

CSS Senior Thesis Guidelines

To be considered for Honors in the College of Social Studies, a senior thesis must be grounded in, and contribute to, the literature of one or more of the CSS disciplines—economics, government, history, and social theory. Students wishing to write an alternative form of thesis, such as a novel or screenplay addressing social issues, should plan to pursue Honors in General Scholarship (see https://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/honors/general_scholarship.html for relevant requirements and procedures). In ambiguous cases, the suitability of a proposed thesis for Honors in CSS will be determined by the Co-Chairs in consultation with the faculty advisor.

A Senior Thesis in the College of Social Studies must present an original line of argument regarding an issue treated in the social scientific literature. This argument may be of an empirical or theoretical nature. A portion of the work should be devoted to summarizing the antecedent literature and to describing the methodology or analytical perspective applied in addressing the issues engaged by the thesis. The thesis should include a critical synthesis of the relevant social science literature, but it must go beyond providing a simple synopsis of writings on a given topic no matter how skillfully executed. The thesis should also develop and present evidence appropriate to the type of research question it seeks to answer. An original undergraduate senior thesis is one in which the student has made the ideas in the literature her or his own by placing them within her or his own analytical framework.

The thesis work should be conducted under the supervision of a faculty member who is sufficiently knowledgeable about the relevant literature to provide proper guidance and direction. The College expects thesis students to meet with their advisors regularly—typically once a week when classes are in session—until the thesis project is completed. Since a senior thesis represents a significant investment of time by both the student and the advisor, generally only projects for which the student has adequate preparation and resources should be undertaken. As of the first day of spring classes, thesis writers must demonstrate sufficient progress toward completion of the thesis, typically in the form of completed initial chapters and a detailed outline of the entire work.

Senior thesis will be evaluated by the thesis advisor and by readers appointed by the CSS Co-Chairs. One reader must be a CSS Tutor and another reader must be a Wesleyan faculty member from outside of the CSS. CSS policy is to keep the names of the thesis readers confidential so that readers' comments will be provided to the thesis writer without identification. Of course, individual readers are free to reveal their identity to the thesis writer.