:00 on Friday afternoons, when tutorials and some other CSS classes let out, food and drink is laid out in the Common Room 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. Apart from these two weekly occasions, there are four special events each year: an evening Banquet, with an outside speaker, each semester; a Holiday Party in December; and a Picnic in May. The regular participation of tutors at these events is strongly encouraged.

As ongoing representation of 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 highly useful to the chairs, tutors, and students in helping with social events, suggesting speakers, passing on curricular suggestions, and generally maintaining morale. The House Committee, and current students generally, 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 and/or major reforms. Some of the best program reforms in the College's history have come from student initiatives, and were hammered out in all-College meetings (but adopted, of course, in tutors' meetings).